Teleology in the *Phaedo’s* Biographical Account

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The aim of this paper is to clarify the first section of Socrates's biographical account (the so-called first sailing) in *Phaedo* (96a-99d). Specifically, the aim is to have a better understanding regarding the teleological argument about the intellect in Socrates's speech. This is a complex and difficult passage which has been subjected to a series of what, in my view, are contradictory interpretations. Broadly speaking, it is possible to distinguish two very different groups of interpretations of the teleological arguments in the first part of the biographical section. In the first interpretation, scholars looking for the roots of the teleological arguments of the *Timaeus* arrive at the conclusion that they lie in the *Phaedo*. For this group of scholars, Plato employs a teleological argument in Socrates’s biographical account in the *Phaedo*, although it is considered to be in schematic form when compared to the one employed in the *Timaeus*. In the second interpretation, scholars focusing exclusively on the *Phaedo*’s biographical passage argue that teleological arguments are not used by Plato in the *Phaedo* since Socrates said in the first part of the biographical passage that he was completely incapable of finding a teleological cause (99c-d).

The upshot is this: studies of the *Phaedo* support the thesis that teleology is not present in the dialogue, while studies of the *Timaeus* support the opposite, namely, that in Socrates’s biographical account teleology is present. So there seems to be a contradiction in the literature about the place of teleology in the *Phaedo*. Since there seems to be more than one philosophical argument involving teleology in the dialogue (e.g. the reminiscence argument (72e-77a) and the final myth (107a-115a)), a coherent reading of the dialogue is at stake. Put differently, if this contradiction is not resolved, then the reader cannot explore the full extent that teleology plays within the dialogue or its philosophical development in the *Timaeus*. How, then, to read the biographical account of the *Phaedo* so that we are able to recognize the teleological argument in it?

In this paper I will challenge the reading of *Phaedo* that says that teleological arguments don’t play an important role there (in particular, in the biographical account). I will further provide a key for reading the teleological arguments in the *Phaedo* (which I will show to exist) that allows the reader to avoid the aforementioned contradiction. The key to understanding the passage lies first in distinguishing the different *dramatis personae* adopted by Socrates while telling to his audience his intellectual story, so that later we may look for similarities and repeated themes in Socrates’s different *personae*. Following this strategy I will show in the first part of the paper that Socrates employs up to three different *dramatis personae*: the first, an old Socrates who reports the *protos plous* (“first sailing”) and *deuteros plous* (“second sailing”) while sitting in jail; the second, a young Socrates who heard about Anaxagoras’s book in a public reading; the third, an old Socrates relaying his take on Anaxagoras’s use of intellect. This literary analysis will allow me, in the second part of the paper, to illustrate how Plato’s Socrates not only thought that teleological arguments were of the utmost importance for philosophy, but more importantly that he preserved the same rough sketch of his teleological arguments from his
younger days up until this point—namely, that intellect orders the universe according to the value of the best.

1. **Socrates's encounter with Anaxagoras’s theory of intellect**

The philosophical exchange that leads to the discussion of teleology in the *Phaedo* begins with a discussion about whether the human soul will exist once it has left the body which it inhabits. Simmias and Cebes raise two objections to Socrates’s first proof of the immortality of the soul (70c-81a). The first objection is to ask whether the soul is nothing but the harmony of corporeal elements which disappears when the body ceases to exist (85e-86d). The second is to compare the soul with an old weaver, who survives some of his works, but inevitably dies after some time (86e-88b). While for Simmias the soul is the product of the body, in Cebes’s objection the soul seems to be the cause of the body (87d-e). Socrates responds to the first objection by providing three consecutive arguments (91c-95a) and then turns his attention to Cebes’s objection.

