# What Does It Mean to Make-Up the Mind (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε)?

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**Abstract:** In the very beginning of Plato's *Republic*, Polemarchus and a few associates emerge to interdict the passage of Socrates and Glaucon as the two are returning home to Athens. When Socrates asks if he might persuade his interlocutors to let the two Athenians pass, Polemarchus says that his group simply will not listen, and that Socrates and Glaucon "better make up their mind to that" (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε). The present paper seizes upon this highly enigmatic phrase as a point of departure for interrogating the relationship between free thought and political power at the founding of Western political theory. The paper draws on the history of ancient Greek religious practices and a particular psychoanalytic topology put forward by Jacques Lacan, in order to demonstrate that this enigmatic and overtly politicized opening of the *Republic* memorializes a dialectical relationship, always present but repressed, between political forces and the "pure thought" of philosophical theory. Along these lines it is shown how Plato situates even the very philosophical high point of the *Republic*, the theory of forms, in a political topology.

## I. Introduction

In the very beginning of Plato's *Republic*, Glaucon and Socrates are heading home to Athens. Polemarchus sees them from a distance and sends a slave to stop them.[1] When Polemarchus catches up, he has Adeimantus, Niceratus, and others by his side. Very abruptly, Polemarchus points out that he has more men in his group, and that Glaucon and Socrates must therefore "prove stronger," or will be forced to stay. Socrates asks if there is not a third possibility, namely, that he and Glaucon persuade the others to let them pass. Polemarchus poses the counter-question: "But could you persuade us, if we won't listen?" to which Glaucon replies, "Certainly not." Polemarchus closes this discussion with an extremely enigmatic statement: "Well, we won't listen; you'd better make up your mind to that" (οὕτω διανοεῖσθε).[2] Immediately after, Adeimantus describes the enjoyments they can expect that evening, "persuading" them to stay after they have already been told they have no choice. Οὕτω διανοεῖσθε is a peculiar phrase. Οὕτω is an adverb, which means "in this way," and thus signifies a limitation of some kind, a restriction with an implicitly commanding or imperative dimension. However, διανοεῖσθε is constructed in the optative mood and means "to be minded," thus implying a free choice in the use of the mind. It is a strange syntactical pairing of the proscriptive/prescriptive with the optative—it seems to suggest a sort of forced freedom.

Furthermore, as if to redouble this tension semantically, διανοεῖσθε contains νόος, mind—the mind of philosophy and understanding, of logical thought—but begins with δια, a commonly used particle to denote necessity, the necessity of something in need of doing. "In this way, you two will have to do with your mind." The mind will have to do.[3] Thus, Plato's language awkwardly combines, on two different linguistic levels, the connotations of force and free thought. As a result, none of the English renderings is immediately comprehensible for us. For, what could it mean to "make up one's mind" to the fact that one will not be heard? This does not link up clearly to any of the multiple meanings that for us are attached to the idea of "making up one's mind." However, this very gap is heuristic: because this current expression conserves quite clearly the contradictory construction of διανοεῖσθε and at the same time is essentially incomprehensible in the context of the *Republic*, this provides the roadmap of a certain distance—a resistance, if one pleases—that would need to be traversed to bring this small piece of Plato's thought into mutual illumination with our own. This being the present aim, a brief justification may be in order. Will the exegesis not be disproportionately extensive with respect to this passing remark in what is not yet even the substantive dialogue?

First, one must be immediately struck by the quite sudden and apparently arbitrary politicization this exchange represents. Especially because Adeimantus is Glaucon's brother, the introduction of the question of force here seems rather contrived. One might read the inorganicism of this question's appearance as an indication that something important must be addressed straightaway, a sacrifice of organic narrativity which must serve another function. Second, beyond this vague hint, in some sense the whole subsequent dialogue has this injunction to "make up one's mind" as its very condition of possibility and can be read as responding to its call, because otherwise Glaucon and Socrates would have simply returned home never encountering the conditions for the production of the *Republic*'s ideas. My reading seeks to confirm that both the inorganicism and early placement of this seemingly unnecessary and merely rhetorical prelude are both called for by the very argument that this scenario dramatizes.

## II. Desire and Theory in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*

Jacques Lacan writes the following:

> I maintain that it is at the level of analysis—if we can take a few more steps forward— that the nodal point by which the pulsation of the unconscious is linked to sexual reality must be revealed. This nodal point is called desire, and the theoretical elaboration that I have pursued in recent years will show you through each stage of clinical experience, how desire is situated in dependence on demand—which, by being articulated in signifiers, leaves a metonymic remainder that runs under it, an element that is not indeterminate, which is a condition both, absolute and unapprehensible, an element necessarily lacking, unsatisfied, impossible, misconstrued, an element that is called desire.[4]

Instead of trying to unpack this systematically—for, Lacan is not our focus, and in any event his texts are unreadable in his own technical sense—let us rather take it as an epigram, a provocation, a bank of vocabulary. A demand is an injunction directed to another, and as a receipt or claim on the desire of the other, it seems quite clear from the beginning that the psychic economy of an individual understood in this way locates the individual in a social scenario that is irreducibly political- economic. That is, if desire only functions in dependence on demand, the economy of desire between persons is an economy of scarcity, based as it is on individuals who, as speaking beings, cannot say everything at once and must therefore make distributional decisions in speech, but who are also players in a zero-sum game insofar as desires between persons simply conflict. What a subject will articulate/signify is a choice always made with respect to the aims of a desire among other conceivable desires and is therefore always the function of a particular distribution of energy among other alternative and forsaken distributions: a political decision. But the absolute and also inapprehensible metonymic remainder of the subject's articulations introduce a second site of psychic politics: the inescapable condition of articulation is the dissimulation or repression of the very basic, primordial violence of language's entrance onto the scene.

