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Socrates' and Callicles' Settlement--or, The Invention of the Impossible Body Politic

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Introduction

"If Right cannot prevail, then Might will take over!" How often have we heard this cry of despair? How sensible it is to cry for Reason in this way when faced with the horrors we witness every day. And yet, this cry too has a history--a history that I want to probe because it might allow us to distinguish anew science from politics, and maybe to explain why the Body Politic has been invented in such a way as to be rendered impossible, impotent, illegitimate, a born bastard.

When I say that this rallying cry has a history, I do not mean that it moves at a fast pace. On the contrary, centuries may pass without affecting it a bit. Its tempo resembles that of Fermat's theorem, or plate tectonics, or glaciations. Witness, for instance, the similarity between Socrates' vehement address to the Sophist Callicles, in the famous dialogue of the *Gorgias*, and this recent instance by Steven Weinberg, fresh off the presses, in an issue of the *New York Review of Books*: "Our civilization," Weinberg writes,

> has been powerfully affected by the discovery that nature is strictly governed by impersonal laws. . . . We will need to confirm and strengthen the vision of a rationally understandable world if we

> are to protect ourselves from the irrational tendencies that still beset humanity. [1]

And here is Socrates' famed admonition: *geômetrias gar ameleis*! **[End Page 189]**

> In fact, Callicles, the experts' opinion is that cooperation, love, order, discipline, and justice *bind heaven and earth, gods and men*. That's why they call the universe an ordered whole, my friend, rather than a disorderly mess or an unruly shambles. It seems to me that, for all your expertise in the field, you're overlooking this point. You've failed to notice how much power *geometrical equality* has among gods and men, and this *neglect of geometry* has led you to believe that one should try to gain a disproportionate share of things. (508 a) [2]

What these two quotations have in common, across the huge gap of centuries, is the strong linkage they establish between the respect for impersonal natural laws on the one hand, and the fight against irrationality, immorality, and political disorder on the other. In both quotations, the fate of Reason and the fate of Politics are associated in one single destiny. To attack Reason is to render morality and social peace impossible. Right is what protects us against Might. Reason against civil warfare. The common tenet is that we need something "inhuman"--for Weinberg, the natural laws no human has constructed; for Socrates, geometry whose demonstrations escape human whim--if we want to be able to fight against "inhumanity." To sum up even more succinctly: only inhumanity will quash inhumanity. Only a Science that is not man-made will protect a Body Politic that is in constant risk of being mob-made. Yes, Reason is our rampart, our Great Wall of China, our Maginot line against the dangerous unruly mob.

This line of reasoning, which I will call "inhumanity against inhumanity," has been attacked, of course, ever since it began--first by the Sophists, against whom Plato launches his all-out attack, all the way to this motley gang of people branded with the label of "postmodernism" (an accusation, by the way, as vague as the curse of being a "sophist"). Postmoderns of the past and of the present have tried to break the connection between the discovery of natural laws of the cosmos and the problems of making the Body Politic safe for its citizens. Some have claimed that adding inhumanity to inhumanity has simply increased the misery and the civil strife, and that a staunch fight against Science and Reason should be started to protect politics against the intrusion of science and technology. Still others, targeted publicly today (with whom, I am sorry to say, I am often mistakenly lumped), have tried to show that mob rule, the violence of the Body Politic, is everywhere polluting the purity of Science, **[End Page 190]** which becomes every day

human, all too human, and every day more adulterated by the civil strife it was supposed to quiet down. Others, like Nietzsche, have shamelessly accepted Callicles' position and claimed, against the degenerate and moralistic Socrates, that only violence could bend both the mob and its retinue of priests and other men of *ressentiment*--among whom, I am sorry to say, he included scientists and cosmologists like Weinberg. . . .

None of these critiques, however, if they have tried to break the iron connection between Reason and Politics, has disputed *simultaneously* the definition of Science *and* the definition of the Body Politic that it implies. Inhumanity is accepted in both, or in at least one of them. Only the connection between the two, or its expediency, has been disputed. What I want to do in this paper is to go back to the source of what I will call the "scenography" of the fight of Right against Might, and see how it was staged in the first place. I want, in other words, to attempt the archaeology of this Pavlovian reflex, which makes any type of lecture in the sociology of science trigger these questions from a member of the audience: "Then, you want force alone to decide in matters of proofs? Then, you are for mob rule against that of rational understanding?" Is there really no other way? Is it really impossible to build up other reflexes, other intellectual resources?

To go some way toward this genealogy, no text is more appropriate than the *Gorgias*, especially in the lively new translation by Robin Waterfield, [3] since never was it more beautifully set up than in the acrimonious debate between Socrates and Callicles, which has been commented on by all the later Sophists from Greece and then from Rome--as well as, in our time, by thinkers as different as Charles Perelman and Hannah Arendt. I do not read this book as if I were a Greek scholar (which I am not, as will be made clear enough in this paper), but as if it had been published a few months ago in the *New York Review of Books* as a contribution to the raging "Science Wars." Fresh as in 385 B.C., it deals with the same puzzle as the one besetting the academy and our contemporary societies today.

This puzzle can be stated very simply: The Greeks made one invention too many! [4] They invented at once democracy and mathematical **[End Page 191]** demonstration--or, to use the terms that Barbara Cassin comments upon so beautifully, *epideixis* and *apodeixis.* [5] We are still struggling, in our "mad cow times," with this same quandary: how to have a science *and* a democracy together. What I will call "the settlement between Socrates and Callicles" has rendered the Body Politic incapable of swallowing the two inventions at once. More fortunate than the Greeks, we might be able, if we rewrite this settlement, to profit at last from both.

To revisit this "primal scene" of Might and Right, I am afraid we have to follow the dialogue in some detail. Although incredibly perverse, Plato's prose is beautiful enough to make this inquiry, I hope, not too tedious. The structure of the story is clear. Three Sophists in turn oppose Socrates and are defeated one after the other: Gorgias, a bit tired from a lecture he has just given; Polus, a bit slow; and finally the harshest of the three, the famous and infamous Callicles. At the end Socrates, having discouraged discussion, speaks to himself and makes a final appeal to the shadows of the afterworld, the only ones able to understand his position and to judge it--with good reason, as we will see!

My commentary will not always follow the chronological order of the dialogue and will focus mainly on Callicles. I want to point out two features of the discussion that, in my view, have often been overlooked. One is that Socrates and his third opponent Callicles agree on everything--and the demonstration of this will make up the first part of my paper. I will even show that the invocation by Socrates of Reason against the unreasonable people is actually patterned on Callicles' request for "an unequal share of power." The second feature is that it is still possible to recognize in the four protagonists' speeches the dim trace of the "conditions of felicity" [6] that are proper to politics, and that both Callicles and Socrates (as characters in Plato's puppet show, at least) have tried their best to erase. This will make up the second part of my own *epideixis.* [7] In the last and much briefer concluding section, I will try to show that the Body Politic could behave very differently if another definition of science and of democracy were provided. A science freed at last from its kidnapping by **[End Page 192]** politics? Even better, a polity freed at last from its delegitimation by science? It is certainly, everyone would admit, worth a try.

Part I. Socrates and Callicles vs. the People of Athens

1. The Demotic Hatred

We are so used to opposing Might and Right and to looking in the *Gorgias* for their best instantiation that we forget to see that Socrates and Callicles have a common enemy: the people of Athens, the crowd assembled in the agora, talking endlessly, making the laws at their whim, behaving like children, like sick people, like animals, shifting opinions at the slightest change of wind. Socrates accuses Gorgias and then Polus of being the slaves of the people, or of being like Callicles, unable to utter words other than those the

raging crowd puts in his mouth. [8] But Callicles too, when his time to talk has come, accuses Socrates of being enslaved by the people of Athens and of forgetting what makes noble masters superior to *hoi polloi*:

> You pretend that truth is your goal, Socrates, but in actual fact you steer discussions towards this kind of ethical idea--ideas which are *unsophisticated* enough to have *popular appeal*, and which depend entirely on convention, not on nature. (482e) [9]

The two protagonists rival each other in trying to avoid being branded with that fatal accusation: *resembling* the people, the common people, the menial manual people of Athens. As we will see, they soon disagree on how best to break the majority rule, but the goal of breaking the rule of the crowd remains beyond question. Witness this exchange, in which a condescending and tired Callicles seems to lose the contest over how much *distance* one should keep from the demos:

> --Callicles: I can't explain it, Socrates, but I do think you're making your points well. All the same, I'm feeling what people invariably feel with you: I'm not *entirely* convinced.
>
> --Socrates: It's the *demotic love* residing in your heart which is resisting me, Callicles. (513c)

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Obviously, the love of the people is not stifling *Socrates'* breath! He has a way to break the rule of majority that no obstacle can restrain. What should we call what resists in *his* heart if not "demotic hatred"? If you make a list of all the derogatory terms with which the common crowd is branded by both Callicles and Socrates, it is hard to see which of them despises it most. Is it because assemblies are polluted by women, children, and slaves that they deserve their spite? [10] Is it because they are made up of people who work with their hands? [11] Or is it because they switch opinions like babies and want to be spoiled and stuffed like irresponsible children? [12] All of that, to be sure--but the source, for our two protagonists, of the greatest scandal is even more elementary than that: the great constitutive defect of the people is that there are simply *too many* of them: [13] "A rhetorician then," says Socrates, with his tranquil arrogance,

> isn't concerned to educate the people *assembled* in lawcourts and so on about right and wrong; all he wants to do is *persuade* them. I mean, I shouldn't think it's possible for him to get *so many*

people to understand such *important matters in such a short time*. (455a)

Yes, there are too many of them, the questions are too important (*megala pragmata*), there is too little time (*oligô chronô*). Are these not, however, the normal conditions of the Body Politic? Is it not precisely to deal with these peculiar situations of number, urgency, and priority that the subtle skills of politics were invented? Yes, as we shall see in the second part; but this is *not* the tack that Socrates and Callicles take. Horror-struck by the numbers, the urgency, and the importance, they both agree upon another radical solution: break the majority rule and escape from it. And it is at this juncture that **[End Page 194]** the fight between Might and Right is being invented, the commedia del artescenography that is going to entertain so many people for so long.

Because of the clever staging by Plato (so clever that it continues even now in campus amphitheaters), we have to distinguish between several Callicleses, so that we do not attribute to the Sophists the position in which Socrates is trying to corner them--a position that they kindly accept, since Plato is holding all the puppet strings of the dialogue at once. [14] I will thus call the Callicles playing the role of a foil for Socrates in Plato's hand, the *straw* Callicles. I will call the Callicles that retains features of the precise conditions of felicity invented by the Sophists and still visible in the dialogue the *positive*, or the *historical*, or the *anthropological* Callicles. [15] As we will see, while the straw Callicles used as a foil is a strong enemy of the demos and the perfect counterpart for Socrates, the anthropological Callicles will allow us to retrieve some of the very specificities of political truth-saying.

2. How Best to Break the Majority Rule

a. Callicles' opposition between natural and conventional law. Callicles' solution is well known. It is the age-old aristocratic solution, presented in a crisp and naive light by the Nietzschean blond brute descending from a race of masters. But we should not be taken in by what happens on the stage. Callicles is not for Might understood as "mere force," but for something, on the contrary, that will make Might weak. He is looking for a might mightier than Might. We should follow with some precision the tricks that Callicles employs, because, in spite of his sneering remarks, it is on the bad guy that the good guy, Socrates, is going to pattern *his* copycat solution to the *same* problem: for both, *beyond* the conventional laws made for and by the mob, there is another, natural law reserved for the elite, which renders the noble souls

unaccountable to the demos. **[End Page 195]**

In a visionary anticipation of certain aspects of sociobiology, Callicles appeals to nature above man-made history:

> But I think we only have to look at *nature* to find evidence that it is *right* for *better* to have a *greater* share than worse, more capable than less capable. The evidence for this is widespread. Other *creatures* show, as do human communities and nations, that *right* has been determined as follows: the *superior* person shall *dominate* the inferior person and have more than him. . . . These people act, surely, in conformity with the natural essence [*kata phusin*] of right and, yes, I'd even go as far as to say that they act in conformity with *natural law* [*kata nomon ge ton tès phuseôs*], even though they presumably *contravene* our *man-made* laws. (483d)

As Socrates and Callicles immediately see, however, this is not a sufficient definition of Might, for a simple and paradoxical reason: Callicles who appeals to the superior natural law is nonetheless physically *weaker* than the crowd. "Presumably you don't think that two people are better than one, or that your slaves are *better* than you, just because they're *stronger* than you" (489d), ironizes Socrates. "Of course," says Callicles,

> I mean that *superior* people are *better*. Haven't I been telling you all along that "better" and "superior" are the same, in my opinion? What else do you think I've been saying? That law consists of the statements made by an *assembly of slaves and assorted other forms of human debris* who could be completely *discounted* if it weren't for the fact they they do have *physical strength* at their disposal? (489c)

We should be careful here not to introduce the moral argument that is going to come later (II, 2, b), and we should remain sensitive only to Callicles' way of escaping the rule of the majority. His appeal to irrepressible natural law exactly resembles the "inhumanity to quash inhumanity" with which I started this paper. Stripped of its moral dimension, which will be added later in the dialogue in the interests of staging and not of logic, Callicles' plea becomes a moving appeal to a force stronger than the democratic force of the assembled people--a force beautifully defined by Socrates when he summarizes Callicles' position:

> Here's your position, then: a *single* clever person is almost *bound to be superior to ten thousand*

> *fools*; political power should be his and they should be his subjects; and it is appropriate for someone with political power to have *more* than his subjects. Now, I'm not picking up on the form of words you used, but that, I take it, is the implication of what you're saying--of a single individual being *superior* to *ten thousand others*. **[End Page 196]**
>
> --Callicles: Yes, that's what I mean. In my opinion, that's what natural right is--for an individual who is *better* (that is, more clever) to *rule over* second-rate people and to have *more* than them. (490a)