Cebes’s argument raises the issue of the birth (*genesis*) and destruction (*phthora*) of the body and soul (95e10). Socrates grants that although his first proof shows that the soul exists before birth, it does not necessarily follow from it that the soul will continue to exist after leaving the body. To solve this matter, the causes of destruction and generation and how they could affect the soul should be investigated. The objection made by Cebes forces Socrates to deal with one of those things that are of “no small value” (*phaulon pragma*; *Phaedo* 95e9), for the cause of generation and decay must be completely and systematically investigated (*holos diapragmateuomai*; *Phaedo* 96a1). The most helpful way to address this problem, Socrates believes, is to relate his youthful intellectual experiences with the type of philosophical investigation called “natural history” (*historia peri physeos*; 96a7–8). Throughout this intellectual biography, Plato’s Socrates describes the way in which he was led to discover the hypothesis of forms and to demonstrate the indestructibility of the soul, but while on his path to uncovering the true cause of generation and corruption, Socrates tells us a story about Anaxagoras’s intellect theory.

After a short period examining his predecessors’ positions regarding the causes of generation and destruction, young Socrates was disappointed with the causal explanations of the Presocratics and rejected their explanatory method. Amid his confusion, Socrates thought that the philosophy of Anaxagoras would deliver a coherent and systematic explanation of nature, one that would avoid making the same mistakes made by the *physiologoi*. In the book of Anaxagoras, Socrates thought he would find a teleological explanation of the *cosmos*: intellect orders everything in the best possible way. However, after reading Anaxagoras’s book, Socrates was completely incapable of finding, either on his own or with the help of others, a teleological cause: “Now I would gladly be the pupil of anyone who would teach me the nature of such a cause; but since that was denied me and I was not able to discover it myself or to learn of it from anyone else, do you wish me, Cebes, to give you an account of the way in which I have conducted my second voyage in quest of the cause?” (99c-d).

These final words in the first sailing passage are usually taken by a number of scholars at face value and as the only evidence for Socrates's assessment of teleology. For example, in the
late 19th century, J. D. Logan wrote that teleological arguments are only found in Plato in and after the *Timaeus* (1897, 389). Although this was written more than 100 years ago, Logan’s interpretation of the *Phaedo* has persisted through time. Gregory Vlastos, in his influential 1969 paper on Plato’s concept of cause, wrote that “what Socrates has failed to discover by his own labors or from those of others and is prepared to do without for the present is the teleological *aitia* itself” (no. 15, 297-298). More recently, C. J. Rowe stated in his commentary on the dialogue that even though the *Timaeus* shows a combined application of a teleological explanation with the hypothesis of forms, “so far as concerns him [Socrates] here and now, in *Phaedo*, that kind of project belongs to the future” (1993, 239). It seems that for an important number of scholars the only significant evidence for interpreting Socrates's reception of Anaxagoras’s intellect theory rests in the final words of the *protos plous*. By taking literally Socrates's final statement about Anaxagoras, it seems to follow that Socrates was truly incapable of finding a final *aitia* and an articulate teleological explanation of nature. Nonetheless, this interpretation will not hold after closer examination of the passage.

In order to resolve the issue we must pay close attention to the circumstances and the temporal and narrative structure of the encounter between Socrates and the book of Anaxagoras. It is in the analysis of the details of these circumstances that the key to understanding Socrates's reception of Anaxagorean teleology lies. The first thing to notice about Socrates's biographical account is that there are three distinct *dramatis personae* in his monologue. The first one is old Socrates who reports the whole affair while in jail. The second is the young and optimistic Socrates who heard about Anaxagoras’s book in a public reading and was delighted to hear this because he felt it was good that intellect should be the cause of everything. The third and final *persona* is old Socrates again, but in this case he is narrating his current take on Anaxagoras’s use of intellect. Since the narrative sequence of the biographic passage is somewhat intricate and complex, I believe it will be useful to break the passage into four distinct mini-episodes; that way, it becomes easier to discern what each of these three *dramatis persona* of Socrates says.