One would never get around to venturing the primordial word if one waited for permission, a justification, a reason-in- advance of reason. The commonplace dialectical paradox of political theory, that the state is logically and empirically founded on the criminal act of its institution—logically because the founding act is external to the state's laws which are only established after the fact, and often semi-empirically, for example, with Romulus's legendary murder and the founding of Rome—finds a perfect parallel in language, or what I would like to call very broadly the theoretical as such (to accent the basic continuity between high theory and everyday practices of signification.) The theoretical is founded on a homologous primordial violence and continues through a homologous repression/dissimulation of that violence. In other words, not only does desire imply forsaken desires, but as speaking beings our articulations imply one of the politician's greatest pastimes: the "cover- up," in which an action that appears at the time practically necessary and desirable but theoretically (or legally) objectionable demands further objectionable actions to keep off the surface the original criminal act and also sustain the desirable practical necessity. We continue to speak to cover up the unsatisfied, impossible, unapprehensible lack which motivated our first utterance.[5]

In politics, we endure while continually revising our management of the profits and losses incurred in the primal political scene by new innovations in the status quo (small to large killings of the father, from mundane legislation to revolutions) and we enjoy their successes and atone for their

failures in a way that dissimulates their reality no less than primitives and neurotics. In the theoretical, we find the same structure. The history of the theoretical is a history of the management of a theoretical ambivalence, between the enjoyments and gains made possible only with the pre-theoretical breach of articulation and a moral consciousness we have become cognizant of only because of the original cut into the world by signification. This, then, establishes in a very preliminary way the basic coordinates of my interest in the *Republic*: the political-economic character of both the personal and interpersonal management of desire; the repressive dimension common to political action and theoretical articulation (what we can now call, properly, the unconscious of each); in general, a very basic structural homology between the political, the theoretical, and the economy of desire.

When Polemarchus makes his odd suggestion/injunction, he evokes this whole set of problems with remarkable efficiency. The root of διανοεῖσθε is διανοέομαι, which contains the well-known nous, and means "be minded of, purpose, or intention."[6] To be minded of: to have something in mind, but also to have the mind forced by the object of attention into its attention. And, of course, this is precisely what is going on between Polemarchus and Socrates. Socrates has to make up his mind about Polemarchus, consider the situtation, play with it in his mind theoretically, etc., but only because the desire of Polemarchus presses, oppresses and we can even say represses that mind. Theory is both repressed and repressing. It is repressed by the objects of its attention, the desire of the other that is its calling and whatever its particular fascination might be, and it is repressing because, in order to function as sound reason, it must keep off the record the founding violence of its intellectually arbitrary distributive choices (to privilege theorizing over doing something else, for instance) in its logically arbitrary origination. That is, the mind cannot simply mind itself in a pure movement of justified reason, just like a state cannot found itself in a pure movement of already legal legislation.

This is what explains Plato's paradoxical construction, which suggests a forced "making" or doing of the free mind. Plato is pointing us toward theory's obscene, and from its own standpoint, absolutely intolerable condition of possibility: that pure reason and truth are founded on a situation thoroughly mediated by an interpersonal negotiation of desire, i.e. the free-thinking mind of philosophical thought is made possible by what, according to its own canons, is a crime: a vulgar, practical necessity laced with selfish aims and opaque strategies. And of course Plato's own strategy in pointing this out to us is no less opaque and must be achieved only by the most oblique condensation of equivocal meanings. This is why it must not be objected against the present reading that I am making too much ado about such a small and insignificant portion of the text. If this little passage has been overlooked, it is no wonder. For the text to get off the ground, it is necessary that it be overlooked at first, only there to be reconsidered, at best, in ambiguous hindsight. For, what it announces, if taken too far toward the limit of the truth it hints at—the founding impurity of pure philosophical speculation which shows its essential lie—would be the text's own invalidation.

Thus, we can understand this initial scenario as a metatheoretical gloss on the analogy between soul and city that is quite appropriately oblique, suspicious, and dissimulated insofar as it cannot escape the economies of repression that belong homologously to both the theory of politics and the politics of theory. It is the metatheoretical statement of the *Republic* insofar as it comments, by a remarkably multi-vocal dramatic enaction, on the originary and multi- directional violence of philosophical thought. The homology between the political management of psychic desire in speech

(the theoretical) and socially conflicting desires among individuals (the profanely political) can be hypothesized as the justification for the analogy between the soul and the city. We can now more confidently build on this analogy for developing the implications of the homology between the politics of theory and the theory of politics.

## III. The Structure of Theory in the *Republic*

Andrea Wilson Nightingale has shown very well that Plato draws heavily on the civic and religious traditions of theoria in order to constitute what is, at the time the *Republic* is written, the new practice of philosophical theoria.[7] Indeed, she suggests that the *Republic*, of all dialogues, leans on traditional social forms of theoria "especially clearly."[8] She observes that Socrates and Glaucon, in the opening scenario, are returning from a "theoric event," the festival of Bendis. As she emphasizes, the establishing function of this theoric event is tightly integrated into the text, particularly in its anticipation of the metaphysical theoria developed in books V- VIII.