Thus, when Might enters the scene in the person of the Nietzschean Callicles, it is not as the Brown Shirts smashing their way through the laboratories--as in the nightmares epistemologists have when they think of "science studies"--it is as an elitist and specialized expertise breaking the neck of mob rule and imposing a Right superior to all the conventional property rights. When Might is invoked on the stage it is not as a crowd against Reason, it is as *one* man against the crowd, against myriads of fools. [16] Nietzsche has deftly drawn the moral of this paradox in his famous advice: "One should always defend the strong against the weak." Nothing is more elitist than the nightmarish Might. [17]

The model employed by Callicles is of course nobility, the aristocratic upbringing to which Plato himself, as has been so often noticed, owes his virtue. Nobility gives an ingrained quality and a native status that makes masters different from *hoi polloi*. But Callicles shifts the classic pattern considerably, by complementing upbringing with an appeal to a law that is superior to the law. Elites are defined not only by their past and ancestors, but also by their connection to this natural law that does not depend on the "social construction" made by slaves. We are so used to laughing when Callicles falls into all the traps laid by Socrates that we forget to see how similar are the roles both offer to an irrepressible natural law that is not man-made: "What do we do with the best and strongest among us?" asks Callicles:

> We capture them young, like lions, mould them, and *turn them into slaves* by chanting spells and incantations over them which insist that they have to be equals to others and that equality is admirable and right. But I'm sure that if a man is born *in whom nature* is *strong* enough, he'll *shake off these limitations*, shatter them to pieces, and win his freedom; he'll *trample* all our regulations, charms, spells, and *unnatural* laws into the dust; this slave will rise up and reveal himself as our master; and then *natural right* (*to tès phuseôs dikaion*) will blaze forth. (484a)

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This sort of sentence has done a lot for Callicles' bad reputation--and yet, it is the same irrepressible urge that even bad education cannot spoil that is going to "shake off" irrationality and "blaze forth" when Socrates will defeat *his* ten thousand fools. If you remove from Callicles the cloak of immorality, if you make him swap offstage his brutish and hairy wig for the virginal white cloth of Antigone, we will be forced to notice that his plea possesses the same beauty as hers against Creon, over which so many moral philosophers have shed so many tears. Both say that deformation by the "social construction" cannot stop the natural law from "blazing forth" in the hearts of naturally good people. In the long run, the noble hearts will triumph against man-made conventions. We despise the Callicleses and we praise the Socrateses and the Antigoneses, but this is to hide the simple fact that they all wish to stand alone against the people. We complain that without Right the war of all against all will take over, but we fail to notice *this* war of two, Socrates and Callicles, against all the others!

b. Socrates' opposition of conventional and natural law. With this little warning in mind, we can now listen to Socrates' solution with a different ear. On the stage, to be sure, he has a field day when ridiculing Callicles' appeal to an unlimited Might:

> Would you go back to the beginning, though, and tell me again what you and Pindar mean by natural right? Am I right in remembering that according to you it's the *forcible seizure of property* belonging to inferior people by anyone who is superior, it's the *dominance* of the worse by the better, and it's the *unequal* distribution of goods, so that the élite have more than second-rate people? (488b)

The entire audience screams in horror when confronted with this threat of Might swallowing the rights of ordinary citizens. But how is Socrates' own solution *technically* different? Again, let the partners stay on the stage for a moment in plain clothes, without the impressive garments of morality, and listen carefully to Socrates' definition of how to resist the *same* assembled crowd. This time, it is the poor Polus who suffers the sting of the numbfish:

> The trouble is, Polus, that you're trying to use on me the kind of rhetorical refutation which *people in lawcourts* think is successful. There too, you see, people think they're proving the other side

> wrong if they produce *a large number of eminent witnesses* in support of the points they're making, but their opponent comes up with only *a single witness* or none at all. This kind of refutation, however, is completely *worthless* in the *context of the truth* [*outos de o elegchos oudenos axios estin pros tèn alètheian*], since it's perfectly possible for **[End Page 198]** someone to be defeated in court by a *horde of witnesses* with no more than apparent respectability who all testify falsely against him. (472a)

How often his position has been admired! How many voices have quivered in commenting on the courage of one man against the hordes, like Saint Genevieve stopping Attila's throngs with the sheer light of her virtue! Yes, it is admirable, but no more than Callicles' appeal to a natural law. The goal is the same, and even Callicles, in his wildest definition of forceful domination, never dreams of a position of power as dominant, as exclusive, as undisputed as the one Socrates requests for his knowledge. It is a great power to which Socrates appeals, comparing it to the physician's knowledge of the human body since it can enslave all the other forms of expertise and know-how:

> They don't realize that this kind of expertise should properly be the *dominant* kind, and should be allowed *a free hand* with the products of all those other techniques because it knows--and none of the others does--which food and drink promotes a good physical state and which doesn't. That's why the *rest of them* are suited only for *slavish, ancillary and degrading work*, and should *by rights* be subordinate to training and medicine. (518a)

Enter Truth, and the agora is emptied. One man can triumph against everyone else. In the "context of truth," as in the "context of aristocracy," the hordes are defeated by a force--yes, a force--superior to the demos's reputation and physical force and to its endless and useless practical knowledge. When Might enters the stage, as I said above, it is not as a crowd but as one man *against* the crowd. When Truth enters the scene, it is not as one man against everyone else, it is as impersonal, transcendent, natural law--a Might mightier than Might. [18] Arguments prevail against everything else because they are rationally made. This is what Callicles has missed: the power of geometrical equality. [19] "You neglected geometry, Callicles!" The young man is never going to recover from the blow. **[End Page 199]**

c. Patterning the two solutions one on the other. That Callicles and Socrates are playing like Siamese twins in this dialogue is made explicit by Plato's many parallels between his heroes' two solutions. The

slavish attachment of Callicles to the demos is compared by Socrates to his slavish attachment to philosophy in this famous comparison of their common ties:

> I love Alcibiades the son of Cleinias, and philosophy, and your two loves are the Athenian *populace* and Demus the son of Pyrilampes. (481e)

> So rather than expressing surprise at the things I've been saying, you should stop my darling philosophy voicing these opinions. You see, my friend, she's *constantly repeating* the views you've just heard from me, and she's far *less fickle* than my other love. I mean, Alcibiades says different things at different times, but *philosophy's views never change*. (482b)

Against the capricious people of Athens, against the even more whimsical Alcibiades, Socrates has found an anchor that allows him to be right against everyone else's vagaries. But this is also, in spite of Socrates' sneering remark, what Callicles thinks of natural laws: they protect him against the vagaries of the assembled people. There is, it is true, a big difference between the two anchors, but this should count in favor of the real, anthropological Callicles, not Socrates: the good guy's anchor is fastened in the ethereal afterworld of shadows and phantoms, whereas Callicles' is gripping at least the solid and resisting matter of the Body Politic. Which one of the two anchors is better fastened? Incredible as it seems, Plato manages to make us believe that it is Socrates'!

The beauty of the dialogue, as has been so often noted, lies mainly in the opposition between two parallel scenes: one in which Callicles mocks Socrates for being unable to defend himself in the tribunal of *this* world, and the other at the end, when his sparring partner mocks Callicles for being unable to defend himself in the afterworld tribunal of Hades. Round one:

> Socrates, you're neglecting matters you shouldn't neglect. Look at the noble temperament with which nature has endowed you! Yet what you're famous for is behaving like a teenager. You couldn't deliver a *proper* speech *to the councils* which administer justice, or make a *plausible* and *persuasive* appeal. . . . The point is that if you or any of your sort were seized and taken away to prison, unjustly accused of some crime, you'd be *incapable*--as I'm sure you're well aware--of doing anything for yourself. *With your head spinning and mouth gapingopen*, you wouldn't know what to say. (486a)

A terrible situation, indeed, for a Greek to be left speechless in front of an unfair accusation in the middle of the crowd. Notice that Callicles' **[End Page 200]** does not admonish Socrates for being too lofty, but for being an impotent, lowly, and idiotic teenager.

Callicles has a resource of his own coming from far away, a talent for speech hooked upon a natural law, which allows him to find just the right thing to say against the conventions made by "second-rate citizens." To find a retort to that one, Socrates has to wait until the end of the dialogue, and must abandon his dialectic of questions and answers to tell a crepuscular tale. The final round:

> I think *it's a flaw in you* that you won't be able to defend yourself when the time comes for you to undergo the trial and the assessment which I've just been talking about. Instead, when you come to be judged by that son of Aegina [Rhadamanthys] and he seizes you and takes you away, *your head will spin and your mouth will gape* there in *that* world just as much as mine would *here*, and the chances are that someone will smash you in the face and generally abuse you as if you were a *nobody* without any *status* at all. (527a)

A beautiful effect on the stage, to be sure, with naked shadows pacing a papier machéinferno, and artificial fumes and fog lingering on! "But a bit late, Socrates," could have retorted Callicles, the historical and anthropological one, "because politics is not about the naked dead living in a world of phantoms and judged by half-existing sons of Zeus, but about clothed and living bodies assembled in the agora with their status and their friends, in the bright sun of Attica, and trying to decide, on the spot, in real time, what to do next." But the straw Callicles by now, through a happy coincidence, has been shut down by Plato. So much for the dialectical method and the appeal to "the community of free speech." When the time of retribution has come, Socrates speaks alone in the much despised epideictic way. [20]

It is a pity that the dialogue ends in such an admirable but empty appeal to the shadows of politics, because Callicles could have shown that even his selfish and extravagant claim to hedonism, which made him so contemptible to the theater crowd, is also used by his partner, Socrates, to define *his* way of dealing with the people:

> And yet, my friend, in my opinion it's preferable for me to be a musician with an out-of-tune lyre or

> a choir leader with a cacophonous choir, and it's preferable for *almost everyone in the world* to find my beliefs misguided and wrong, rather than for *just one person--me*--to contradict and clash *with myself*. (482b)

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"Perish the people of Athens," claimed the straw Callicles, "provided I have a good time, and forcibly seize as much as I can from the hands of the second-rate human debris!" In what sense is Socrates' appeal less selfish? "Perish the whole world, provided I am in agreement not only with one other person"--as, we shall see, he has earlier said to Polus--"but with myself!" Knowing that Plato willfully misrepresents Callicles' and Gorgias' position, whereas Socrates is taken as having the last word and responding seriously, who is the more dangerous--the agoraphobic mad scientist, or the "blond brute of prey"? Who is the more deleterious for democracy, Right or Might? All through the dialogue, the parallelism between the solutions of the two sparring partners is inescapable.

And yet, of course, it is completely invisible, as long as we keep our eyes on the stage. Why? Because of the definition of knowledge that is forcibly imposed by Socrates over Callicles' definition. This is where the symmetry is broken; this is what makes Callicles exit to the sound of hoots, no matter how many Nietzscheans will later try to push him back onto the planks. Q.E.D.; T.K.O.

3. The Triangular Contest of Socrates, the Sophists, and the Demos

a. The *coup de force* of reason. In the three dialogues of the *Gorgias*, Might and Right never appear as comparable; we will later see why. What remain commensurable enough to be disputed are the relative qualities of two types of expert knowledge: one in the hands of Socrates, and the other in the hands of the rhetoricians (a word, by the way, invented, it seems, by the *Gorgias*). [21] What is beyond question for both Socrates and the straw Sophists is that some expert knowledge is necessary, either to make the people of Athens behave in the right way or to keep them at bay and shut their mouths. They no longer consider the obvious solution to the problem besetting the agora, the one we will explore in the second part because it is still present in the dialogue, at least as a negative template: the assembled Body Politic, in order to make decisions, *cannot* rely on expert knowledge only, given the constraints of number, totality, urgency, and priority that politics imposes. The reaching of a decision *without* appealing to a natural impersonal law in the

hands of experts requires a disseminated knowledge as multifarious as the multitude itself. *The knowledge of the whole needs the whole, not the few*. But that would be a scandal for Callicles and for Socrates, a scandal whose name at all periods has been the same: democracy. **[End Page 202]**

So here, again, the disagreement of the partners is secondary to their complete agreement: the contest is about how to shut the mouths of the people faster and tighter. On this ground, Callicles is quickly going to lose. After having agreed, with a common paternalism, that experts are needed to "look after a community and its citizens" (513e), the two argue over what sort of knowledge will be best. Rhetoricians have one type of expertise and Socrates has another. One is epidictic, the other apodictic. One is employed in the dangerous conditions of the agora, the other in the quiet and remote one-to-one conversation that Socrates pursues with his disciples. At first glance, it looks as though Socrates should lose at this game, since it is of no use at all to have a method for bettering the citizens of the agora that is itself agoraphobic and operates only on a one-to-one basis. "I'm content," Socrates confesses naively to Polus, "if you testify to the validity of *my* argument and I canvass *only* for your vote, *without caring about what everyone else thinks*" (476a). But politics is precisely about "caring for what everyone thinks." Canvassing for only one vote is worse than a crime, it is a political mistake. So when Callicles admonishes Socrates for this infantile behavior, he should win the day:

> Even a naturally gifted person isn't going to develop into a *real man*, because he's avoiding the *heart of his community* and the *thick of the agora*, which are places where, as Homer tells us, a man *earns distinction*. Instead he spends the rest of his life *sunk out of sight, whispering in a corner* with three or four young men, rather than giving open expression to *important* and *significant* ideas. (485e)

Thus the dialogue, logically, should end up with one scene only, in which Socrates is sent back to his campus corner, philosophy being limited to a useless specialized obsession, with no relation to what "real men" do to "earn distinction" with "important and significant ideas." This is what rhetoric will do. But this is not what we did, when we reinvented the power of Science, with a capital *S*, over and over again. [22] With the "context of truth" that Socrates is pushing forth, Callicles' triumph becomes impossible. It is a very subtle **[End Page 203]** trick, but it is enough to reverse the logical course of the dialogue, and to make Socrates win where he should have lost.