The first episode (I) amounts to the public reading of Anaxagoras’s book, which the youthful Socrates attended (97b6-c1). In this public reading, Socrates heard that according to Anaxagoras “it is intellect that arranges and causes all things” (97c1-2). After hearing the fundamental tenet of Anaxagoras's theory of intellect, young Socrates was "very pleased" that intellect should be the cause of everything. Now, it can be inferred that Socrates gathered only that intellect causes and orders all things from the public reading from the fact that he was disappointed upon reading the book himself. Within the first moment of the passage, then, we can easily distinguish two events: (1) Socrates was present during a public reading of Anaxagoras’s work; and (2), Socrates seems to have paid attention only to one single statement from the book—the hint that intellect orders and causes everything—but did not come to know anything more about the role of intellect from Anaxagoras.

The second episode (II) concerns Socrates crediting the intellect to be a teleological *aitia*. This attribution takes place before Socrates could have actually studied Anaxagoras’s writings. After hearing publicly that intellect orders and causes all things Socrates reasoned that “if this is so,” i.e. if it is the case that intellect is the cause of everything, then "intellect in arranging things arranges everything and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be. So if anyone wishes to find the cause of the generation or destruction or existence of a particular thing, he must find out
what sort of existence, or passive state of any kind or activity is best for it” (Phaedo 97c5-d4). The new and complementary role attributed to intellect is presented by Plato as a reasonable inference from Anaxagoras’s thesis. As young Socrates heard Anaxagoras’s book he thought that if intellect causes all, then it should follow also that it causes and orders everything the best possible way. We can plot Socrates’s reasoning in the passage as follows: (1) if intellect orders everything, then it follows that (2) it organizes and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be; young Socrates thinks then that if (1) is true, then (2) follows naturally. However, only point (1) can be found in the work of Anaxagoras and the extant fragments we have come to possess, while point (2) is an inference made by Socrates from point (1).

Socrates’s choice of words in the second section of the passage seems to reflect a clear awareness that the attributed new teleological role of intellect is a product of his own mind: “As I considered these things I was delighted to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher of the cause of things quite to my intellect” (97d5-7). After having indicated the teleological function of intellect (97e-98a), Socrates insists yet again that his account was an assumption (homen; 98a7) and an expectation (elpidas) (98b3). This is because, despite the fragmentary state of Anaxagoras’s philosophy, Anaxagoras nowhere says that intellect arranges things in a certain way because it is best for them to be so. In frag. B 12 Diels-Kranz (1966), for example, Anaxagoras assigns three functions to intellect: it has knowledge of everything (gnome peri pantes), inaugurates the rotation of the mass of ingredients, and controls its rotation. It would not be unreasonable to assume that intellect would also know why everything occupies a determinate place in the cosmos. However, no such thing is found in Anaxagoras’s fragments. Moreover, we have external confirmation from Aristotle’s Metaphysics and Proclus’s commentary on the Timaeus that intellect was never designated as a teleological cause in Anaxagoras’s theory. The important point is that Socrates is represented by Plato here as already adopting a teleological perspective before hearing Anaxagoras’s book and/or as a consequence of the public reading. Either way, the teleological perspective is Socrates’s own philosophical reflection on intellect; he imagined that Anaxagoras would explain what was best for the individual, what was the common good, and guessed he would find some sort of textual confirmation to his teleological speculations about intellect.