As a result of this debt to traditional forms of theoria, in Plato's *Republic* one can plot quite rigorously what I will call a "theoric structure." In the parallels between traditional forms of theoria and Plato's philosophical theoria, we have the material to sketch this structure and, particularly by thinking more seriously about desire, put forward some quite significant conclusions. To anticipate, this theoric structure consists in three elements: 1.) the desire for a particular kind of knowledge, which leads to 2.) a confrontation with the object of that knowledge, and 3.) the problem of bringing that knowledge back in the form a "return account." This much is already clear in accounts such as the one provided by Nightingale, but a few new points will have to be brought into focus. Namely and in short, the theoric flight, although it seeks knowledge or truth, takes off and lands on decidedly politicized runways. The point of departure is invariably a function of competing desires, and the return account is always compromised by the political reality of the desires into which it must integrate itself. Furthermore, even in his confrontation with the object of his theoric desire, it can be shown that the theoros always comes up short or just misses his object. Finally and perhaps most interestingly, we will have to note what is retained as the signifier of this lost object.

### Religious and Diplomatic Theoria

In the case of religious theoria, the theoros is most often on an oracular mission desiring, and himself a function of others' desires for, divine knowledge. The theoros is sent by a city to consult an oracle, perform the relevant rituals, have the consultation,and return home to provide an account of what was said by the oracle. Almost needless to say, the theoroi sent to oracles were mostly from the aristocratic classes. More interestingly, the issue of funding such theoric ventures were explicitly political. If not to an oracle, a theoros might be sent to a religious festival for the same purpose, and with the same expectations. As Nightingale notes, the latter form of religious theoria was as political as it was religious, insofar as the theoroi were most often aristocrats sent as representatives of their city.[9] In this variation, we are dealing with what is basically a diplomatic mission. As we will see, there is another political dimension to this form of theoros in that the content of the return account would by definition be a comparative political assessment of one's home city, favorable or unfavorable.

Even apart from an implicit political critique implied in a comparative view, messages right from the mouth of an oracle could be a significant political liability for the theoros, as in Oedipus

Tyrannus.[10] Part of the expectation for oracular missions was a scrupulous emphasis on the faithfulness of the return account, an insistence that one not “add anything,” nor “take anything away,” from the “sacred pronouncement.”[11] However, there are several indications that this emphasis only testifies to the marked impossibility of such a pure account. In fact, it is much like the dialectical paradox of the rule and its transgression: the prohibition does not testify to the abhorrence of a certain action, but an intimate sense of desire for its execution.

First, that the whole point of visiting an oracle is to bear witness to something with one’s own eyes as opposed to just hearing an account,[12] already indicates an inherent inadequacy, an invariable gap in the completeness of the most articulate return account. Secondly, oracular truth was never something to be recorded and transmitted, but it rather consisted in a ritualistic practice, what Elsner calls “ritual-centered visuality.”[13] This visuality supported by practical, ceremonial supports, keeps the theoros from “interpreting images through the rules and desires of everyday life. It constructs a ritual barrier to the identification and objectifications of the screen of [social] discourse and posits a sacred possibility for vision.”[14] In this way, too, the divine vision is from the start not susceptible to a faithful return account, insofar as the practical ritual conditions cannot be simply replicated at home in a do-it-yourself manner. Finally, although Nightingale cites the Ion for its rendering of what a return account looks like, she does not notice the irony: in the excessively “vivid detail” of the chorus’s description of the Oracle at Delphi, and also in the chorus’s comparison of the Delphic sculptures to the ones with which they are familiar from home, can we not see a note of mockery at the expectation, proffered by the likes of Theognis, of an absolute fidelity in the return account?

**Personal Theoria**

In the case of theoria as a search for wisdom, the theoros undertakes the work of personal cultivation to obtain a personal kind of knowledge or wisdom. The theoros would journey abroad simply for the sake of learning. Through Herodotus, Nightingale highlights Solon, who privately traveled abroad for ten years, “wandering” in the name of “intellectual cultivation.”[15] Instances of personal self- cultivation with political sponsorship, it appears, are not necessarily without religious and diplomatic dimensions.

Anarcharsis, interestingly, was sent to Greece by the king of Scythia and after studying Greek religious practices, he attempted to introduce some of the Greek religious practices into Scythian religious culture. The king of Scythia then shot and killed him with an arrow for this attempted importation of foreign ways, and the Scythian people then disclaimed all knowledge of Anacharsis.[16]

The life of Socrates also followed the theoric trajectory as an instance of personal theoria, distinct from the discipline of philosophy as Plato would later conceive it. Socratic skepticism, which consists in knowing that one knows nothing, was only a negative knowledge, a limiting knowledge used for the maintenance of one’s own soul. Socrates’ practical efforts to provide an account of what he learned were limited to extreme modesty and ironic detachment, and critique of others’ claims and arguments. The benefit or gain of Socratic dialectic was only to be found in Socrates’ inner peace, and it is well known that his minor forays into practical conversion or positive intellectual production, his “corrupting of the youth,” ended in dramatic political failure.