What is the little *supplement* provided by apodictic reasoning that makes it so much better than the natural laws invoked by the Sophists against the conventions of "slaves and assorted human debris"? This kind of reasoning is *beyond dispute*:

> --Socrates: But can knowledge be either true or false?
>
> --Gorgias: Certainly not.
>
> --Socrates: Obviously, then, *conviction* [*pistis*] and *knowledge* [*epistèmè*] aren't the same. (454d)

The Sophists' transcendence is beyond convention, but not beyond dispute, since the questions of being superior, more natural, better born, better bred, open another swarm of discussions--as can be witnessed even today, no matter how many "bell curves" one throws into the boiling pot. Callicles has invented a way to discount the crowd's physical weight and number, but not to escape altogether from the *site* of the chock-full agora. Socrates' solution is much stronger. The fabulous secret of mathematical demonstration that he has in his hands is that it is a step-by-step persuasion that forces you to assent no matter what. Nothing, though, makes this way of reasoning adjustable to the extremely harsh conditions of the agora, where it should be as useful "as a bicycle for a goldfish," to use an old feminist slogan. So a bit more work is needed, for Socrates to be able to make use of this weapon. [23] He first has to disarm everyone else, or at least make them believe that they are thoroughly disarmed:

> So we'd better think in terms of *two kinds* of persuasion, one of which confers conviction *without understanding* [*to men pistin parchomenon aneu tou eidenai*], while the other confers *knowledge* [*epistèmè*]. (454e)

Epistèmè, how many crimes have been committed in your name! This is where the whole history hinges. So venerable is this opposition that, contrary to the fight of Might and Right, obviously rigged, we might lose nerve at this point and fail to see how bizarre and illogical **[End Page 204]** is the argument. The whole difference between the two kinds of persuasion relies on these two innocuous little words, "without understanding." But understanding *of what*? If we mean the understanding of the very specific conditions of felicity for political discussion--that is, number, urgency, and priority--then Socrates is certainly wrong. If anything, it is the apodictic reasoning of causes and consequences, the *epistèmè*, that is "without

understanding"--meaning that it fails to take into account the pragmatic conditions of deciding what to do next in the thick of the agora with ten thousand people talking all at once. On his own, there is no way that Socrates can replace this pragmatic knowledge in situ, with his unsituated knowledge of demonstration. His weapon is mind-boggling, mouth-shutting, but a useless deterrent in the context of the agora. He needs help. Who is going to give him a hand? It will come from the foils invented by Plato, who, as usual, conveniently fall into the trap, as so many ideal straw men.

The dialogue could not work and make Socrates triumph against all odds, if the puppet Sophists did not share his loathing for the knacks and gimmicks with which common people mind their daily business. So when Socrates makes a distinction between real knowledge and know-how, the (straw) Sophists do not protest, since they have the same aristocratic spite for practice:

> There's absolutely no expertise involved in the way it [cookery] pursues pleasure; it hasn't considered either the nature of pleasure or the reason why it occurs. . . . All it can do [the technical cook] is remember a *routine* which has become *ingrained* by *habituation* and *past experience*, and that's also what it relies on to provide us with pleasant experiences. (501a)

Amusingly enough, this definition of merely practical know-how, although uttered with scorn, would today be described by psychologists, pragmatists, and other cognitive anthropologists as "knowledge." [24] But the key point is that this difference itself has *no other content* than Socrates' disdain for the common people. Socrates is here on very thin ice. The difference between knowlege and practical knowledge is both what allows him to appeal to a mouth-shutting superior natural law, and also what is enforced by the very action of shutting the mouth of the ten thousand people who mind their business every day "without knowing what they do." If they **[End Page 205]** knew what they were doing, the difference would be lost. So if you do not impose this absolute demarcation by sheer force--the true task of epistemology over the ages--the "context of truth" cannot be made to bear on the impossibly deleterious atmosphere of public debate. This is one of the rare cases in history where "sheer force" has been applied. To enforce this divide what do we have? *Only* Socrates' word for it--and Gorgias', Polus', and Callicles' meek retreats into an acceptance of Socrates' definition, all of them, of course, carefully staged in Plato's theatrical machinery! That represents a lot of conditions for an unconditional appeal to an unconstructed "impersonal law."

As Jean-François Lyotard showed several years ago, and as Barbara Cassin has recently demonstrated so

forcefully, to distinguish the two forms of knowledge and set up the absolute difference between Force and Reason, you need a *coup de force*--the one that expels the Sophists from philosophy, and the one that expels the common people from rigorous knowledge. [25] Without this coup, the expert knowledge of demonstration could not take over the precise, subtle, necessary, distributed, indispensable knowledge of the Body Politic who take it upon themselves to decide what to do next in the agora. *Epistèmè* will not replace *pistis*. Apodictic reasoning will remain important, of course, even indispensable, but *in no way connected by an iron tie to the question of how best to discipline the multitude*. As in the origin of all political regimes, undisputed legitimacy resides in an original bloody coup. In this case, and this is the beauty of the play, the blood that is shed *is Socrates' own*. That sacrifice makes the move even more irresistible and the legitimacy even more indisputable. By the end, there will not be a dry eye left in the theater. . . .

The Sophists are no match for this dramatic move, and after having accepted, first, that an expert knowledge is necessary to replace that of the poor ignorant multitude, and second, that the knowledge of demonstration is absolutely and not relatively different from the knacks and gimmicks of the common people, they have to confess that their form of expertise is empty. How silly Gorgias' boasting now sounds:

> Doesn't that simplify things, Socrates? Rhetoric is the only area of expertise you need to learn. You *can ignore all the rest* and still get the *better* of professionals! (459c)

We will see in the second part that this apparently cynical answer is in fact a very precise definition of the *non*professional nature of **[End Page 206]** political action. However, if you agree to overlook this point, and if you start to accept the contest and pit the specialized knowledge of scientists against the specialized knowledge of the rhetoricians, then sophistry is immediately turned into an empty manipulation. It is like introducing a racing car into a marathon: the new machine renders the slower runners ridiculous.

> --Socrates: Faced with phenomena like the one you've mentioned, it comes across as *something supernatural*, with *enormous power*.
>
> --Gorgias: You don't know the half of it, Socrates! Almost every accomplishment falls within the scope of rhetoric. . . . Often in the past, when I've gone with my brother or some other doctor to one of their patients who was refusing to take his medicine or to let the doctor operate on him or cauterize him, the doctor proved *incapable* of persuading the patient to accept his treatment, but I

> succeeded, *even though I didn't have any other expertise to draw on except rhetoric*. (456b)

Even for sentences like that we need centuries of Pavlovian training to read them as cynical, because what the real Gorgias alludes to here is the impotence of specialists to make the people as a whole take tough decisions. The real Gorgias pointed out an extraordinarily subtle skill, one that Socrates does not want to understand (although he practices it so cleverly); the puppet Gorgias is made to say that no knowledge at all is necessary. After their staged defeat, the rhetoricians are putting their own heads on the chopping-block. Having accepted that it is an expertise, then having found it empty, they are now expelled from knowledge altogether, and their skills branded as mere "flattery" (502d), one of the many obscure types of popular know-how from which it cannot be distinguished:

> Well, in my opinion, Gorgias, it *doesn't involve* expertise; all you need is a mind which is *good at guessing*, some *courage*, and a natural talent *for interacting with people*. The general term I use to refer to it is "flattery," and this strikes me as a multifaceted activity, one of whose branches is *cookery*. And what I'm saying about cookery is that it does seem to be a branch of expertise, but in fact isn't: it's a *knack, acquired by habituation* [*ouk estin technè, all' empeiria kai tribè*]. (463b)

The most moving feature, which will deserve all our attention later, is that even in this famous coup de grâce, Socrates is still complimenting rhetoric. How can we not consider as so many positive qualities being "good at guessing," having "courage," knowing "how to interact with people"--certainly not skills that Socrates lacks, in spite of his protests to the contrary? For that matter, what is so bad about being talented as a cook? I myself prefer a good chef to lots of **[End Page 207]** bad leaders! And yet, Socrates has won. The weakest has turned the tables on the strongest. The least logical--that is, the "happy few"--have won over the "universal" logic, that is, everyone minding the whole Body Politic at once. Socrates, who, by his own confession, is the least adapted to rule over the people, rules over them--at least from the conveniently faraway place of the Isles of the Blessed: "I think," he says, wrapping his words in three degrees of irony, "I'm the only genuine practitioner of politics in Athens today, the *only example of a true statesman*" (521d).

And it is true, no tyranny has been longer lasting than that held by this sacrificed, dead man over the living, no power more absolute, no reign more undisputed.

b. Only one loser: the people of Athens. The defeat of the (straw) Sophists is nothing compared to that of

the common people of Athens, as can be seen by a summary of the argument so far. The "human debris and assorted slaves" are the great absent, without even a choir to defend their own common sense, as in classic tragedies. When we start reading carefully this most famous dialogue, we discover a fight not only between Callicles (that is, Might) and Socrates (namely Right), but *two* overlapping disputes, only the first of which has been commented on ad nauseam. [26] One dispute, as in a puppet show, pits the wise sage against the blond brute, and is so beautifully staged that little children scream in terror that Might will beat down Right. (As we saw earlier, it makes no difference at all if the script is rewritten later by a Nietzschean scriptwriter and now pits the beautiful and sunny Callicles, head of the race of masters, against the black Socrates, degenerate scion of a race of priests and men of *ressentiment.* We, the children, are still supposed to scream all the same that Right, this time, will beat Might down and turn it into a weak and meek sheep.)

But there is a *second* fight going on silently, off-stage, pitting the people of Athens, the ten thousand fools, against Socrates and Callicles, allied buddies, *agreeing on everything* and differing *only* about the swiftest means to silence the crowd. How can we best reverse the balance of force, close the mouths of the multitude, put an end to the disorderly democracy? Will it be through the appeal to reason, geometry, proportion? Or will it be through aristocratic virtue and upbringing? Each of them is alone against the crowd, and each of **[End Page 208]** them wants to dominate the mob and obtain a disproportionate share either of this world's or of the other world's laurels.

The fight of Might and Right is rigged like a game of catch, and hides the *settlement* between Callicles and Socrates, each agreeing to serve as the other's foil. In order to avoid the fall into Might, let us accept unconditionally the rule of Reason; such has been the earlier version. The later one is the same in reverse: in order to avoid falling into Reason, let us unconditionally agree to fall into the arms of Might. But in the meantime, silent and mute, puzzled and baffled, the people of Athens remain off-stage, waiting for their masters to sort out the best means to reverse their "physical force," which could be "entirely discounted" if there were not so many of them. Yes, there are too many, too many to be taken in anymore by this childish story of the cosmic dispute between Might and Right. The hands of the puppeteers are too visible now, and the scandal of seeing Socrates and Callicles, the arch-rivals, arm in arm, is an experience as enlightening for the little children as seeing the actors of *Hamlet* drink together laughingly at the pub after the curtain has fallen.

Such an experience should leave us older and wiser. Instead of a dramatic opposition between Force and Reason, we will have to consider *three* different kinds of forces (or three different kinds of reasons--the choice of words adding, from now on, *no decisive nuance* [27]): the force of Socrates, the force of Callicles, and the force of the people. It is a trilogue we have to deal with, and no longer a dialogue. The absolute contradiction between the two famous protagonists is now displaced into a more open contest between two tugs of war--one between the two heroes, and the other one, not yet recognized **[End Page 209]** by philosophers, between the two heroes pulling on the *same* side of the rope, and the ten thousand average citizens pulling on the other side. The principle of the excluded middle that seems so strong in the burning choice between Might and Right--"choose your camp fast or all hell will break loose!"--is now interrupted by *a third party*, the assembled people of Athens. *The excluded middle is the Third Estate*. [28]

When we hear about the danger of mob rule, we will now be able to ask quietly: "Is it Callicles' solitary rule that you mean, or that of the voiceless assembly of 'human debris and assorted slaves'?" When we hear the little red-flag word "social," we will be able to disentangle two different meanings: the one that designates the power of Callicles' Might against Socrates' Reason, *and* the one that designates the never-yet-described crowd resisting the attempts of both Socrates *and* Callicles to exert a solitary form of power over them. Two weak, naked, and arrogant men on the one hand; the City of Athens on the other, children, women, and slaves included. The war of two against all, the strange war of the duo trying to make us believe that *without them* it would be the war of all against all.

Part II. Socrates' Equation: (Politics) + (Absolute Morality) - (Practical Means) = The Impossible Body Politic

Napoleon's mother used to sneer at her emperor son's fits of rage: "*Commediante! Tragediante!*" We could mock in the same way these two races of masters, the one descending from Socrates, the other from Callicles. On the comedy side, we have the fight between Might and Right; on the tragedy side, we have the absolute distinction between *epistèmè* and *pistis*, this *coup de force* whose origin is cleansed by the blood of one martyr. But we can also turn our eyes to the Third Estate and extract from the *Gorgias* the trace of another voice, which is neither comedy nor tragedy but plain prose. Plato is close enough to this benighted time when politics was respected for what it was--that is, before the advent of the scenography set up in common by Socrates and Callicles, which I have defined as "inhumanity against inhumanity." Much as an

archaeologist would do with the Delphic Tholos, we can thus reconstruct out of the ruins of the dialogue the original Body Politic before it was smashed to pieces. By unwinding the adventures of Reason, we can imagine how it was before it got turned into an unlivable chimera, a monstrous Big Animal whose unrest horrifies the masters even today. Needless **[End Page 210]** to say, this is an attempt at an archaeology-fiction: the invention of a mythical time where political truth-saying would have been fully understood, a world that was later lost through the accumulation of mistakes and degeneration. [29]

1. How Socrates Renders Infelicitous the Conditions of Felicity of Political Enunciation

In the first part, we have already noticed many of the specifications of political debate. To reconstruct the virtual image of the original Body Politic, we simply have to take *positively* the long list of negative remarks made by Plato: they show in reverse what is missed when one creates an expert knowledge held by a few out of what was, until then, the distributed knowledge of the whole about the whole. Through this bit of archaeology-fiction, we can be the privileged witnesses to two phenomena at once: the explication of the conditions of felicity proper to politics, *and* their systematic destruction by Plato, who turns them into ruins. We thus witness simultaneously the iconoclastic gesture that destroys our much-treasured ability to deal with one another, and the conditions of its possible reconstruction.