The third episode (III) of the passage comprises young Socrates’s reading of the book and his consequent disappointment and critique of Anaxagorean cosmology. Young Socrates dashed to buy the book of Anaxagoras in order to discover as quickly as possible “what is best [beltiston] for each and what is good [agathon] for all in common [to koinon pasin]” (98b1-2). However, he was tremendously disappointed when he read Anaxagoras’s book himself and discovered that Anaxagoras never talks about intellect as final cause but, on the contrary, adopts a mechanistic explanation of nature:

I prized my hopes very highly, and I seized the books very eagerly and read them as fast as I could, that I might know as fast as I could about the best and the worst. My glorious hope, my friend, was quickly snatched away from me. As I went on with my reading I saw that the man made no use of intelligence, and did not assign any real causes for the ordering of things, but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other absurdities. (98b2-c2)
From 98a to 98c, young Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras for having “introduce[d] any other cause for these things than that it is best for them to be as they are” (97e3-98a2). Young Socrates believed that Anaxagoras’s writings would resolve his doubts regarding which cause leads to which specific effect, and why this effect is the best possible outcome. He expected, for example, that if an explanation was presented as to why the earth is flat or spherical, that that explanation should also explain why this is best. But in his book, Anaxagoras turns only to material causes with respect to the shape and position of the earth, such as ether or water, and says nothing about why it is better that each of these phenomena be the way they are. According to young Socrates the problem with Anaxagoras’s theory is that it fails to provide a coherent account covering both the explanation of physical changes in physical terms—if the earth is flat or spherical—and the explanation of the same physical changes in teleological terms—why it is better that earth is this way or the other.

Now, during these first three narrative episodes of the biographical account, it is old Socrates who remembers his past philosophical experiences and narrates them as if he were still a young man. That is, old Socrates personifies his younger dramatic self, speaks as from a past perspective, and narrates the encounter along with the disappointment and critique he charged against Anaxagoras’s philosophy. Socrates communicates to his audience his experience with Anaxagoras by assuming his younger point of view on Anaxagoras. From *Phaedo* 98c onwards, however, it is old Socrates who takes the stage to make a devastating and final critique of Anaxagoras’s theory. As old Socrates criticizes Anaxagoras, he also indicates his current opinion on the teleological role of intellect. As we will see in the following paragraphs, his current opinion matches his younger expectation about intellect.

This is illuminated in the fourth episode. In order to explain to Cebes and Simmias how Anaxagoras failed to make coherent use of intellect as a teleological principle, Socrates employs an analogy between the real cause that has kept him from escaping jail and the conditions that are necessary to either run away or stay:

“And it seemed to me it was very much as if one should say that Socrates does with intelligence whatever he does, and then, in trying to give the causes of the particular thing I do, should say first that I am now sitting here because my body is composed of bones and sinews, and the bones are hard and have joints which divide them and the sinews can be contracted and relaxed and, with the flesh and the skin which contains them all, are laid about the bones; and so, as the bones are hung loose in their ligaments, the sinews, by relaxing and contracting, make me able to bend my limbs now, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my legs bent. Or as if in the same way he should give voice and air and hearing and countless other things of the sort as causes for our talking with each other, and should fail to mention the real causes, which are, that the Athenians decided that it was best to condemn me, and therefore I have decided that it was best for me to sit here and that it is right for me to stay and undergo whatever penalty they order… But it is most absurd to call things of that sort causes. If anyone were to say that I could not have done what I thought proper if I had not bones and sinews and other things that I have, he would be right. But to say that those things are the cause of my doing what I do, and that I act with intelligence but not from the choice of what
is best, would be an extremely careless way of talking. Whoever talks in that way is unable to make a distinction and to see that in reality a cause is one thing, and the thing without which the cause could never be a cause is quite another thing.” (98c1-99b2)

According to the comparison, it would be unreasonable to pinpoint the motions of his body as the cause for Socrates's decision not to escape from jail, as the same bodily parts and motions could be used to explain the opposite, that is, Socrates's escape to Megara or Boeotia. Socrates's actions are not explained in any way by his bodily parts, but instead by his opinion of the good, from which it follows that remaining in prison will be the best course of action for the Athenians and for himself. Therefore, in order to explain from a teleological and rational point of view why Socrates has not escaped, one must take recourse to Socrates's intellect and its knowledge of the good. In that regard, Socrates has drawn the distinction between that because of which someone does what he does and those things in the absence of which the cause could never be a cause. The problem of Anaxagoras (and of the rest of Presocratics) is that he was not capable of distinguishing between the "real cause" and that without which the "real cause" could not exercise its power (dynamis).