**The Theoria of Dying**

The Myth of Er, which concludes the *Republic*, follows the same structure. Er participates in military battle as the practical access point to knowledge of the afterlife. Plato narrates how Er is killed in battle, travels to the afterlife, but then awakes to give an account of what he witnessed to the people of his home city. The place of the afterlife, revealingly, is described precisely as a religious festival, and there he is given an injunction to bring home to mankind everything he witnesses there.[17] When he entered the afterlife, he was instructed to "listen to and look at everything in the place" because he was to be a "messenger to human beings about the things that were there."[18] However, just as in the other kinds of theoria, Plato in at least two ways highlights that "everything in the place" is certainly not reported.

First of all, the sheer breadth and depth of what Er is given to perceive in the afterlife almost leads one to think that what Er is perceiving is Everything itself. That is, the fantastic ensemble Plato describes, between the notoriously difficult "light and spindle" to the lives of men which are laid out (…all the other things were there, mixed with each other and with wealth, poverty, sickness, health, and to the states intermediate to them) seem to represent nothing less than absolute totality plain and simple. If the experiential content of Er's visit to the afterlife is absolute totality itself, than Er's task of reporting "everything in the place" is like the "vivid detail" of the *Ion*, an insistence on a completely comprehensive description of an experience that is at the same time understood to be impossibly rich.

Secondly, one finds another peculiar statement in this portion of the text which has the same functional significance of the narrative prelude which introduces Socrates and Glaucon in the beginning of the text. Plato tells us that Er "said some other things about the stillborn and those who had only lived for a short time, but they're not worth recounting." Apparently, this is an absolutely trivial statement. But we must be permitted to wonder: Why, if these things are not worth recounting, is it worth it for Plato to recount that they are not worth recounting? It seems perfectly fair to suggest that it is worth recounting for Plato because it is in fact essential to recall that logos faces ineluctable distributive choices, or in other words, that the giving of an account is subject to an economy that cannot be ignored.

There is one final note of interest in the theoric structure of the myth of Er. Socrates introduces the story with the following disclaimer. "It isn't, however, a tale of Alcinous that I'll tell you but that of a brave Pamphylian man called Er, the son of Armenias, who once died in a war." As pointed out in the editor's notes, Plato seems to be punning on the Greek word for "brave," alkimou. For, the tales of Alcinous in Books 9–11 of the Odyssey are known as Alkinou apologoi. Therefore, if alkimou can be read as combining alke (strength) and nous (understanding), alkimou can be read as combining alke and Mousa, muse. [19] In other words, it is not a tale of strong logical understanding, but rather a tale of strong storytelling. It is obvious that Plato, in recounting a myth, is telling a strong story, and this is certainly what has served to justify this particular interpretation of the pun.[20] But because the figure of Er, in Plato's story, is also an assigned "messenger," one can just as well suggest that he, not Plato, is the strong storyteller. In fact, it is even more compelling to understand Er as the object of the pun because the "brave" (alkimou) character Plato refers to is, after all, Er, not Plato. Of course, we will have every reason to affirm its applicability to Plato's own recourse to myth, but it is important for the purpose of rounding out the terms of the theoric structure that we highlight the pun's applicability to Er.

This distinction is noticeable and worth mentioning only in the present context because the goal is to show that the applicability of the pun to Plato's mythmaking is not just an easy and obvious conclusion ("of course, Plato is just telling a story,") but rather the necessary conclusion of a deeper and more systematic sketch of the theoric structure in its several appearances. That is why it is necessary to highlight the structural integrity of Er's theoric trajectory, ending in the strong storytelling of his tale, rather than stopping short at a reading of the pun which applies to Plato's mythmaking only.

**Philosophical Theoria**

In Book V-VII of *Republic*, Plato constructs, for the first time at length, the new, specific activity of "philosophy," as something distinct from general intellectual cultivation (philosophein).[21] Nightingale shows in great detail how the philosopher is constructed on the grounds of traditional theoria. The Allegory of the Cave, for instance, is the story of a theoric pilgrimage from shadow to light and back into shadow. The desire of he who leaves the cave differs from mere personal cultivation in that the philosophical theoros seeks not to "wander" so as to work on the self, but to see being as it really is, to see it in its truth unadulterated by the shadows of personal desires, biases, illusions, etc., in order to bring it back into the cave.[22] This would be the difference between wisdom and philosophical truth: the first is negative, a peeling away of excesses, biases, and illusions for the improvement of one's soul; the second is a positive acquisition or production intended for the reception of others. The error of Anarchasis, or Socrates for that matter, was to make a politically inept production of their acquired wisdom. As we will see, this also marks the difference between Socrates and Plato and can be read as a foundational concern of the *Republic* itself.

**Generalizing the Structure of Theoria**

If we wished to represent the structure of theoria graphically, as Plato gave us to understand it, we would have to show thought "ascending" from earthly obviousness to a better-lit plateau, followed by the descent back "down to earth," to "reality." Here, each particular element in each particular kind of theoria—Plato's own as they appear on the narrative level of his text, and the traditional institutions of theoria as Nightingale has reconstructed them out of his text—are clustered and plotted to represent the general trajectory of theoria as it appears in the *Republic*.