The dialogue is very explicit about this iconoclasm, since Socrates naively confesses: "In my opinion, you see, rhetoric is a *phantom* of a branch of statesmanship [*politikès moriou eidôlon*]" (463d). That is exactly what he and his buddies have done: they have turned a fleshy, rosy, living Body Politic that kicked and bit into "a phantom," by asking it to feed on a diet of expert knowledge on which no such organism could survive. They have turned it into an *eidôlon* without realizing that by smashing it they have deprived us of one part of our humanity.

a. Political *logos* takes place in full view of the public. As Gorgias rightly points out, the first specification of political speech is that it is public and does not take place in the silent isolation of the cabinet or the laboratory: **[End Page 211]**

> --Gorgias: When I say there's nothing better, Socrates, that is no more than the truth. It [rhetoric] is responsible for *personal freedom* and enables an individual to gain political power in his community.

> --Socrates: Yes, but what *is* it?
>
> --Gorgias: I'm talking about the ability to use the *spoken word* to persuade--to persuade the jurors in the courts, the members of the *Council*, the citizens *attending the Assembly*--in short to *win over* any and every form of public *meeting* of the *citizen body*. (452e)

As we just saw, this very specific condition of speaking to all the different forms of assemblies essential to Athenian life (courts, councils, assemblies, burials, ceremonies--all sorts of private and public meetings) is denigrated by Socrates, and turned into a defect, whereas Socrates' weakness, his inability to live in the agora--although he spends all his time in it and seems to enjoy himself immensely!--is vaunted as his highest quality:

> *I'm no politician*, Polus. In fact, last year I was on the Council, thanks to the lottery, and when it was the turn of my tribe to *form the executive committee* and I had to put an issue to the vote, *I made a fool of myself by not knowing the procedure* for this. So please don't ask me to ask the present company to vote now, either. . . . My expertise is restricted to producing just *a single witness* in support of my ideas--the person with whom I'm carrying on the discussion--and I *pay no attention to large numbers* of people; I only know how to ask for a single person's vote, and *I can't even begin to address people in large groups*. (474a)

Tough luck, because "addressing large numbers," and "paying attention" to what they mean, think, and desire, is exactly what is in debate under the despised label of "rhetoric." If Socrates is so proud of "not being a politician," why is he teaching those who know better, and why does he not remain in the confines of his own selfish, specialized, expert discipline? What business do agoraphobics have in the agora? This is what Callicles (the real Callicles, the historical, anthropological one whose negative presence can still be detected in the dialogue) rightly points out:

> In actual fact, philosophers *don't understand their community's legal system*, or how *to address* either political or private *meetings*, or what kinds of things people *enjoy and desire*. In short, they're completely *out of touch with human nature*. When they do turn to *practical activity*, then, in either a private or a political capacity, they make *ridiculous fools of themselves*--just as, I imagine, politicians make fools of themselves when they're faced with your lot's discussions and

> ideas. (484d)

[End Page 212]

But Callicles' derision, although it accurately underlines the qualities required from a leader, is itself made useless by his own appeal to an expert knowledge of rhetoric that is content with knowing nothing at all, with just being manipulative. Yet when he defines the goal of his aristocratic friends, he paints an accurate portrait of the real qualities that Socrates entirely lacks:

> The *superior* people I mean aren't shoemakers or cooks: above all, I'm thinking of people who've applied their *cleverness to politics* and thought about how to run their community *well*. But cleverness is only part of it; they also have *courage*, which enables them *to see their policies through to the finish without losing their nerve* and giving up. (491b)

It is precisely this courage to see "through to the finish" that Socrates is going to misrepresent so unfairly when he destroys the subtle mechanism of representation by polluting it with the question of an absolute morality (see II, 2). To see a political project through--with the crowd, for the crowd, in spite of the crowd--is so stunningly difficult that Socrates flees from it. But instead of conceding defeat and acknowledging the specificity of politics, he destroys the means of practicing it in a sort of scorched-earth policy the blackened wrecks of which are still visible today. And the torch that sets the public buildings ablaze is said to be that of Reason!

b. Political knowledge is not professional knowledge. The second specification that can be recovered from the wreckage is that political reason cannot possibly be the object of a professional knowledge. Here the ruins have been so deformed by Plato's iconoclastic obstinacy that they have been made as barely recognizable as those of Carthage. And yet this is what most of the dialogue turns around, as all the commentators have noticed: the question, it seems, is to decide what sort of knowledge rhetoric is. At first, though, it seems very clear that politics is *not* about professionals telling the people what to do:

> I assume you're aware that it was either Themistocles or Pericles, *not the professionals*, [30] whose advice led to those dockyards you mentioned, and to Athens' fortifications and the construction of the harbours. (455e)

The protagonists agree that what is needed is not knowledge as such, but a very specific form of attention to the whole Body by the whole Body itself. This is what is recognized by Socrates under the **[End Page 213]** name of a good and ordered *cosmos* in the qualities required of the expert technicians (*demiourgos*):

> Each of them *organizes* the various components he works with into a particular structure and makes them *accommodate and fit one another* until he's formed the whole into an *organized and ordered object*. (504a)

But then, as usual, every time a condition of felicity is clearly articulated, it is perverted in its opposite by Socrates, who, as Nietzsche remarked, has King Midas's hands, except that he turns gold into mud. The nonprofessional nature of the knowledge of the people by the people turning the whole into an ordered cosmos and not "a disorderly shambles" becomes, through a subtle shift, the *right* of a few rhetoricians to *win over real* experts even if they know *nothing*. What the Sophists meant was that no expert can win in the public agora because of the specific conditions of felicity that reign there. After Socrates' translation, this sensible argument becomes the following absurd one: *any expert* will be defeated by an ignorant person who knows *only* rhetoric. And of course, as usual, the Sophists kindly oblige Socrates by saying the ridiculous thing they have long been accused of saying--this is the great advantage of the dialogue form that *epideixis* lacks:

> --Socrates: Now, you claimed a while back [31] that a rhetorician would be *more persuasive* than a doctor even when the issue was health.
>
> --Gorgias: Yes, I did, as long as *he's speaking in front of a crowd*.
>
> --Socrates: By "in front of a crowd" you mean "*in front of non-experts*," don't you? I mean, a rhetorician wouldn't be more persuasive than a doctor in front of an audience of experts, of course.
>
> --Gorgias: True. (459a)

Socrates triumphs. Yet again, Gorgias is insisting on the very problem that still besets us today and that no one has ever been able to solve since, and certainly not Plato and his *Republic*. Politics is about dealing

with a crowd of "non-experts," and this situation cannot possibly be *the same thing* as experts dealing with experts in the inner recesses of their special institutions. So when Plato is making his famous joke about a cook and a physician pleading for votes in front of an assembly of spoiled little brats (522), it takes very little talent **[End Page 214]** to twist the story to Socrates' embarrassment! This funny scene works only if the crowd of Athens is made up of spoiled children. Even putting Socrates' aristocratic scorn aside, nowhere does the story state, if we read it carefully, that it pits a serious expert against a populist flatterer. Rather, it stages a *controversy* between two specialists, the cook and the physician, talking to an assembly of grown men about either *short-term or long-term* strategy, the outcome of which neither of them knows, and through which only one party is going to suffer, namely, the demos itself.

Here again, Socrates' use of a pleasant story hides the dramatic condition of felicity for what it is to speak in real time, in real size, about things that no one knows for sure and that affect everybody. To fulfill this pragmatic condition he does not have the slightest suggestion, and yet the only solution that the nonexperts had in hand--that is, *listening* in the agora to *both* the short-term cook and the long-term physician before running the *risk* of taking a decision together that will have legal consequences--is smashed into pieces. [32] We in Europe, who do not know which beefsteak to eat because of the many controversies we read about every day in our newspapers between cooks and physicians about mad cows infected or not by prions, would give several years of our lives to recover the solution that Socrates simply *ignores*.

c. Political reason cannot know what it is doing since it is doing it. The third condition of felicity is similarly important and similarly ignored. Not only does political reason deal with important matters, taken up by many people in the harsh conditions of urgency, but it cannot rely on any sort of previous knowledge of cause and consequence. In the following passage, which I have already discussed, the misunderstanding is clear:

> Rhetoric is an agent of the kind of persuasion [*peithous demiurgos*] which is designed to produce conviction, but not to educate people, about matters of right and wrong. . . . A rhetorician, then, isn't concerned to educate the people assembled in lawcourts and so on about right and wrong; all he wants to do is *persuade* them [*peistikos*]. I mean, I shouldn't think it's possible for him to get *so many people* to understand [*didaxai*] such *important* matters *in such a short time*. (455a)

[End Page 215]

The "demiurge of persuasion" does exactly what the "didactic" urge cannot: it deals with the very conditions of urgency with which politics is faced. Socrates wants to replace *pistis* with a didacticism that is fit for professors asking students to take exams on things known in advance and rehearsed by training and rote exercises, but not for the trembling souls who have to decide what is right and wrong on the spot. Socrates recognizes this readily: "I think it is a knack [*empeirian*]," he says of rhetoric,

> because it *lacks rational understanding* either of the object of its attentions or of the *nature of the things* it dispenses (and so it can't explain the reason [*aitian*] why anything happens), and it's inconceivable to me that *anything irrational involves expertise* [*egô de technèn ou kalô o an è alogon pragma*]. (465a)

How accurate here is the definition of what is being destroyed! It is as if we were seeing at once the venerable statue of politics and the hammer that breaks it into pieces. How moving to see, by returning to the past, how close all these Greeks still were to the positive nature of this democracy that remains their wildest invention. Of course "it does not involve expertise," of course "it lacks rational understanding"; the whole dealing with the whole under the incredibly tough constraints of the agora must decide in the dark and will be led by people as blind as they, without the benefit of proof, of hindsight, of foresight, of repetitive experiment, of progressive scaling up. In politics there is never a second chance--only one, this occasion, this *kairos*. There is never any knowledge of cause and consequence. Socrates has a good laugh at the ignorant politicians, but *there is no other way* to do politics, and the invention of an afterworld to solve the whole question is exactly what the Sophists laugh at, and rightly so! Politics imposes this simple and harsh condition of felicity: *hic est Rhodus, hic est saltus*.

Here again, after Gorgias points out the real-life conditions in which the demos has to reach a decision through rhetoric--"[I] repeat . . . that its effect is to persuade people *in the kinds of mass-meetings which happen in lawcourts* and so on; and I think its province is *right and wrong*" (454b)--Socrates requires from rhetoric something it cannot possibly deliver, a *rational* expertise of right and wrong. What could work efficiently with a *relative* difference between bad and good, cannot hold water if an *absolute* foundation is required of it, as Socrates demands: [33] **[End Page 216]**

> Do you think . . . that all activity aims at the good, and that the good should not be a means

> toward anything else, but should be *the goal of every action*? . . . Now is just anyone *competent* to separate good pleasures from bad ones, or does it always take an expert? (500a)

And Callicles swallows the hook! "It takes an expert," he responds, a *technicos*. From then on there is no solution, and the Body Politic is made impossible. If there is one thing that does *not* require an expert, and cannot be taken *out* of the hands of the ten thousand fools, it is deciding about what is right and wrong, what is good and bad. But the Third Estate has been turned, by Socrates and by Callicles, into a barbaric population of unintelligent, spoiled, and sickly slaves and children, who are now waiting eagerly for their pittance of morality, without which they would have "no understanding" of what to do, what to choose, what to know, what to hope. Yes, "morality is a phantom of statesmanship," its *idol*. And yet, at the same time that Socrates renders the task of politics impossible by asking from the people a knowledge of the causes that is totally irrelevant, he accurately defines it:

> There's nothing which even a relatively unintelligent person would take *more seriously* than the issue we're discussing--the issue of how to live one's life? The life you're recommending to me involves the *manly activities* of *addressing the assembled people*, rhetorical training, and the kind of *political involvement you and your sort* are engaged in. (500c)

d. Political reason crucially depends on many practical mediations and past experience. Nothing is more moving in the *Gorgias* than the passage in which Socrates and Callicles, after having agreed on the relevance of statesmanship, destroy, one after another, the only practical means by which a crowd of blind people fumbling in the dark could get the light to help them decide what to do next:

> So these are the qualities which that *excellent rhetorical expert of ours* will be aiming for in all his dealing with people's minds, whether he's talking or acting, giving or taking. He'll *constantly be applying his intelligence* to *find ways* for *justice*, self-control and goodness in all its manifestations to *enter* his fellow citizens' minds, and for injustice, self-indulgence and badness in all its manifestations to *leave*. (504d)

This is what they agree on. This high-minded definition of politics, as we will see, is common sense, but only as long as it is *not* deprived of all the *ways and means* that make it effective. And yet this is what Socrates is going to do, the straw Callicles following suit obediently. In a denigration of the beauties of

Athens that is worse than **[End Page 217]** its plunder by the Persians or the Spartans because it comes *from within*, they are going to persuade themselves that every art aims at nothing but corruption. As is usual with hearts full of demotic hatred, the loathing for popular culture "blazes forth" every time they talk of politics:

> There's *absolutely no expertise* involved in the way it pursues pleasure; it hasn't considered either the *nature* of pleasure or the *reason* why it occurs. (501a)

About what do they talk so irreverently? Cookery first, and then the skills of the greatest playwrights, the greatest sculptors, the greatest musicians, the greatest architects, the greatest orators, the greatest statesmen, the greatest tragedians! All of these people are slighted because they don't know what they know in the didactic fashion that ProfessorSocrates wants to impose on the people of Athens. Stripped of all its artistic means to express itself to itself, this is how this most sophisticated demos appears in the eyes of its disappointed teacher:

> So we're faced with a kind of rhetoric which is addressed to the *assembled population* of men, women, and children all at once--slaves as well as free people--and it's a kind of rhetoric we find *we can't approve of*. I mean, we did describe it as "*flattery*." (502d)

Was it simply being flattered to go the tragedies, to hear the orations, to listen to poetry, to watch the Panathenaean pageantry, to vote with one's own tribe? No, these were the only means by which the demos could accomplish this most extraordinary feat: to represent itself publicly to the public, to render visible what it is and what it wants. All the centuries of arts and literature, all the public spaces--the temples, the Acropolis, the agora--that Socrates is denigrating one by one, were the only ways the Athenians had invented to reflexively seize themselves as a totality living together and thinking together. [34] We see here the dramatic double-bind that turns the Body Politic into a schizophrenic monster: Socrates appeals to reason and reflection--but then he deems illegitimate all the arts, all the sites, all the occasions where this reflexivity takes the very specific form of the whole dealing with the whole. He decries the knowledge of politics for its inability to understand the causes of what it does, but he severs all the feedback loops that would make this knowledge of the cause practical. No wonder Socrates was called **[End Page 218]** the numbfish! What he paralyzes with his electric sting is the very life, the very essence of the Body Politic. [35]

In this passage the two partners switch off, one by one, each of the hundreds of fragile and tenuous lamps, plunging the demos into a darkness much more profound than it was before they started to "enlighten" it--an odious self-annihilation that we cannot mock as a bad show happening on a stage, because it is not Socrates and Callicles who blind themselves, but rather we, in the streets, who are deprived of our only fragile lights. No, there is no reason to laugh, because the spite against politicians is still today what creates the widest consensus in academic circles. And this was written, twenty-five centuries ago, not by a barbaric invader, but by the most sophisticated, most enlightened, most literate of all writers, who all his life gorged himself on the very wealth and beauty that he so foolishly destroys or deems irrelevant for producing political reason and reflection. *This* sort of "deconstruction," and not the slow iconoclasm of the present-day sophists, is worth our indignation, because it parades as the highest virtue and, as Weinberg claims, our only hope against irrationality. Yes! if there has ever been a form of "higher superstition," it is seen in Socrates' passion in the dialogue for destroying idols and invoking afterworldly, extraterrestrial phantoms.