In 99b-c, after having criticized Anaxagoras's theory of the intellect, old Socrates gives details to his audience about the teleological dimension of intellect. From a cosmological perspective, old Socrates argues that intellect orders the universe according to the good; it is the cause “which causes things to be now placed as it is best for them to be placed” and it “embraces and holds together all things” (99c1-2). From a personal ethical perspective, the individual intellect consists in selecting pragmatic courses of action that produce the individual and common good. For example, old Socrates acts "from the choice of what is best" and decides that remaining in prison will be the best decision (99b1). In both cases, the good, as common and as individual, is the value and end of intellect, the paradigm that governs the actions of intellect.

Now, let’s go back to episode number two to examine Socrates's early conception of intellect. Young Socrates thought that “the intellect in arranging things arranges everything and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be” (97c1-2) and “in respect to that particular thing, and other things too, a man need examine nothing but what is best and most excellent” (97d1-4). He then expected that Anaxagoras “would go on and explain what is best for each and what is good for all in common (ariston kai to beltiston)” (98b). Thus, in Socrates's early teleological theory, intellect arranges and orders each thing and the totality of things according to the value of good. Intellect causes everything to occupy its rightful place, and by doing so intellect is the source of particular and common goods. Comparing young and old Socrates's theories of intellect, it seems that both dramatis personae agree about the details of its causal powers. In both cases (1) intellect orders each and everything according to the good, (2) causes individual and common good, and (3) embraces all things together. The difference between the statements of one Socrates and the other, young and old, lies not in content, but merely in form: young Socrates portrays his theory of intellect in the form of an inference while old Socrates does it in the form of a critique.

In summary, then, (a) young Socrates heard about the causal role of the intellect in Anaxagoras’s book; then (b) conceived a schematic teleological explanation of intellect and
good; (c) subsequently, young Socrates read Anaxagoras’s work and became disillusioned with the explanation given about intellect; and finally (d) old Socrates tells how he understands the teleological role of intellect and uses an analogy to criticize Anaxagoras. It becomes easy to see that points (b) and (d) represent the narrative episodes when young Socrates devised a theory of teleology and when old Socrates stated what he thinks intellect causes.

2. **Socrates's Teleological Model**

Now, was Socrates really incapable of finding a teleological explanation? As we have seen, this cannot be true, since Socrates devised by himself a teleological theory of intellect that has persisted since his was young. But then what is the meaning of the final words of the first sailing? Since Socrates was deprived of a coherent explanation of intellect not only by Anaxagoras, but by all the Presocratics, we can conclude that no one was his teacher. Socrates believes that the Presocratics were more interested in coming up with ever more astonishing and dramatic causes rather than finding a suitable teleological *aitia* (99b6-c6). In this sense, Socrates's criticism can be understood as targeting and condemning all previous causation models for failing to incorporate intellect in their methods. But, importantly for my argument, that does not entail that Socrates was completely deprived of a teleological model.

As we have seen, young and old Socrates agreed in their opinions about intellect. Beyond this overlap in opinions is the fact that Socrates calls the project of finding a teleological explanation something every “man need examine” in order to explain *physis*. Likewise, a teleological theory seems to be a sufficient explanation of nature, since Socrates says he would not need another method to explain it. Finally, in just 15 Stephanus lines, Socrates repeatedly calls intellect the "true cause": intellect is the real cause of Socrates's permanence in prison and it is the true cause that unites the whole *cosmos*. In this case, the repeated use of *aletheia* in reference to the status of intellect as a cause shows that Socrates's speech about intellect is considered to be truthful.