**Figure 1. Theoric structure in *Republic***

In each case there is, to begin with, a set of practical conditions or in other words a particular institution—a more or less distinct and stable desire (more: religious theoria; less: philosophical theoria, which is for Greek philosophy radically insecure) propped up by some relationship to some reserve of power or force, be it military might, state funding, or the resources of a lone individual. This desire takes off, as it were, and is propelled by these resources to an encounter with some object. What is interesting about this object, designated here as the theoric discovery, is that in each case the object is not so much a positive attainment, but some finally insurmountable resistance to the upward theoric flight: mystery, difference, skepticism, limbo, and blindness, respectively.

On return, the desire of the theoros and the journey it motivated must reintegrate itself into the practical institutional context from whence it came. As noted, the expectation of this reintegration is itself a condition of possibility for the theoric journey. But also indicated here, this reintegration is a negotiated result. It is not determined in the strong sense; there is room for play, between, for instance, a radical Socratic negativity which maintains fidelity to the truth of thought's experience, and a more selective and discreet narrative of the experience.

Constituted by the very shape of the journey, clustered in the negative space underneath the arc of the way taken, are the positive designations for the contradictory objects which both propel the journey upward and then repel it downward. These several kinds of knowledge serve to denote the positive stamp, whether implicitly or explicitly, Plato gives to the invariably elusive object at the height of the theoric flight. After discussing a similar structure which pertains to the psychic economy, we will gain additional resources to say more about this theoric economy.

## IV. The Structure of Drive

In the psychoanalytic understanding, sexual drives must be rigorously distinguished from the animal instinct, because it is only the latter which take a particular, determinate object. As is well known, the story of sexual development, as told by the younger Freud, is the story of the infantile sexual drives (oral, anal, etc.) and their gradual organization at the genital level. Despite Freud's early insistence on this tendency of the child's "polymorphous perversion" to consolidate at the genital level, Freud later realized, and Lacan emphasized, that this organization always remains inherently incomplete and precarious at that. Lacan links the partiality of the drives to what he somewhat ambiguously calls an "economic factor," implied by the pleasure principle's relationship to the Real-Ich, what can be conceptualized as essentially the central nervous system. It must be remembered that the pleasure-principle has nothing to do with a kind of hedonistic insistence on simply seeking pleasures, but is rather the reduction of excitations as such, the maintenance of equilibrium or harmony in the psyche. It is not about pursuing excitations, but about gratifying and sating excitations so as to get rid of them because they are unpleasurable from the standpoint of the psyche.

The central nervous system, in maintaining a certain "homeostasis of the internal tensions," achieves a minimization of excitations, a containment of energies, and is therefore the pleasure principle itself. But in the maintenance and containment of these excitations, it is what gives them the character of a "pressure," in other words, what accounts for them as unpleasurable. In other words, it is the maintenance of the homeostasis of the excitations, but a maintenance which, as it were, runs on the very energy of those excitations. This is why they are partial drives, drives which find no satisfaction in a final goal or destination, but which only drive out in order to drive back in. The pleasure principle can be conceptualized as the central nervous system because each essentially represents this economy, this investment of energy into the maintenance of nothing other than this investment.

In order to interpret this topology, consider Lacan's following explanation of the partial drives in connection to the larger course of life itself: Sexuality is realized only through the operation of the drives in so far as they are partial drives, partial with regard to the biological finality of sexuality…If all is confusion in the discussion of the sexual drives it is because one does not see that the drive represents no doubt, but merely represents, and partially at that, the curve of fulfillment of sexuality in the living being. Is it surprising that its final term should be death, when the presence of sex in the living being is bound up with death?[23]

Lacan is referring here to the beyond of the pleasure principle—what Freud referred to as the death drive. If we could imagine Lacan's topology of the partial drives with the drive rather going straight up and reaching a goal beyond its mere point of departure we would have a topology of animal instinct, death itself for human being. Life is precisely what is sustained by the return and the repetition of the drives, and in fact is little more, but not nothing more, than this circular circuit (the central nervous system), in the same sense that a home becomes a home only with its inhabitants' repeated returns, and without them remains just a dead empty space. In any event, Lacan bases his topology of the partial drives on Freud's use of the three voices (active, reflexive, and passive) to describe the circuit of the drive. Freud uses the pleasure of seeing as an example. One sees (active), and from this seeing one is able to see oneself (reflexive). These two voices would appear, at first glance, to provide a sufficient description of the drive's circuit, which Freud tells us is an "outwards- and-back" movement. But Freud notes a third moment in the pleasure of

sight, namely, that in seeing oneself one arrives at a notion of being seen (passive).