In a sort of blinding rage, the two sparring partners start killing not only the arts that make reflexivity possible, but each of the slightly less blind leaders whose experience was crucially important to the practical politics of Athens: Themistocles, and Pericles himself. This sinister form of iconoclasm does not go without a concession:

> --Socrates: I'm actually *not criticizing them* in their capacity as servants of the state. In fact I think they are *better* at serving the state than current politicians are. . . . However, it's more or less true to say that they were *no better* than current politicians as regards the *only responsibility* a good member of the community has--that is, *altering* the community's needs rather than going along with them, and persuading, or even *forcing*, their fellow citizens to *adopt* a course of action which would result in their becoming *better* people. (517b)

But Socrates, as we are going to see below, has deprived the statesmen of all the means to obtain this "alteration," this "betterment," this "forcing function," and so all that is left is either a slavish attachment to what the people think, or a mad flight into a fanciful afterworld where only professors and good pupils would exist. With his inadequate bench-mark, Socrates takes upon himself the incredible **[End Page 219]** task of passing judgment on all of those who, contrary to him, have led the politics of Athens:

> Well, can you name *a single rhetorician* from the past who's supposed to have been instrumental, from his very first public speech onwards, *in changing* the Athenian people from the *terrible state* they'd been in before to a *better* one? (503b)

To which the only devastating answer is that *no one* has: "It follows from this argument, then, that *Pericles was not a good statesman*" (516d). And the straw Callicles agrees, taking with him the real anthropological Callicles, and Gorgias, and Polus, who of course would have screamed in indignation against this iconoclasm! Instead of defending the great invention of a rhetoric adapted to the subtle conditions of that other great invention, democracy, the straw Callicles shamefully accepts Socrates' judgment.

Among the smoking ruins of those institutions, only one man triumphs: "I'm the *only genuine* practitioner of politics in Athens today, the *only example of a true statesman*" (521d). One man against all! To hide the megalomaniacal dimension of this insane conclusion, another folly is added. After having mocked rhetoric for providing only "a phantom of statesmanship," Socrates provides an even paler picture. He rules, indeed, but as a shadow, over a demos of shadows:

> They'd [the souls] better be judged *naked*, *stripped* of all this clothing--in other words, they have to be *judged after* they've died. If the assessment is to be *fair*, the judge had better be *naked* as well--which is to say, dead--so that with an *unhampered soul* he can scrutinize the *unhampered soul* of a *freshly dead* individual who isn't *surrounded by his friends and relatives*, and has left those *trappings* behind in the world. (523e)

How right was Nietzsche to put Socrates at the head of his hit-list of "men of *ressentiment*." A beautiful scene indeed, this last judgment, but totally irrelevant to politics. Politics is not about "freshly dead" people, but about the living; not about ghoulish stories of the afterworld, but about gory stories of this world. If there is one thing politics does not need, it is yet another afterworld of "unhampered souls." What Socrates does not want to consider is that these attachments, these "friends and relatives," these "trappings," are exactly what oblige us to pass judgment *now*, in the bright sun of Athens, not in the crepuscular light of Hades. What he does not want to realize is that if, by some nightmarish miracle, all of Athens were made of Socrateses who had, like him, shed their wise *pistis* for his didactic knowledge, *none* of the problems of the City would have even begun to be solved. An Athens made of virtuous Socrateses will be no **[End Page**

220] better off if the Body Politic is deprived of its specific form of rationality, this unique circulating virtue, which is like its blood.

2. How Socrates Misconstrues the Work Done by the Body Politic upon Itself

Socrates' project is tantamount to replacing the blood of a healthy body with a transfusion from an altogether different species: it can be done, but the high level of risk demands obtaining the informed consent of the patient first. If I am using irony and indignation, I do so of course to counterbalance the old habit that makes us either share Socrates' demotic hatred or embrace, without further ado, Callicles' definition of politics as "mere force." What I want to do with this burlesque style is to focus our attention on the middle position, that of the Third Estate, which does not ask either for reason or for cynicism. Why is it that a choice has to be made between those two positions if the choice paralyzes the Body Politic? As we know with all choices of this sort, it is because iconoclasm has broken a crucial feature of action. An operator that was crucial to the common sense of the common people has been turned into an irrelevant choice. [36] If we want to speak less polemically, we can say that Socrates' misrepresentation of the Sophists depends on a category mistake. He applies to politics a "context of truth" that pertains to another realm.

a. The proper distance of the Body Politic from itself. The stunning beauty of the *Gorgias* is that this other context is clearly visible in the very lack of comprehension Socrates displays for what it is to *re-present* the people. I am not talking here about the modern notion of representation that will come much later, and that will itself be infused with rationalist definitions, but with a completely ad hoc sort of activity that is neither transcendent nor immanent but resembles more a fermentation by which the demos brews itself toward a decision--never exactly in accordance with itself, and never led or commanded or directed from above:

> Please tell me, then, which one of these two ways of looking after the state you're suggesting I follow. *Is it the one* which is analogous to the practice of medicine and involves *confronting* the Athenian people and *struggling* to ensure **[End Page 221]** their perfection? Or is it the one which is analogous to what servants do and *makes pleasure* the point of the operation? Tell me the truth, Callicles. (521a)

We can ignore for now Plato's childish pleasure in making Callicles answer that it is the second way, and

focus instead on the reason for that choice. The choice is as brutal as it is absurd: either head-on confrontation, the teacher's way, or slavish obsequiousness, the Sophist's way. No teacher, and indeed no servant, has ever behaved like this--and of course, no Sophist either. The choice is so bizarre that it can be explained only because Socrates is trying to bring in a foreign resource, which makes him ask a totally irrelevant question. We know where it comes from. Socrates applies to politics a model of geometrical equality that requires a strict conformity to the model, since what is in question is the conservation of proportions through many different relations. Thus, the faithfulness of a representation will be judged by its ability to transport a proportion through all sorts of transformations. Either it transports it without deformation, and is deemed to be accurate--or it transforms it, and is deemed inaccurate. Equipped with this standard, Socrates is going to calibrate every utterance of the poor Sophists: [37]

> So that's the course any young member of the community we're imagining must follow if he's wondering how to have a *great deal of power* and avoid being at the receiving end of wrongdoing. He must train himself from an early age to *share the dictator's likes and dislikes*, and he must find a way to *resemble the dictator as closely as he can*. (510d)

Since Socrates voluntarily ignores all the conditions of felicity we listed above, when he evaluates the quality of an utterance it is on the basis of the *resemblance* between the source (here, the dictator who represents the spoiled people) and the receptor (here, the young men thirsty for power):

> You're so incapable of challenging your loved ones' decisions and assertions *that if anyone were to express surprise at the extraordinary things they cause you to say* once in a while, you'd probably respond--if you were in a truthful mood-- **[End Page 222]** by admitting that it's only *when someone stops them voicing these opinions that you'll stop echoing them*. (482a)

Politics is conceived by Socrates as an echo chamber, and there should be no difference between represented and representing except the slight delay that is imposed by the nymph Echo's small bandwidth. The same is true for obedience to the master: once the order is uttered, everyone applies it without deformation or interpretation. No wonder that the Body Politic becomes a rather impossible animal: whatever it says, it is always the same thing. Echo for representation, echo for obedience, minus a little bit of static. No invention, no interpretation. Every perturbation is judged a mistake, misrepresentation, misbehavior, betrayal. Imitation for Socrates is necessarily total--either when Callicles repeats what the people say, or

when Socrates himself repeats what his true love, philosophy, makes him say (482b), or when statesmen force the people to change their bad ways for better ways (503b). With this bench-mark it is easy to see, in Socrates's eyes at least, that Pericles never improves anyone else and that Callicles simply follows the populace:

> Now, you are terribly clever, of course, but all the same I've had occasion to notice that *you're incapable of objecting to anything your loved ones* say or believe. *You chop and change rather than contradict them*. If in the Assembly the Athenian people *refuse to accept an idea of yours, you change tack and say what they want to hear*, and your behavior is pretty much the same with that good-looking lad of Pyrilampes'. (481e) [38]

However, even here, Callicles' behavior--the real Callicles, not the straw one--is perfectly adapted to the ecological conditions of the agora. Far from believing in a "diffusionist" model of an information that will travel unadulterated no matter what, he uses an excellent "model of translation" that obliges him to "change tack" when people "refuse to accept his ideas." One can say that Callicles does not hold to truth when he "chops and changes" *only if truth-telling is defined as being convinced alone in the afterworld*. But if the conditions of felicity are, as Callicles so aptly defined them above (II, I), for courageous statesmen "to see their policies through to the finish without losing their nerve and giving up," then there is no other way than to negotiate one's position until all of those who are party to the deal are convinced. In a democracy, this means everyone. In the agora, there is never any echo, but rumors, condensations, displacements, accumulations, simplifications, detours, transformations-- **[End Page 223]** a highly complex chemistry that makes *one* stand for the *whole*, and another chemistry, equally complex, to make (sometimes) the *whole* obey *one*. [39]

What Socrates misjudges is the great positive *distance* between what the represented and the representing are saying, because he judges it according either to slavish resemblance or to total difference, the only two models he is able to imagine. [40] This is true for representation, as well as for obedience. When the citizens repeat what the Body Politic is about, or when they obey the law, none of them slavishly transports without deformation a piece of information. Socrates' dream of replacing all their subtle translations with a strict didactic form of reasoning, like the multiple-choice exams that teachers so much enjoy, shows his complete ignorance of what it is to end up being collectively convinced about matters for which no one has the definite answer. The Sophists in particular had worked out many little tricks and a great treasure of lore, to deal with

the peculiarity of what cannot be considered as an echo chamber or a schoolroom [41] --but their expertise, after Plato's onslaught, is laid to waste. The proof is that even here, I employ the words "trick" and "lore" to describe an accurate form of knowledge, so powerful is the shadow cast by the notion of an information without deformation--the sort of transport devised for geometrical demonstration [42] --on political reasoning.

Our dialogue seizes the specific form of political distance red-handed, so to speak--that is, just when the deed of destruction is being committed. Later, when the iconoclasts have won the day and the **[End Page 224]** dust has settled, the people will remain in complete ignorance that a huge and beautiful statue once stood there. Witness this extraordinary fatherly advice that Socrates gives to Callicles, which accurately defines the proper form of transcendence within which Callicles is still operating, and that Socrates is quashing under our very eyes:

> If you're under the impression that anyone is going to hand you *the kind of expertise which will enable you to be a political force* here while you're *not assimilated to our system of government* (whether this means that you're better or worse than it), I think you've been *misled,* Callicles. If you're to achieve any *kind of meaningful friendly relationship with the Athenian people* . . . then it's not just *a matter of impersonation: you have to be inherently similar to them*. In other words, it's someone who can *abolish differences between you and them* [*ostis ouv se toutoi omoiotaton apergasetai*] who can turn you into a *rhetorician and the kind of politician you aspire to be*, because everyone enjoys *hearing their own characteristic points of view in a speech and resents hearing anything unfamiliar*--unless you tell me otherwise, my friend. (513b)

The real anthropological Callicles would have told him otherwise, if Plato had not held the stylus and turned him into a straw man. "Not only mimesis is sufficient but a complete and total assimilation to the nature of everyone [*Ou gar mimetèn dei einai all' autophuôs omoin toutois*]." Never was political reasoning defined so precisely as by the one who rendered it forever impossible. *Autophuos* says it all, defining with incredible precision that strange form of transcendence and that even stranger kind of reflexivity that remains completely immanent, since, far from the foolish dreams of transparent representation, Socrates endows the Sophists with the power to "grow by themselves" into what all the others are doing and willing. Yes, this is the mysterious quality of politics--which has become a mystery to us, but which politicians fortunately preserve with great skill, hidden in their despised tricks and lore. To read Callicles' calling as immanence, as "assimilation" that "abolishes difference," is to miss the very specific form of transcendence that happens

when the whole represents itself reflexively to the whole, through the mediation of one who takes it upon himself (or herself) to be everyone else--exactly the sort of thing that Socrates is so incapable of doing that he flees from the agora with one or two young men and fulminates against Athens from the safe and nonexistent standpoint of Hades. [43] **[End Page 225]**

We are not faced here with one transcendence, Reason, against the immanence of populist leaders, but with *two* transcendences: one admirable, to be sure, that of geometrical demonstration, and the other one, exactly as admirable although utterly distinct, that obliges the whole to deal with itself *without* the benefit of information. Viewed from Socrates' remote standpoint, the aim of politics is as impossible as the bootstrapping of Baron von Munchausen. The demos, deprived of knowledge and of morality, needs outside help in order to stand up, and Socrates, generously enough, offers to give it a hand. But if this help were accepted, it would not raise the people one inch: the specific transcendence they need to elevate themselves is not that of a lever applied from the outside, but much more like the kneading of a dough--except that the demos is at once the flour, the water, the baker, the leavening ferment, and the very act of kneading. . . . Yes, a fermentation, the sort of turmoil that has always seemed so terrible to the powerful, and that has nonetheless always been transcendent enough to make the people move and be represented.