From the evidence we can conclude that on the one hand, all these statements show the high esteem and value Socrates has for his own schematic explanation of intellect; on the other hand, as this theory is the product of his own intelligence, it can be maintained that Socrates discovers for himself the teleological function of intellect and regards it as a true cause. In conclusion, I have shown through textual evidence that it is impossible to deny the presence of a schematic theory of intellect in the first part of the intellectual biography (i.e. the first sailing). Although it is true that Socrates did not find a coherent theory of intellect in Anaxagoras’s writings, it is not true that he could not find one by himself. In that regard, the only possible interpretation of Socrates's failure seems to be ironic: in a self-deprecating manner, Socrates obscures the truth about teleology amongst the disappointment with the natural philosophers and lies to his audience about his incapability to find the real nature of intellect. But in reality, Socrates is himself the only person he needed to find the truth about the intellect.

3. **The Dynamis of Intellect According to Socrates**

What exactly then does Socrates believe intellect to cause? As a result of the analysis into the four different episodes and Socrates's *dramatis personæ* that was carried out we can finally answer this question. Socrates seems to believe the following to be true about intellect: (1) “that
[intellect] arranges (diaskomein) all things (ta pragmata)”; (2) that “[intellect] in arranging things arranges everything and establishes each thing as it is best for it to be”; (3) that intellect is “the power which causes things to be now placed as it is best for them to be placed”; (4) that it is the “more powerful and more immortal and more all-embracing cause”; and (5) that it is that “which must embrace and hold together all things.” Regarding Anaxagoras, Socrates thought that (6): “when he [Anaxagoras] assigned the cause of each thing and of all things in common he would go on and explain what is best for each and what is good for all in common.” Finally, (7) that “a man need examine nothing but what is best and most excellent; for then he will necessarily know also what is inferior.”

Socrates's intellect theory includes as its central tenet a cause that orders the universe in the best possible way. For Socrates intellect is a universal cause, since it affects all things, and also a systematic one, for intellect unites the objects of the physis without mixing them. In that sense, intellect is the most powerful of the causes, because it makes the world a complex unity where everything is interconnected. In Socrates's words it is possible to distinguish between intellect and the good, for the intellect uses the good as the criterion and principle for ordering the universe. What is the ontological status of this good? In Plato’s Timaeus 29a, it is affirmed that the divine craftsman, or intellect, was good. This statement has led some scholars to believe that intellect and the form of the good are one and the same. However, since the passage in Phaedo provides us with so little information about the nature of this good or best, as tempting as it is to identify them, I believe it is simply impossible to conclude whether the good of intellect is a form (or even the form of the good from the Republic). Rather than identifying its ontological status, it seems it is only possible to pinpoint the causal function of the good as some sort of paradigm of order. Thus we may say that before intellect the universe was in a chaotic state: intellect transformed chaos into order by acting upon the good, making the universe both good and an interconnected whole.

4. Conclusions

By ordering and dividing into distinct temporal sequences the closing section of the first sailing passage, we come to see that Socrates's early belief in the dynamis of intellect and his later criticism of Anaxagoras correspond in content and differ merely in form. Once each individual part of the narrative has been classified (public reading, inference about the causal role of intellect, disappointment, and late criticism with an analogy) it is possible to identify Socrates's views on teleology. For Socrates, the role of intellect should be to order the universe and make it a unity according to the paradigmatic value of the good. Additionally, Socrates did not find a logos of intellect as teleological cause in Anaxagoras’s work, but he was able to discover it on his own.