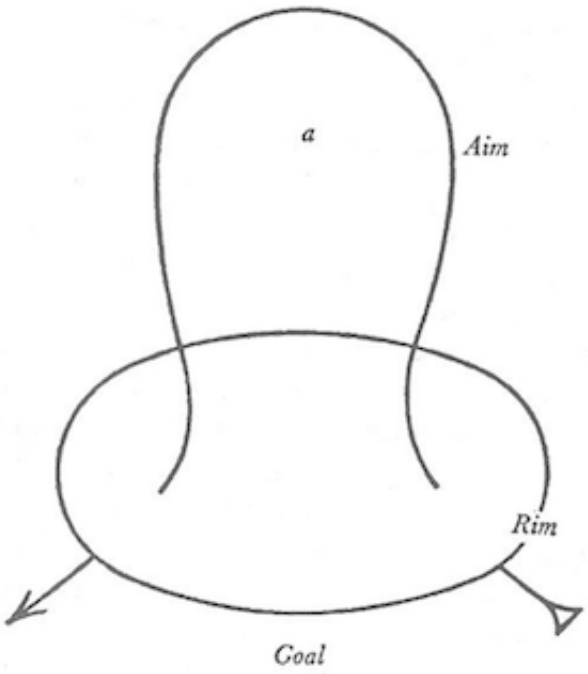


**Figure 2. Lacan's topology of the partial drive**

Lacan's interest here is that in this circular circuit, something new emerges. There is suddenly a subject, not the subject of the drive, but a subject that is other from the subject of the drive, someone to see the subject of the drive. It was said before that life is little more but not nothing more than the formalism of a circular circuit because, as Lacan's topology shows, the critical feature is what Lacan calls the *objet a*. This *objet a* is not at all the object of the drive as a particular, determinate bull's eye, rather it is the name for the hollow space that the drive creates by not attaining any final satisfaction outside itself. It only comes to be in the drive's return into itself without having attained a determinate satisfaction; it is the object of the drive only known by the fact that when the drive runs its course, it keeps running nonetheless.

This is how humans are distinct from the other species insofar as the object of their drives is not given, it is not limited and neatly constrained by an automatic instinct as when the fish eats the minnow that is all there is to it; in the movement of the partial drives which constitute human being, virtually anything can be occupied by the void within the partial drive, that is, what we retroactively and only fantastically determine as missing after the drives run their course (what the mother is trying to understand when she screams to her ceaselessly crying child, "What do you want from me?") is up for grabs.

Thus, life is the perpetuity of the partial drive's circuit. The reason it deserves and necessitates the designation of "economy" is that it is subject to certain laws of motion which are laws precisely because the outcome of their violation is no less predicted by the laws: going off the circular track is conceivable exactly as death, a body torn asunder by an outward expenditure uncontained, i.e. not reinvested in any apparatus which would maintain the perpetuity of the energetics.

One last point needs mention before we can begin our return to Plato: the place of the rim. What is

the rim? It is the quelle, the source, of the drive. In short, the rim-like structure of the drive's source is implied in the notion of the drive as an excitation, a movement, a deviation from an equilibrium: as such, it must be seen as a breaking into/out of something back through which it returns. For the drive to emerge as a concentration, as a particular force rather than total mere diffusion, there must be a minimal surface against which it finds resistance. This is simply the Real, defined as obstacle or resistance, the unwelcome.[24] "It is because of the reality of the homeostatic system that sexuality comes into play only in the form of partial drives."[25] A drive is what presses through a gap in the Real, but the Real is necessary for the pressure which constitutes the drive. This is its dialectical character. This will certainly remain ambiguous at this point, but it is enough to permit moving forward.

If we seem far afield from our concern with Plato and the founding of political philosophy in the West, we have to elucidate what the partial drive has to do with rationality. Repression, in other words the very constitution of the partial drives as drives (as opposed to the death drive, the explosion of the central nervous system in an enjoyment beyond the pleasure principle) is a signifier insofar as it sets up a subject (here, the Real-Ich becomes an objectified subject)[26] for another signifier. This other signifier is, of course, the symptom, the return of the repressed, which Lacan teaches is homogenous with the repressed and connected to it in what can be conceived as a scaffolding.[27]

Opposed to this one extreme of repression as such is not some kind of vulgar hedonistic, excessive pleasure, but simply interpretation."Desire, in fact, is interpretation itself."[28] The move from one signifier to another, in other words the search for meaning, the traversal of the scaffolding which represents the very libidinal investments the returns on which are the perpetuity of life, can be understood in this sense as an illicit travel into a territory blocked- off by the Real, that is, structurally blocked off by life and the pleasure principle: every move between signifiers is unjustified from the standpoint of the pleasure principle, as it represents an excitation which upsets the equilibrium of any particular moment and the horizon of significations which constitute it. Interpretation—rather than being on one side with the Real, as in the conception of interpretation as a search for pure Truth—is opposed to the Real, an obscene and dangerous movement which moves precisely against the Real.

In between interpertation and the Real, according to Lacan, is sexuality. If the partiality of the drives did not dominate the "whole economy of this interval," we could be true prophets. That we are not mantics indicates sexuality, or the outward-and-backward movements between the primal repressed and interpretation of the symptom that is a scaffolding built on and run on the pressure of the primal repressed. The topology of the partial drive illustrates that the desire of a sexed being does not attain a final satisfaction, but perpetually recreates, by virtue and within the space of an encircling, a lost object, which retroactively appears as the cause of desire. In other words, the partiality of the drives (sexuality itself) assures us is that a final interpretative satisfaction—in, say, the finality of a pure truth, the desire for which we can now understand as the death drive—is out of the question.

More specifically, it is out of the question precisely because the posing of a question is not what philosophy all too comfortably imagines it is—a deferral of pleasure, of mere desire, sublimated into a search for the Real—but rather a violent laceration of the Real (the horizon of present knowledge as obstacle to some "deeper" meaning located at some other point beyond the horizon) in the name of desire.