As I said at the beginning, the Greeks made one invention too many, either geometry or democracy. But it is a matter of historical contingency that we have inherited this impossible Body Politic. Nothing in principle, except a lack of nerves, obliges us to choose between the two inventions and to forgo part of our rightful heritage. If Socrates had not, by mistake, tried to substitute one type of demonstration, geometry, for another, mass demonstration (the two terms remaining close enough) *we would be able to honor the scientists without despising the politicians*. It is true that the skills of politics are so difficult, so strenuous, so counterintuitive, and require so much work, so many interruptions, that, to parody Mark Twain's phrase, "there is no extremity to which a man will not go to avoid the hard work of thinking politically." But the mistakes of our forefathers do not prevent us from sorting out their deeds and taking their good qualities without their defects.

b. The red herring of morality, and how it hides Socrates' denegation of politics. Before we can conclude and restore the two transcendences at once with the fragile plausibility of this archaeology-fiction, we have to understand one last thing about the dialogue: Why is it so often taken as a discussion about

morality? [44] I want to argue **[End Page 226]** that, in spite of the moving commentaries made by moral philosophers, the ethical questions debated by Socrates and Callicles are so many red herrings. Every time the rhetoricians say something to prove that Socrates' requirements are totally *irrelevant* to the task at hand, Socrates reads it as proof that Sophists are *uninterested* in moral standing. With admirable irony, he delivers, for instance, the following challenge:

> Is there anyone--from here or elsewhere, from any walk of life--who was previously bad (that is, unjust, self-indulgent, and thoughtless), but *who has become, thanks to Callicles, a paragon of virtue*? (515a)

We should not hasten to answer that politics and morality are, of course, two different things, and that naturally no one has asked Callicles to turn all citizens into "paragons of virtue"--because if we concede this, we still accept the Machiavellian definition of politics as being *unconcerned* with morality. This would be to live under Callicles' and Socrates' settlement, to take politics as the degraded exercise of conserving power a little longer without any hope of betterment. This would be playing right into Socrates' hands because such a disregard for morality is exactly what he wants for the people of Athens without him, and what Machiavelli will later overesteem as a positive definition of political cleverness. [45]

In fact, Plato's perversity is even greater than this. If by morality we mean the efforts to provide the Third Estate with the ways and means by which they can represent themselves to themselves in order to decide what to do next in matters where there is no definite knowledge, then Socrates is exactly as immoral as Callicles (as I showed in the first part), for each is competing with the other over how best to break the majority rule. If anything, Socrates is much worse, since, as we have just witnessed, he systematically breaks what makes representation efficient; whereas Callicles, in spite of Plato's will, still presents, even through his blunders, a vague reminiscence **[End Page 227]** of the proper political skills--the real Sophists being visible through their straw counterparts.

Actually, Socrates' crookery is mind-boggling because he manages, by a little shift, to take away from the Third Estate exactly the sort of moral behavior that *everyone agrees upon*, and then to turn it into an impossible task that can be carried out only by following Socrates' impossible requirements--the whole thing ending, as we know, in the afterworld of shadows. Quite a feat! And one that, in my view, should be met with grinding of teeth rather than tears of admiration.

Gorgias, the first to enter the scene, is easily paralyzed by the echo-chamber argument dissected above. Exit poor Gorgias. Then Polus is the first to fall into the ethical trap. The question raised by Socrates appears so irrelevant that it works perfectly to divert attention from his own misunderstanding of political representation:

> It follows that wrongdoing is the *second worst* thing that can happen; the *worst* thing in the world, the *supreme* curse, is to do wrong and not pay the penalty for it. (479e)
>
> I also claim that to steal, enslave, burgle, and in short to do any kind of wrong against me and my property, is not only *worse* for the wrongdoer than it is for me, the target of his wrongdoing, but is also *more* contemptible. (508e)

Here again we need an enormously long conditioning, to see this question as crucially important. If morality were taken as nothing more than a sort of basic ethological aptitude of primates in groups, it would still be pretty close to such an assessment. The only thing that Socrates adds to turn this into a "big question" is the strict and absolute order of priority that he imposes between suffering wrongdoing and doing it. In exactly the same way that the *absolute* difference between knowledge and know-how was imposed by a *coup de force* for which we had only Socrates' words (see above, I, 3.a), the absolute difference between what every moral animal believes and what Socrates' higher morality requires is to be made by force.

Actually, something else is needed, and that is, as usual, the straw Sophists' slavish behavior. It is Polus who makes us believe that we are dealing here with a revolutionary statement:

> If you're serious, and if what you're saying really is the truth, surely human life would be *turned upside down*, wouldn't it? Everything we do is the *opposite* of what you imply we *should be* doing. (481c)

It is great luck for Socrates that Plato hands him foils like this one, because without the Sophists' indignation, what Socrates says and **[End Page 228]** what the common people say would be *indistinguishable*. As is usual with revolutionary speeches, there is no safer way to make a revolution than to say that you are making one!

What is so extraordinary is that Socrates, very late in the dialogue, recognizes the obvious, commonsense nature of what he has spent so much effort trying to prove:

> All I'm saying is what I always say: I myself don't know the facts of these matters, but *I've never met anyone*, *including* the people today, who *could disagree* with what I'm saying and still avoid making *himself ridiculous*. (509a)

Is this not a clear confession that all this long debate with Polus, on how to rank moral behavior, was never doubted by anyone for any length of time? Everyone is *relatively* bound by the Golden Rule. It is only if you want to turn it into an *absolute* demarcation between suffering evil and doing evil that it can fail to enlighten you. Exit Polus.

The same paralyzing trick is going to work on poor Callicles, who, after having appealed (as we saw) to natural laws against conventional laws, is immediately turned into someone who demands unlimited hedonism! This smokescreen is very efficient at concealing the closeness of Socrates' solution to Callicles' own. And here again, after a lengthy acrimonious *disputatio* where Callicles conveniently plays the unrestrained beast of prey--as if beasts of prey were themselves unrestrained! as if wolves behaved like wolves, and hyenas like hyenas!--Socrates candidly confesses the basic ethological nature of the morality that he, like every slave, child, or, for that matter, chimpanzee, relies on: [46]

> We shouldn't refuse to restrain our desires, because that *condemns us to a life of endlessly trying* to satisfy them. And this is the life of *a predatory outlaw*, in the sense that *anyone who lives like that will never be on good terms with anyone else*--any other human being, let alone a god--since he's *incapable of co-operation, and co-operation is a prerequisite for friendship*. (508a)

I do not know about the gods, about whom ethological knowledge is slim, but I am confident that even Shirley Strum's baboons, if they could read Plato, would applaud this description of relative morality in social groups. [47] The amusing thing is that *no one* ever **[End Page 229]** said the opposite, *except* the straw Callicles in Plato's hands! The mythology of the war of all against all that threatens to engulf civilization if morality is not enforced is told only by those who have withdrawn from the people the basic morality that sociability has imposed for millions of years on animals in groups. This should be obvious, but is

not--because, unfortunately, moral philosophy is a narcotic as addictive as epistemology, and we cannot withdraw easily from the idea that the demos lacks morality as totally as it lacks epistemic knowledge. Even Socrates' admission that what he says is common sense and in no way revolutionary is not enough. Even Callicles' sneering remark that questions of morality are totally irrelevant to the discussion of political rhetoric is not enough:

> I've been thinking about the *adolescent delight* you take in seizing on any concession someone makes to you, even if he means it as a joke. Do you really think that *I or anyone else would deny* that there are better and worse pleasures? (499b) [48]

No one denies what Socrates says! No matter what the evidence, moral philosophers portray the *Gorgias* as the magnificent fight of a high-minded Socrates offering the people a goal too high for them to achieve. It is a fight, yes, but one fought by Socrates to impose on a people who know better a definition of morality that they always possessed, *minus* the ways to apply it! [49] What Socrates does to the demos of Athens is something as blatantly absurd as if a psychologist, let's say from America, were to go to China and, working under the very chauvinist conceit that "all Chinese people look alike," were to decide to paint big numbers on them so as to make them recognizable at last. With what glares will he be received when he arrives with his brush and his bucket of black or red paint in hand, and his candid psychological explanation? Can we think that the inhabitants of the huge city of Shanghai will readily say that they welcome this new way of recognizing each other, because for centuries they have been without a means of telling one another apart?! Will they welcome this new "white man's" invention? Of course not-- **[End Page 230]** they will hoot the psychologist away, and rightly so, and "his head will spin and his mouth will gape there in that world"! Yet, Socrates' use of the morality question in the *Gorgias* is based on exactly the same sort of vast misunderstanding. The Chinese *do* recognize each other without the use of big painted numbers. The demos is endowed with all the morality and all the reflexive knowledge it needs in order to behave itself.

3. Conclusion: Socrates' Deal and Death

If, to conclude this second part, we bring together all the successive moves that Plato makes Socrates play on the stage, we have this very tricky juggling act:

In the first move, Socrates *takes away* from the people of Athens their basic sociality, their basic morality,

their basic know-how, which no one before had ever denied they possessed.

Then, in a second move, stripped of all their qualities, the people are now portrayed as children, as beasts of prey, as spoiled slaves ready to get at one another's throats at their slightest whim. Sent down to the Cave, grasping only at shadows, they begin a war of all against all.

Third move: something needs to be done to keep this horrifying mob at bay and to set up order against their disorder.

It is at this point, that, with trumpet flourishes, the solutions arrive: Reason and Morality. That is the fourth move. But when these are handed back to the people by Socrates, from the exotic realm of geometrical demonstration, the people cannot recognize what has been taken from them, because there is one thing added and one thing missing! What has been added, during the passage in the realm of shadows, is an absolute requirement that renders morality and know-how inefficient. What has been subtracted, on the other hand, is the tradition of practical mediations through which the people could turn their relative knowledge and relative morality to good use in the specific conditions of the agora.

Fifth move: Professor Socrates writes on the blackboard his triumphant equation: Politics *plus* absolute morality *minus* practical means *equals* the Impossible Body Politic.

Sixth move, the most dramatic: since the Body Politic is impossible, let us send the whole thing to hell! The deus ex machina descends and the three judges of Hades condemn everyone to death--*except* Socrates and "a few other souls"! [50] Clap, clap, clap. . . . **[End Page 231]**

Let me be naughty (just one last time, I promise) and explain the seventh move, which is the epilogue of this show, which will take place once the crowd has gone home. Is there another explanation, in the end, for the very famous and fair trial, through which the people of Athens forced Socrates to poison himself!? It was certainly a political mistake, because it made a martyr out of a mad scientist--but it might have been, at least, a healthy reaction against this most unfair trial that Socrates waged against the demos. Was it not fair for someone who wanted to judge naked shadows from the superior seat of eternal justice to be sent to the Isles of the Blessed by the living and fully clothed citizens of Athens? But as we shall now see, this tragicomedy had a great advantage over the later ones: only one character shed his blood, and he was not a

part of the public.

Part III. Conclusion: A Possible Body Politic

Let us now abandon the irony and the rage that were needed to expel the poison and extract the honey. We can now salvage from the *Gorgias* the powerful definition of real politics to which epistemic knowledge and absolute morality are so obviously irrelevant. The category mistake is now clear enough. Socrates' and Callicles' settlement can no longer prevent us from liking scientists *as muchas* politicians. Contrary to what Weinberg asserts after Plato, there are many possible settlements other than the one described above as "inhumanity to quash inhumanity." A slight change in our definition of science and in our definition of politics will be sufficient, at the end of this paper, to show the many ways we can now go.

1. A Science Freed from the Politics of Doing Away with Politics

Let us first see, even briefly, how the sciences can be freed from the burden of making a type of politics that shortcuts politics. If we now quietly read the *Gorgias*, we see that a certain specialized form of reasoning, *epistèmè*, was kidnapped for a political purpose it could not possibly fulfill. This has resulted in bad politics but in an even worse science. If we let the kidnapped sciences escape, then different meanings of the adjective "scientific" start to be distinguishable again after having been lumped together for so long.

The first meaning is that of Science with a capital *S*, the ideal of the transport of information without discussion or deformation. This Science, capital *S*, is *not* a description of what scientists do. To use an old term, it is an ideology that never had any other use, in the epistemologists' hands, than to offer a *substitute* for public discussion. It has always been a political weapon to do away with the strenuous constraints of politics. From the beginning, as we saw in **[End Page 232]** the dialogue, it was tailored for this end alone, and it never stops, over the ages, being used in this way.

Because it was intended as a weapon, this conception of Science, the one to which Weinberg clings so forcefully, can be used neither to "make humanity less irrational," nor to make the sciences better. It has only one use: as the command, "Keep your mouth shut!"--the "you" designating, interestingly enough, other scientists engaged in controversies, as much as the rest of the people. "Substitute Science, capital *S,* for political irrationality" is only a war cry. In that sense, and that sense only, it is of course useful, as we can

witness in these days of the Science Wars. However, this definition of Science N°1, I am afraid, has no more use than the Maginot line, and I take great pleasure in being branded as "antiscientific" *if* "scientific" has this first meaning *only*.

But then "scientific" has another meaning, which is much more interesting and is not engaged in doing away with politics--*not* because it is apolitical, *nor* because it is politicized, but because it deals with entirely different questions, a difference that is never respected when Science N°1 is taken, by its friends *as well as* by its foes, to be all there is to say about science. The second meaning of "science" is the gaining of access, through experiments and calculations, to entities that do not at first have the same characters as humans. This definition might seem odd, but it is what is implied by Weinberg's own interest in "impersonal laws." Science N°2 deals with nonhumans, which begin by being foreign to social life, and which are slowly socialized in our midst through the channels of laboratories, expeditions, institutions, and so on--as recent historians of science have so often described. What working scientists want to be sure of, is that they *do not make up*, with their own repertoire of actions, the new entities to which they have access. With each new nonhuman they want their repertoire of action, their ontology, to be enriched. Pasteur, for example, does not "construct" his microbes; rather, Pasteur, his microbes, and French society are shifted, through their common agency, from a collective made up of, let's say, *x* many entities, into another one made up of many *more* entities, microbes included.