At the end of the passage (96a-99d) Socrates speaks of himself as having made a second sailing “in search of the cause.” What would be the place of teleological explanations within the second sailing? There is no further direct reference to final causality in the second sailing passage. As we saw, Socrates argues in the first sailing that an adequate explanation would make use of the true cause and necessary material conditions. Later, in the second sailing, Socrates reasons that the true causes are equivalent to the forms. In the second sailing, Socrates states one more time that a satisfactory explanation of generation and corruption must employ
real causes (now the forms) and necessary material conditions—what Socrates calls the “subtle explanation.” In this second and final attempt to explain the causes of generation and destruction, Socrates makes no explicit mention of intellect. Thus, the theoretical linkage among intellect, forms and necessary conditions is not anywhere in Phaedo and any attempt to establish it would be highly speculative. However, the lack of information does not mean that intellect is not a true cause in Socrates's causation model. Since the teleological theory presented in Phaedo corresponds schematically to the full teleological explanation of Timaeus (where it is once again intellect that orders everything and brings the cosmos into unity according to the value of the good and forms from a previous unordered state), for Plato, then, the problem with intellect and teleology in Phaedo is as follows: How does one articulate intellect and the forms in a coherent causal theory? In this regard, statements that relegate Plato’s interest in philosophy of nature and teleology to his later writings should be put into serious question.\(^{15}\)

**Notes**

1. Socrates's biographical account is divided by Socrates himself in two parts. The first part, called protos plous or first sailing, deals with Socrates's youthful readings of the Presocratics. The second part, called deuteros plous or second sailing, deals with Socrates's late discovery of the theory of ideas and the hypothetical method. The expression “deuteros plous” is used by Socrates himself to allude to the significant methodological change that came from rejecting the Presocratic method and replacing it with the hypothetical one. The expression “biographical passage” is found in the literature; it is the section of the dialogue where Plato’s Socrates relates his own philosophical training and background. The philosophical meaning, relevance, and scope of this section of the Phaedo have been amply discussed since the beginning of the 20th century. Generally speaking, there is a consensus among scholars that the information revealed about Socrates's philosophical training is Plato’s own creation, although certain minor details about the anecdote can be independently verified, such as the price and availability of Anaxagoras’s book in Athens and Socrates's early interest in “natural history.” Sometimes the passage is referred to as an “autobiography,” but the expression is misleading since the writer of the passage is not Socrates, but Plato.

   Further note that all Stephanus numbers in this text refer to the Phaedo.

2. Socrates's statements about intellect (nous) in the Phaedo have, according to some scholars, a “programmatic air” with regard to the teleological cosmology carried out in the Timaeus. See, for example, Sedley (1990, 359); Gregory (2000, 17); Lennox (2001, 195-96); Ariew (2002, 10-12); Cornford (1937, 174-75); Johansen (2004).

3. See Archer-Hind(1894, 92-93; 96-97; 156-162); Gaye (1901, 249); Goodrich (1903, 381-383); Shorey (1933, 534); Murphy (1936, 40-44); Robinson, R. (1953, 138; 143); Hackforth (1955, 127; 131-2; 146); Bluck (1955, 111; 166-167; 199); Raven (1965, 89); Lynn (1966, 464-465); Sayre (1969, 4-5); Vlastos (1969, no. 15 297-298); Burge (1971, 1-2); Gallop (1975, 176); Frede (1978, 28; 39-40); Burger (1984, 140-145); Bostock (1986, 149); Chen (1992, 33); Rowe (1993, 238-239); Stern (1993, 114-118); Ahrensford (1995, 166-169); Cerri (2003, 58-60); Gower (2008, 336); Betegh (2008, 96-97).

4. This passage reads: “Now I would gladly be the pupil of anyone who would teach me the nature of such a cause; but since that was denied me and I was not able to discover it myself or to learn of it from anyone else, do you wish me, Cebes, to give you an account of the way in which I have conducted my second sailing in quest of the cause?”

   English translations are always of Fowler (1966). Greek quotations are from E. A. Duke.
et al. (1995).

5. To my knowledge, the only scholars that have studied the place of teleology in other sections of Phaedo are David White (1989), David Sedley (1990) and Kenneth Dorer (1982).