## V. Conclusion

If we return to our visualization of theoric structure as it appears in Plato's *Republic*, and we stand by the premise of the homology between the well-ordered soul and the well-ordered polis, it would appear that missing from the graphic representation is a source, a quell, or rim- like structure. If the theoric structure resembles a bow, the curve of fulfillment of human sexuality, much like the circuit of the partial drive, do we not learn from Lacan's topology that such a trajectory cannot, as it were, power itself without the pressure of a Real out of which the theoric departure would erupt? In other words, what we learn very clearly is that the mind must be made up, out of a Real which presses on it.

Thought (interpretation, desire) cannot emerge without something which would press the libido, that is, function as an unpleasurable excitation to be reduced (repressed). The expression of a demand, for the satisfaction of a particular need, which for speaking beings is articulated in signifiers, guarantees that there will always be a metonymic remainder as foundation of the scaffolding of signifiers, the dimension of desire the repression of which serves as the investment of articulating the demand. When libido is pressed by an unpleasurable excitation, the Real as obstacle, this pressing creates a pressure or investment which results in the libido's departure out of a rim- like structure in the Real.

Whereas attaining a final goal outside of itself would be the death drive, the will to inorganic thing-like existence, the drives of a sexed being return into themselves as return on the investment. So it is with the mind and the freethinking subject: the Real presses, builds a pressure—or, in economic terms, invests itself—into a speaking being, and the being re-presses that pressure into the production of a truth. This is borne out by the structure of theoria in *Republic*.

Thus, the self and the city are made up and minded according to the same economics or energetics: theoretical objects constructed mentally or freely but only possible from the pressure of a materiality (rim) against which the subject is invested with the desire to think. The desire to free thinking is only what the pleasure principle demands in response to the Thrasymachean materiality of being, and free thought or truth is only the outcome of this material investment that being makes in another, this time speaking, being. Speaking freely is like the steam valve of a pressure cooker: and it is in this way that the mind is made up, that freedom is forced and is force, but is nonetheless true insofar as this actually happens.

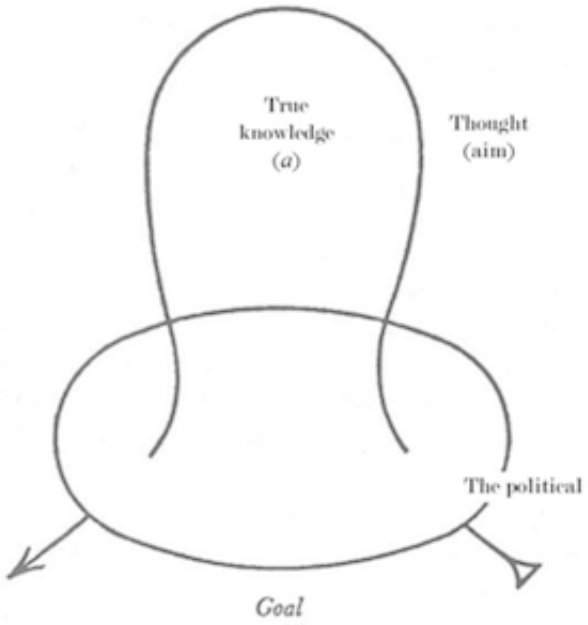


**Figure 3. Theoria in terms of drive**

This accounts for why Thrasymachus is not theoretically refuted, but effectively defeated. He is not made to concede that he is wrong, but Plato is able to keep his argument alive and protected by its own resources. He does this not by proving that he has brought down for Thrasymachus's view the Form itself as a positive attainment, but by relating the theory of Forms, the theory which states the form of Thrasymachus's theory's failure, which demonstrates the paradoxical fact that the truth as the mere empty form of the idea of truth, is a positive force in political progress. It can forestall anything, and in doing so it reshapes the positive movements forward which happen of necessity, anyway.

Recall that Socrates and Glaucon are returning from a fairly significant theoric event, heading home to Athens, when they are captured by Polemarchus and the others. Clearly, in the light of the preceding remarks, their capture functions on the narrative level of the dialogue according quite strictly to how Socrates describes "the return" phase of all the other theoric structures he invokes. That is, returning from a theoric event, he encounters resistance on his return home, a resistance based on a Thrasymachean advantage of the stronger. Let us emphasize also that the festival at Bendis was not a trivial affair. The Athenian polis exercised the right to permit or prohibit forms of worship and the festival to which Glaucon and Socrates refer had the political significance of being the first Thracian festival permitted in Attica.[29]

Furthermore, recall what Socrates and Glaucon learned at the Thracian festival in Attica. As it is said briefly and in passing in the very first lines of the text, the procession of the Thracians was "no less outstanding" than the "fine one" conducted by the Athenians. It may seem a banal remark, but as Nightingale points out, Plato goes out of his way to have Socrates voice a non-Athenocentric viewpoint.[30] Thus, what he learns from the theoric event is a comparative political knowledge that conflicts with the patriotism of those back home to whom he will have to provide an account. That he is returning with a truth that is a political liability supports our emphasis on this initial framing as invested with the same properties as the other theoric structures.

When Socrates, in the dialogue, encounters the political problem of "selling" the idea of justice to

otherwise selfish people, he takes recourse to myth—to strong stories instead of strong knowledge.[31] If we can reasonably posit a structural affinity between the theoric events invoked throughout the dialogue and the dialogue itself, then going back to the initial scenario reveals the following.