"Science N°2" thus alludes to the maximum possible *distance* between standpoints *as different* as possible, and to their *intimate* integration into the daily life and thoughts of as many humans as possible. To do justice to this scientific work, the first definition of Science N°1 is totally inadequate--because what Science N°2 needs, on the contrary, is lots of controversies, puzzles, risk-taking, imagination, and a "vascularization" with the rest of the collective as rich and as **[End Page 233]** complex as possible. [51] Naturally, these many contact-points between humans and nonhumans are unthinkable if by "social" we mean Callicles' pure brutal force, or if by "reason" we mean the mouth-shutting Science N°1. We recognize here, by the way, the two enemy camps of "science studies": those from the humanities, who think we give too much to the nonhumans; and those from some quarters of the "hard" sciences, who accuse us of giving too much to the humans. This symmetric accusation triangulates with great precision the place where we stand: we follow scientists in their daily scientific practice in the N°2 definition, and not in the N°1, politicized definition. Reason--meaning Science N°1--does not describe science any better than cynicism describes politics. [52]

So freeing science from politics is easy--not, as has been done in the past, by trying to *isolate* as much as possible the autonomous core of science from pollution by the social, but by freeing Science N°2 as much as possible from the political disciplining that went with Science N°1 and that Socrates introduced into philosophy. The first solution, inhumanity against inhumanity, relied too much on a fanciful definition of the social--the mob, which has to be silenced and disciplined--and an even more fanciful definition of Science N°1, conceived as a type of demonstration that had no other goal than to bring in "impersonal laws" to stop controversies from boiling over. The second solution is the best and fastest way to free science from politics. Let Science N°2 be represented publicly in all its beautiful orginality--that is, as what establishes new, unpredictable **[End Page 234]** connections between humans and nonhumans, thus deeply modifying what the collective is made of. Who defined it in the clearest way? Socrates--and here I want to return once again to the passage I started with and make amends for having ironized so much at the expense of this master of irony:

> In fact, Callicles, the experts' opinion is that co-operation, love, order, discipline, and justice *bind heaven and earth, gods and men*. That's why they call the universe an ordered whole, my friend, rather than a disorderly mess or an unruly shambles [*kai to olon touto dia tauta kosmon kalousin, ô etaire, ouk akosmian oude akolasian*]. (508a)

Far from taking us away from the agora, Science N°2--once clearly separated from the impossible agenda of Science, capital *S*--redefines political order as that which brings together stars, prions, cows, heavens, and people, the task being to turn this collective into a "cosmos" instead of an "unruly shambles." For scientists, such an endeavor seems much more lively, much more interesting, much more adapted to their skill and genius than the boring, repetitive chore of beating the poor undisciplined demos with the big stick of "impersonal laws." This new settlement is not the one Socrates and Callicles agreed upon--"appealing to one form of inhumanity to avoid inhumane social behavior"--but something that could be defined as "making collectively sure that the collective formed by ever-vaster numbers of humans and nonhumans becomes a cosmos." [53]

However, for this other possible task, we not only need scientists who will accept abandoning the older privileges of Science N°1, and who will take up at last a science (N°2) freed from politics, we also need a symmetric transformation of politics. I must confess that this is much more difficult, because, in practice,

very few scientists are happy in the artificial strait-jacket that Socrates' position imposes on them, and they would be very happy to deal with what they are good at, Science N°2 (and N°3). But what about politics? To convince Socrates is one thing, but what about Callicles? To free science from politics is easy, but how can we free politics from science?

2. Freeing Politics from a Power/Knowledge That Renders Politics Impossible

The paradox always lost on those who accuse "science studies" of politicizing science is that it does exactly the reverse, but in doing **[End Page 235]** so, it meets another opposition, much stronger than that of epistemologists or of a few disgruntled scientists. If the trenches of the so-called Science Wars had any plausible shape, the people like us who are said to "fight" science should be heartily supported by the battalions coming from social sciences or the humanities. And yet, here again, it is exactly the reverse. Science N°2 is a scandal to sociologists and humanists alike because it totally subverts the definition of the social they work with--whereas it is common sense to the scientists, who are worried, of course, but only at seeing their unwieldy Science N°1 taken away from them. The opposition from those who believe in the "social" is a lot meaner than our (on the whole) friendly exchanges with our contradictors from the scientific ranks. So much for trenches. . . . How is this possible?

In this, too, the settlement between Socrates and Callicles can enlighten us, although this is much harder to see and cannot possibly be done within the scope of this paper. As we saw above, when deciphering the tug of war between Reason and Force on the one hand, and the demos on the other, there are two meanings of the word *social*. The first, Social N°1, is used by Socrates against Callicles (and accepted by the straw Callicles as a good definition of force); the other, Social N°2, should be used to describe the specific conditions of felicity for the demos representing itself--conditions that the *Gorgias* reveals so well at the same time that Socrates smashes them to pieces.

What I want to indicate here, if only briefly, is that the two meanings are as different as are Science N°1 and Science N°2. No wonder; the ordinary notion of the social is patterned on the same rationalist argument as that of Science, capital *S*: it is a transport without deformation of inflexible laws. It is called "power" instead of "epistèmè," but this makes no difference because while epistemologists speak of the "power of demonstration" sociologists are happy to use their most famous recent motto, "Power/Knowledge." The damning irony of the social sciences is that when they use this Foucauldian expression to exert their critical

skill, they in effect say, without noticing it: "Let the agreement of Socrates--Knowledge--and Callicles--Power--stand and triumph *against* the Third Estate!" No critical slogan is less critical than this one; no popular flag is more elitist. What makes this argument difficult to grasp is that natural and social scientists are both behaving as if Power were made of another matter altogether than Reason--hence the supposed originality of separating them and then reuniting them with a mysterious slash. They are taken in by Socrates' and Callicles' show. Power **[End Page 236]** and Reason are one and the same, and the Body Politic built by one or by the other is shaped with the same clay; hence the uselessness of the slash, which heightens the interest for the players and the disinterest for the other party, down there in the audience.

It seems that after the *Gorgias*, political philosophy never recovered the full right it once possessed to think over its specific conditions of felicity and to build the Body Politic with its own flesh and blood. [54] The "factish," once smashed, can be patched up, but it can never be made whole again. Barbara Cassin, to be sure, has shown beautifully how the second Sophistics won against Plato and reestablished rhetoric *over* philosophy. But this millennium of Pyrrhic victories counted for naught once, in the seventeenth century, another settlement had again linked Science and Politics into one common Constitution--especially after Machiavelli fell into Socrates' trap and defined politics as a cleverness entirely freed from scientific virtue. Hobbes's Leviathan is a rationalist Beast through and through, made of arguments, proofs, cogs, and wheels. It is a Cartesian *animal-machine* that transports power without discussion or deformation. Again, Hobbes was used as a foil against Reason, much as Callicles was used against Socrates, but the common settlement is even clearer in the seventeenth century than twenty centuries before: natural laws and indisputable demonstrations now make for a rationally founded politics. The conditions of felicity for the slow creation of a consensus in the harsh conditions of the agora disappeared underground. There is even less genuine politics in Hobbes than in Socrates' appeal from an afterworld. The only difference is that Socrates' Body Politic has been called back from the dead to become a Leviathan of *this world*, a monster and a half, composed only of "unhampered" individuals half-dead, half-alive, "without trappings, without clothes, without relatives and friends"--a scenography altogether more ghoulish than the one imagined by Plato.

Things do not improve when the Body Politic, to escape from Hobbesian cynicism, is given another transfusion of Reason by Rousseau and his descendants. The impossible surgery started by Socrates continues on an even bigger scale: more Reason, more artificial blood, but less and less of this very specific form of circulating fluid **[End Page 237]** that is the essence of the Body Politic, and for which the Sophists had so many good terms and we so few. [55] The Body Politic is now supposed to be transparent to

itself, freed from the manipulations, dark secrets, cleverness, tricks of the Sophists. Representation has taken over, but a representation understood in the very terms of Socrates' demonstration. By pretending to clean Glaucus' statue of all its later deformations, Rousseau makes the Body Politic even more monstrous.

Should I go on with the sad story of how to transform a once-healthy Body into an even more unlivable and dangerous monster? No, no one wants to hear of more horrific deeds committed in this world instead of the other, all in the name of Reason. Suffice it to say that when a "scientific politics" is finally invented, then monstrosities come hard and fast on an even grander scale. Socrates had only threatened to leave the agora alone, and only *his* blood was shed at the end of his strange attempt to rationalize politics. How innocent it looks to children of our century! How could Socrates have imagined that scientific programs could later be invented to send the *whole* of the demos into the afterworld and replace political life with the iron laws of one science, and economics at that! [56] Social sciences in most of their instantiations represent the ultimate reconciliation of Socrates with Callicles, since the brute force advocated by the latter has become a matter of demonstration--not through geometrical equality, of course, but through new tools such as statistics. Every single feature of our definition of the "social" now comes from Socrates' and Callicles' side, fused into one.

I have said enough to make clear now why Knowledge/Power is not a solution but yet another attempt to paralyze what is left of the Body Politic. To take Callicles' definition of Power, to use it to deconstruct Reason and to show that, instead of the demonstration of truths, it involves only the demonstration of Force, is simply to reverse the twin definitions that have been devised to make politics unthinkable. Nothing has been achieved, nothing analyzed. It is black and white instead of white and black. The strong hand of Callicles simply takes over from the weakening hand of Socrates the rope used in the tug of war against the demos, and later, as the slash indicates, Socrates' hand will take over from the tired hand of Callicles! Admirable collaboration, indeed, but not the one that will reinforce **[End Page 238]** the Third Estate, the people pulling on the other end of the rope. To sum up the argument once again, there is not a single trait in the definition of Reason that is not shared by the definition of Force. Thus, nothing is gained by trying to alternate between the two, or to expand one at the expense of the other. Everything will be gained, however, if we turn our attention toward the sites and situations against which the twin resources of Force/Reason have been devised: the agora.

It is often said that the American people are intoxicated by sugar, slowly poisoned by a fabulous excess of

carbohydrates unfit for organisms that have evolved for eons on a sugar-poor diet. This is a good metaphor for the Body Politic slowly poisoned by a fabulous excess of Reason. Just how ill-adapted was the cure of professor Socrates has now, I hope, been made clear--but how much more ill-adjusted is also that of the physician *qua* physicist Weinberg, who wants to cure the people's supposed irrationality by bringing in even more "impersonal laws," in order to eliminate even further the damned tendency of the mob to discuss and to disobey! The older settlement had a great appeal in the past, even the recent past, because it seemed to offer the fastest way to transform the "unruly shambles of gods, heaven, and men, into an ordered whole." It seemed to provide an ideal *shortcut*, a fabulous acceleration, compared to the slow and delicate politics of producing politics through political means, in the way we learned--and then, alas, unlearned--from the Athenian people. But it has now been shown that instead of simply adding order, the solution adds disorder as well.

To take up one last time the story of the dispute between the cook and the physician with which Socrates amused the public so much, there was some plausibility in this idea of kicking the cook out and letting the physician take over and dictate what we should eat and drink. However, it is no longer adjusted to "mad cow" times, when neither the cook nor the physician knows what to tell an assembly that is no longer made of spoiled brats and "assorted slaves," but of grown-up citizens. There is a Science War, but it is not the one that pits descendants of Socrates against descendants of Callicles in the rerun of that tired old show--it is the one between "unruly shambles" and "cosmos." How can we mix Science N°2, which brings an ever-greater number of nonhumans into the agora, with Social N°2, which deals with the very specific conditions of felicity that cannot be content with transporting forces or truth without deformation? I do not know, but I am sure of one thing: no shortcuts are possible, no short-circuits, and no acceleration. Half of our knowledge may be in scientists' hands, but the other half is alive only in those most despised **[End Page 239]** of all people, the politicians, who are risking their lives and ours in the middle of scientifico-political controversies that nowadays make up most of our daily bread. To deal with them, a "double circulation" has to flow effortlessly again in the Body Politic: the one of science (N°2) freed from politics, and the one of politics freed from science (N°1). The task of today can be summed up in this odd sentence: Can we learn to like scientists as much as politicians, so that we can benefit *at last* from the two inventions made by the Greeks, demonstration and democracy?

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Notes

1. Steven Weinberg, "Sokal's Hoax," *New York Review of Books*, August 8, 1996, p. 15

2. Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Robin Waterfield (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994). The emphases within quotations throughout the essay are mine. I am of course aware of the anachronism involved in comparing Weinberg's "impersonal laws" with Socrates' "cosmos," but I will render justice to the differences at the end of the paper only.

3. Waterfield's translation has the advantage of many anachronisms that help in bringing the fresh resources

of this essential text to bear on contemporary issues in the philosophy of science.

4. See G. E. R Lloyd, *The Revolutions of Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987); and the magnificent compendium just published, Jacques Brunschwig and Geoffrey Lloyd, *Le savoir Grec: Dictionnaire critique* (Paris: Flammarion, 1996).

5. Barbara Cassin, *L'effet sophistique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1995).

6. I use this term as defined in pragmatics and linguistics, to designate a set of rules that lie in between the rules of grammar and the specific context of the situation. I simply extend the meaning to designate the conditions of enunciation proper to science, on the one hand, and to political truth-saying, on the other.

7. Or more exactly, as one reader suggested, "hypodeixis"!

8. As we will see in section II, 2, it is Socrates, in fact, who misconstrues the specific condition of political fermentation, of political reflexivity, of what will be called *autophuos*.

9. Here Waterfield's translation is rather far from the text: "under the pretext of looking for truth, you are tiring us with demagogical sophisms about what is ugly according to nature and beautiful according to the law" (Plato, *Gorgias*, trans. Alfred Croiset [édition Guillaume Budé] [Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1992 (1923)]).

10. "So we're faced here with a kind of rhetoric which is addressed to the assembled population of men, women, and children all at once--slaves as well as free people--and it's a kind of rhetoric we find we can't approve of. I mean, we did describe it as
flattery" (502d).