6. Historia peri physeos, which can be translated as “investigation of nature” or “natural history,” was not only the title of many of the treatises of the Presocratics, but also the subject of these books: an investigation or research (historia) of the primary cause or causes of the origin, process and result of the universe or nature (physis) (Naddaf 2006, 17). In addition, historia peri physeos refers to the philosophical method for studying nature, the one rejected by Socrates: explaining the origin, process and result of nature from material causes such as fire, wind or human blood.

7. For a similar view on the rhetorical structure of the passage, see Robinson, T. M. (2008, 99; 102).

8. J. H. Lesher (1995) argues that gnome should not be understood as complete knowledge of the cosmic order, but as the power of decision. Anaxagoras’s intellect, then, does not know everything, but is rather the intelligent decision-making cause.

9. This passage reads: “And so one man makes the earth stay below the heavens by putting a vortex about it, and another regards the earth as a flat trough supported on a foundation of air; but they do not look for the power which causes things to be now placed as it is best for them to be placed, nor do they think it has any divine force, but they think they can find a new Atlas more powerful and more immortal and more all-embracing than this, and in truth they give no thought to the good, which must embrace and hold together all things.”

10. Twice as adverb (98e1, 99e5) and once as adjective (99a7).

11. Some of the claims in favor of the absence of teleology in the passage rely on a philological argument. Most translations of the passage seem to imply that since in the past Socrates was deprived of an argument about the teleological cause, then Socrates was never interested and will never be interested in finding a teleological explanation in the present. According to J. T. Bedu-Addo (1979a, 105-107), the impression of complete privation of the demiurgic cause comes from a mistranslation of the tense of the verbs στερέω (99c8: ἔστερήθη) and γίγνομαι (99c9: ἐγενόμην). The mistake consists in translating and interpreting ἔστερήθην and ἐγενόμην as if they were in the perfect present and not in the aorist tense. Translating the verbs as present perfect creates the impression that Socrates is still deprived of the teleological cause. If this interpretation is accepted, it follows from it that the search for a teleological cause has been a complete failure and, therefore, it has been abandoned altogether. Thus, young Socrates's statements about intellect would have not any sort of relation with the present from which old Socrates speaks. On the contrary, if the verbs are correctly translated as aorist, Socrates's privation refers to a specific past action which points directly to the experience caused by the reading of the treaty of Anaxagoras, but not necessarily means an absolute privation (Goodwin 2009, 24-26). In that sense, Socrates argues that he was deprived of a teleological cause by Anaxagoras, but he does not say that he continues to be deprived of one in the present time. Therefore, the supposed abandonment of the teleological cause Socrates speaks about should not be understood either retroactively or as prolonging into the future, but only in close and direct relation to Anaxagoras.


13. The passage presents a constant and repeated distinction between agathos (or belistos) of each particular thing and agathos of the common (or koinos). The particular good (to eskaton bestiston) manifests itself not only in the specific arrangement and place each thing occupies in the universe (for example why the earth is round and why it is in the center of the universe), but likewise in the particular actions of men. For example, the decision to stay in prison is the only possible outcome
that can come from Socrates's opinion of the good. Private and particular goods are, to that extent, articulated to the common good, which in both cases is caused by intellect. David White suggests, correctly in my view, that the distinction introduces the problem of how the individual good and the common good are articulated. This seems to be a pressing problem especially when the individual good and the common good do not seem to reconcile. For instance, if the individual good of Socrates—not to escape—and the common good of Athens—the respect of the law—match, what might be the particular good of Socrates's children if his father has to die? Between Socrates's particular good and that of his children, family, and Athens, there is an apparent conflict. Then, only knowledge of the good allows the agent to identify and understand the hierarchy and division of goods, and thus to be able to overcome the particular ethical interpretations and arbitrary actions of everyday life.

14. Although Bedu-Addo (1979a, 123–24); (1979b, 111) and Hans Krämer (1996, 80 n. 17) seem to think that there are.

15. A recent example is: Kahn (2014, xii).

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Bibliography


Gnosis 15.1 | 2016