The injunction that Socrates make up his mind gives us reason to cast across the whole subsequent dialogue a suspicion of "strong storytelling," that is, mythmaking or lying. As demonstrated both in the arguments about the theoros's return and in the recourse to myth, bringing an account home to an unjust city is a political liability that requires a political ruse. It is not that the whole dialogue of the *Republic* is a veiled way of saying that the Thracian procession was just as good as the Athenian, but that even the apparent triviality—in fact, pure negativity— of this non-critique that is mere non- Athenocentrism is nonetheless clearly a marker for the place of serious critique. It might be objected that too much is being made of what is only non- praise and non-critique of Athens, in calling it a marker for critical political analysis. However, because we are dealing with the politics of theory, and therefore the repressing and repressed of theory, I think it is permissible to here to take up another psychoanalytic line. That is, exactly in the resistance, the muting, the veiling, the trivializing of Socrates' calling into question of Athenocentrism is the proof that we are here dealing with dangerous material. Since my argument is that theoretical conclusions in the *Republic* are understood by Plato to be always politically problematic, when these theoretical conclusions are dramatized they *ipso facto* cannot be presented in the full, unrepressed force of their critical potency, and the negativity that Plato uses to hollow out this positive statement is therefore perfectly revealing of the political problem this theoretical conclusion represents.

The question that remains is why, if my reading makes sense, would Plato pack so much into apparently very trivial introductory lines? Everything demonstrated here suggests that the *Republic* itself, and indeed any transcription of a philosophical realization, can be read as a "return from the Forms" which always means an encounter with force. Everything indicates that for Plato there is a constant theoric structure and that Plato and his own texts broadly fit this structure.

If we conclude that Plato himself would have to adopt the strategy he attributes to Socrates literally from the first pages to the last, that is, making up his mind—with all of the reverberations of that phrase—then what does this tell us? All of the ambiguity surrounding the Forms—that they are not strictly speaking attainable, that they are modeled on mystery—can be restored a profound coherence at the point we interpret the theory of Forms according to the formula outlined here. The theory of the Forms is made up, or to be more precise, Plato made up his mind to them in order to provide a return account of the truth. Of course, a key figure in this equation is the historical Socrates. Why are the Forms so ontologically and epistemologically mysterious? Because they are a politicized theory of Socratic negativity, a contrived positivity (content) for the radical negativity of the truth (form), the pure form of the "I know that I know nothing."

The theory of Forms is therefore Socratic negativity plus political strategy. The passage that acts as the narrative condition of possibility for the dialogue of the *Republic* invokes a Socrates that is different from the historical Socrates precisely in that he is politically shrewd; in the face of capture, he provides a politically palatable form for the irreducibility of dialectic by positing the idealism that sustains it. By inserting himself into this ideology as an interlocutor, he is able to execute the logical parlor trick called Justice in order to subvert the reality of

Thrasymachean advantage.

1. Plato, *Republic*, trans. G. M. A. Grube, ed. C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1992) I, [^327, b. All references to *Republic* are from this edition, unless otherwise noted. ↩

2. Plato, *Republic*, I, 327, c. ↩

3. Of course, there is variance in the translations. In slight contrast to Grube, Bloom has Polemarchus say, “Well then, think it over, bearing in mind we won’t listen.” Plato, *Republic*, trans. Allan Bloom (NY: Basic, 1991). ↩

4. Jacques Lacan, The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis, trans. Alan Sheridan, ed. [^Jacques-Alain Miller (New York: Norton, 1977) 154. ↩

5. It will become relevant to recall that this whole problematic is seen just as well in the Freudian problematic of the primal horde, insofar as our psychic anxieties are traceable to an original, semi-empirical band of brothers who kill their father to share the exploits of his promiscuous sexual reign. The brothers must then endure, through to the present day, the ambivalent
tension between happiness for their freedom and remorse for their crime. ↩

6. See the Perseus Digital Library at http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/hopper/morph?l=dianoei%3Dsqe&l ^a=greek&prior=ou(/tw&d=Perseus:text:1999.01.0167:book=1:section=327c&i=1. ↩

7. Andrea Wilson Nightingale, Spectacles of Truth in Classical Greek Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 72. ↩

8. Nightingale, 74. ↩

9. Nightingale, 45. ↩

10. Nightingale, 48. ↩

11. The words are attributed to Theognis as cited in Nightingale, 44. ↩

12. Nightingale, 46. ↩

13. John Elsner, “Between Mimesis and Divine Power: Visuality in the Greco- Roman World,” [^Visuality Before and Beyond the Renaissance, ed. R. Nelson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press)
[^61, as cited in Nightingale, 46. ↩

14. Elsner, 62. ↩

15. Nightingale, 63–64. ↩

16. Nightingale, 64–65. ↩

17. Nightingale, 76–77. ↩

18. Plato, 286. ↩

19. Plato, 285, fn24. ↩

20. Such as the one provided in the editorial notes: “Socrates would then be saying something [^like: It isn’t a tale that shows strength of understanding that I’m going to tell but one that [^shows the strength of the Muse of storytelling.” ↩

21. Nightingale, 77. ↩

22. Plato, 191. ↩

23. Lacan, 177. ↩

24. Lacan, 69. ↩

25. Lacan, 176. ↩

26. Lacan, 164. ↩

27. Lacan, 176. ↩

28. Lacan, 176. ↩

29. Nightingale, 75. ↩

30. Nightingale, 75. ↩

31. Cf. pp.10–13. ↩