11. "You simply never stop going on and on about cobblers and fullers and cooks and doctors, as if they had the slightest relevance to our discussion" (491a).

12. "You're singing the praises of the people who gave the Athenians lavish treats and indulged their desires. They're reputed to have made their city great, but no one notices that these men from Athens' past made her bloated and rotten, by stuffing her, with no sense of restraint or right, full of trumpery like harbours, dockyards, fortifications, and tribute payments" (519a).

13. This horror of the many fits very well with the obsession of conservative thinkers much later in history, all the way to the present--as can be witnessed in the study of their fantasies by Albert O. Hirschman, *The Rhetoric of Reaction: Perversity, Futility, Jeopardy* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991).

14. We should never forget that the Sophists are represented by their enemies. It would be like reconstituting "science studies" by reading Gross and Levitt, Dunbar, Sokal, or Wolpert! Not that they write like Plato, but because they misrepresent as much.

15. It should in fact be called "Cassin's Callicles" and made clearly different from the Nietzschean one, which has the same properties as that of Plato except that the polarities have been reversed: the aristocratic animals indifferent to truth have become the positive model, while Socrates has become black and degenerate. "Rehabilitating the Sophists" would mean something entirely different, of course, for any of the three characters thus specified.

16. Another proof of the parallelism between Socrates' and Callicles' solutions is that the same trope will be used later by Galileo, for instance, to define how one ordinary man equipped with reason can beat down ten thousand Aristotles and ten thousand Demostheneses. Thus, the same metaphor of a vastly unequal balance can be used both to define Might and to define Right!

17. "--Socrates: Who are the better people, according to you?--Callicles: I mean the élite" (489e).

18. Might versus Right has of course two versions: one where Right means the legal system of a society, and the other where it means Science and Reason. The destinies of these two fights are different because of the inner constructivism acceptable in the Law. I am talking here only of impersonal natural laws, those of Antigone, Socrates, Callicles, and Weinberg. I use the adjective *transcendent* in a consciously anachronistic way to define anything that the philosophers believe should be added to the Body Politic to keep it from falling onto itself into pure immanence, *once* they have emptied politics of its own peculiar type of fermentation, of reflexivity, of *autophuos*. More of this below.

19. See also the beautiful primal scene staged by Plutarch when Archimedes displays the power of technology, "*dynamis ten techinen,*" in front of the Syracusan court (Plutarch, *Life of Marcellus)*.

20. As he himself reflexively and mockingly notes: "You might think that my behaviour has been ridiculous: first I stopped you making long speeches and now I've gone on for so long myself" (465e).

21. Cassin, *L'effet sophistique* (above, n. 5), p. 411.

22. As Alexandre Koyré proposed long ago, it was the seventeenth-century assimilation of Platonism together with the newly emergent mathematical physics, that again reversed the solution of this dialogue and made philosophy, meaning geometry plus physics, as active as Socrates imagined it to be. With Galileo, rhetoric begins to disappear again, and none of the efforts made afterward, such as Perelman's, are any match for the "power of demonstration." Rhetoricians have forgotten the conditions of felicity of politics as much as those of science, when they limit themselves to law and later to literature. But the demise of rhetoric was slow in coming, and we have not yet fathomed what has been lost with it. Perhaps it was political reason.

23. Bernadette Bensaude (personal communication) points out another technical difference: Callicles' use of relations of inequality forces him to occupy at best one slot in a "food chain" where he is superior to some but inferior to others, whereas geometrical equality allows Socrates to establish all sorts of positions without ever being locked into one asymmetrical relation. He begins to occupy the God-like position that will later be taken over by many physicist-kings, as can be seen in Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, vol. 2, *L'invention de la mécanique: Pouvoir et raison* (Paris: La Découverte, 1996).

24. Edwin Hutchins, *Cognition in the Wild* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1995). Most of science studies will now show this excellent definition to extend to the skills of scientists, including mathematicians and logicians. See Claude Rosental, "L'émergence d'un théorème logique: Une approche sociologique des pratiques contemporaines de démonstration," Thése de sociologie, Ecole nationale supérieure des mines de Paris, 1996.

25. Jean-François Lyotard, *Le différend* (Paris: Minuit, 1983); Cassin, *L'effet sophistique* (above, n. 5).

26. Even by Waterfield, whose comments are not at the level of his translation, and who falls into every trap laid by Plato to distract attention toward morality. More on this below.

27. This result was obtained earlier in *Irreductions*, part 2 of Bruno Latour, *The Pasteurization of France* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988). However, without at least some indication of the genealogy of that difference--first in the seventeenth century, as in Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, *Leviathan and the Air-Pump: Hobbes, Boyle, and the Experimental Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), and now in Greece--it remained useless, tainted by the accusation of sophistry and cynicism and by the proximity of a Nietzschean "will to power." It was thus necessary to make a detour (a) to return to the origin of that fateful distinction, and (b) to provide, with the notion of "factish," a real alternative to the construction versus nonconstruction argument. "Factish" is a combination of the words *fact* and *fetish*, in which the work of fabrication has been twice added, canceling the twin effects of belief and knowledge: see Bruno Latour, *Petite réflexion sur le culte moderne des dieux Faitiches* (Paris: Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996). Isabelle Stengers's "cosmopolitics" was of course the principal spur for that series of moves which forced me to take more and more seriously the "politics of reason": Isabelle Stengers, *Cosmopolitiques*, vol 1, *La guerre des sciences* (Paris: La Découverte & Les Empêcheurs de penser en rond, 1996). Barbara Cassin in *L'effet sophistique* (above, n. 5) offered to me the first credible defense of the Sophists because, contrary to Nietzsche, she did not overcompensate for their cynical role.

28. It sounds better in French: *le tiers exclu c'est le Tiers Etat*! As Bernadette Bensaude so forcefully comments: the philosopher does not escape from the Cave, he sends the whole demos down into the Cave to feed only on shadows!

29. I use the same myth as Rousseau for exactly the opposite goal--that is, to free politics from an excess of reason! "The human soul, like the statue of Glaucus which time, the sea and storms had so much disfigured that it resembled a wild beast more than a god; . . . and by now we perceive in it, instead of a being always acting from certain and invariable principles, instead of that heavenly and majestic simplicity which its author had impressed upon it, nothing but the shocking contrast of passion that thinks it reasons, and an understanding grown delirious" (Jean Jacques Rousseau, *Discourse on the Origin of Inequality,* trans. G. D. H. Cole [New York: Dutton, 1973], p. 38). The statue of Glaucus is an allusion to Plato's *Republic* (X, 611).

30. "All' ouk ek tès dèmiourgôn": here the word *professionals* stretches the meaning a bit too far.

31. "Think of a community--any community you like--and I assure you that if an expert in rhetoric and a doctor went there and had to compete against each other for election as the community's doctor by addressing the Assembly or some other public meeting, the doctor would be left standing, and the effective speaker would win the election, if that's what he wanted" (456b).

32. On contemporary disputes that can in no way be fitted into Socrates's choice, see Marie-Angèle Hermitte, *Le sang et le droit: Essai sur la transfusion sanguine* (Paris: Le Seuil, 1996), on the tainted blood scandal; or more generally, the already classic work of Sheila Jasanoff, *Science at the Bar: Law, Science, and Technology in America* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995).

33. This is a point well made by pragmatism: see Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Pragmatism, however, has accepted the secondary place of practice prepared for it by Socrates and his many descendants.

34. Like transcendance, *reflexivity* is a provisional anachronism, used here until we define the very precise mechanism of "fermentation" that will be rescued in the next section.

35. How sensible was the Athenian demos to invent the derided institution of ostracism, this very intelligent way to get rid of those who want to get rid of the people!

36. The choice I have spent the most time on is this bizarre one: "Are facts fabricated, or are facts real?"--to which any reasonable scientist will answer, simply, "both." But because of the iconoclasm proper to epistemologists, this simple answer is never listened to. On this see Latour, *Petite réflexion* (above, n. 27). On one specific case see Bruno Latour, "Do Scientific Objects Have a History? Pasteur and Whitehead in a Bath of Lactic Acid," *Common Knowledge* 5:1 (1996): 76-91.

37. As we know, in practice, the nature of this transformation is precisely to *lose* information on its way and to *re*describe in a cascade of re-representations whose precise nature is as little known as that of politics. For one entry into this now-vast literature, see Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, "The Image of Objectivity," *Representation* 40 (1992): 81-128. But thinkers like Plato used the *theory* of how demonstration progressed, not the practice. Thus, they could use this notion of a proportion maintained through different relations as a bench-mark to judge all the others.

38. Let us remember that in this passage Socrates compares his two loves, Alcibiades and philosophy, to Callicles' two: the Athenian populace and his minion.

39. Political philosophy, obsessed by foundation, has never been very good at describing this two-way practice of representation and obedience. The paradox is thus that we now know a good deal more about scientific practice than about political practice.

40. See Michael Walzer, *The Company of Critics: Social Criticism and Political Commitment in the Twentieth Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1988), on the recent history of these two antipolitical reflexes of the critical mode of thought.

41. Aristotle, of course, tried to salvage a much larger part of their skills. On this whole history see Cassin, *L'effet sophistique* (above, n. 5). On the difficulty of accommodating skills and cleverness in Greek thought, see the classic work by Marcel Détienne and Jean Pierre Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence: La métis chez les Grecs* (Paris: Flammarion, 1974).

42. As I will discuss in the third part of this essay, the transport of information is a myth of Science, not the real practice of the sciences, in which the notion of information is highly controversial. The substitution of Science for the sciences is the very result of texts like the *Gorgias,* and it depends on the political agenda, not on any interest in how the sciences work. This is where "science students" have added their little grain of salt: a genuine interest in the practice of science, and not in the politics of keeping the demos at bay.

43. By reading this alchemy as representation, we mistake it exactly as much as Socrates did--and that is the great advantage of the Sophists: they have offered a *dark* definition of the Body Politic's, "fermentation," instead of the mythically clear self-representation that was invented in the modernist period. Manipulations, differences, combinations, tricks, rhetoric are part of that slight difference between the Body and itself. Neither organic bliss nor rationalist transparency, this was the clever knowledge of the Sophists expelled from the City by the philosopher King.

44. The forewords of the seven recent editions in French and English that I have checked do not for one minute question the moral message of the dialogue, even though morality, as is pointed out in Cassin's commentary, is an anachronism. One editor goes so far as to offer Socrates as a model to youngsters living

in a degenerate civilization--as if escaping from the specific constraints of the agora were a solution worthy of imitation!

45. Although Machiavelli's own position is of course not an immoral one. Yet in the rehabilitation of politics that is so typical of the Machiavellian moment, the superior position taken by Reason is not reconsidered--so that what we now call political cleverness will always be read as sneaky and clever tricks, forever unable to catch up with the superior ideals of apodictic reasoning and morality. As we know, the same position of inferiority will be accepted by rhetoric and later by "communication." Thus all the resources that would have given equal standing to scientific and political truth-saying have been eaten away.

46. Frans De Waal, *Chimpanzee Politics: Power and Sex among Apes* (New York: Harper and Row, 1982).

47. Shirley Strum, *Almost Human: A Journey into the World of Baboons* (New York: Random House, 1987). Let us remember what Darwin wrote: the understanding of one baboon would enlighten us more about morality than the reading of Plato--or something to that effect. I have never been more in agreement with Darwin.

48. There are many signs in the dialogue that the question itself might be irrelevant: "All these futile little questions are typical of the way Socrates tries to prove people wrong, Gorgias" (497b); "Actually, these arguments of yours don't interest me in the slightest, and I've only been answering your questions for Gorgias' sake" (505c).

49. On the anthropology of Greek morality, see Martha C. Nussbaum, *The Therapy of Desire: Theory and Practice in Hellenistic Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994). On many alternatives to the very definition of morality, see the comparative perspective offered by François Jullien, *Fonder la morale: Dialogue de Mencius avec un philosophe des Lumières* (Paris: Grasset, 1995).

50. "Occasionally, however, (Rhadmanthys) comes across a different kind of soul, one which has lived a life of moral integrity, and which belonged to a man who played *no part in public life* or . . . to a philosopher who minded his *own* business and remained *detached from things* throughout his life" (526c).

51. See Isabelle Stengers's magnum opus, where *risk* is used to replace the demarcation between scientific and unscientific (*Cosmopolitiques* [above, nn. 23 and 27]). See also Isabelle Stengers, *Power and Invention*

(Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997).

52. A third meaning of "science" could be added, which I will call "logistics," because it is directly connected to the *number* of entities one wants to access and to socialize. Just as there is a logistic problem to be solved if 20,000 fans are simultaneously trying to park around a baseball stadium, there is a logistic problem to be solved if masses of data have to be displaced over great distance, treated, sorted, "parked," summarized, and expressed. Much of the common usage of the adjective "scientific" refers to this logistic question. And yet it should not be confused with the other two, especially not with science as access to nonhumans. Science N°3 ensures that the fast and safe communication of data is established; it does not ensure that something sensible is communicated. "Garbage in, garbage out," as the computer motto goes. Many disciplines--which I am too polite to name--are "scientific" in this third meaning only, which means they solve huge logistic problems by shifting around lots of data, but if you stop one of their many vehicles to check what is in it, you often find it empty. Conversely, many disciplines that are accused of being "unscientific" are loaded with treasures, but since they remain on the small scale of craft production they never have to engage in the huge logistic problems of large-scale operations.

53. I give *collective* the technical sense of the association of humans and nonhumans, and not that of "society," which would be to fall into Callicles' hands. See Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, trans. Catherine Porter (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 4 and passim.

54. I still use the myth of a once-complete Greek political knowledge, knowing full well that this myth cannot account for the long and crooked history of political philosophy, and still less for the practice of political life. But I want to keep the frame and polemical style of the *Gorgias* all the way to the end--that is, to the present-day Science Wars. My apologies to the anthropologists of political practice who want (rightly) to do that which I would advocate, in other venues, for scientific and technical daily routine.

55. See again Cassin, *L'effet sophistique* (above, n. 5), especially the notion of "plasma"!

56. In case this is confused with an argument against Marxist "science" only, a reading of Polanyi's interpretation of the war led by the "other" economic science against the people is in order: Karl Polanyi, *The Great Transformation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1944).

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