

The Turning Point

Introduction

For some time now I've had an interest in the **Dialogues** by Plato where Socrates plays a dominant role. Just about everyone has heard of these two men...inseparable, really...sometimes hard to distinguish one from the other. When dealing with people like these who have a kind of semi-divine status, there's a tendency to seek out where they came from or more precisely, from where they got their inspiration. This is an assumption pretty much accepted by anyone who does research. The source has to originate somewhere...anywhere... and getting there is of supreme importance.

In light of this one is therefore driven to go as far back as possible to get at the very root of an author's inspiration. Unfortunately less focus is upon the author in and by himself. Yes, that person may be responsible for some good stuff, but that isn't sufficient for the task at hand. He or she as being the absolute source cannot be true. There has to be some precedent, and our task is to seek it out. The insights which had been a direct inspiration can never come from this one person. So goes the prevailing prejudice. Such an attitude is harmful in the sense that it posits no single person as responsible for being inspired in such and such a way.

Admittedly I brought some of that attitude to Socrates. I had wondered where in the world he had obtained his insights, figuring that they didn't come from him. Yes, he did have his own ideas, but let's face it. They came from elsewhere. So one day when I was reading the **Phaedo** my dream came true. Behold, here in Socrates' very own words he acknowledged the source of his inspiration. Hence the reason for this article's title, Anaxagoras being the turning point for Socrates.

I figured if you pay close attention to Socrates' own account as to how he hit upon Anaxagoras, you've found something really valuable. The trouble is we have little information about Anaxagoras ¹. What's notable about him is that he had introduced the concept of *nous* (sometimes *noos*) or mind to explain how the cosmos was ordered. *Nous* is an impersonal force that set the universe in motion

¹**Anaxagoras of Clazomenae** by Patricia Curd goes into details as to his teaching which essentially is based upon fragments and mention by other ancient authors.

and established the basis for change. As for other meanings of this word besides the one associated with Anaxagoras as an active principle governing the universe, it involves perceiving, thinking, sense, wit and more widely as employed in feeling, deciding, etc. Anaxagoras believed that *nous* was separate from substances and could not be explained by the same principles that govern substances. *Nous* formed the cosmos in two stages: first, by mixing and revolving all the elements and second, by developing living things.

And so by paying close attention to how Socrates hit upon Anaxagoras is important as a way to see how he set out on his own unique path which he calls a “confused method of my own.” Such words have a way of automatically endearing one to Socrates. We know right away that we’re not going to deal with a self-styled sophist who thinks his contribution will change the world. It so happened, that such was the blessed result.

In light of this, I decided to pick out an excerpt from a dialogue other than the **Phaedo** (there are many candidates indeed) which turned out to be the **Symposium**. Here he centers around the very concrete notion of being pregnant. Also being pregnant presupposes focus upon the female element. The genius of Socrates is that he takes this bodily image and applies it to being pregnant with beauty. In sum, the **Symposium** excerpt demonstrates Socrates in action once he had decided to branch off on his own. That is, he was inspired by Anaxagoras’ original insight into *Nous* or Mind and applies it to real life situations. I.e., here *Nous* deals with ethical matters, not physical ones such as related to the planets, stars, etc. It seems that without saying it Socrates saw focus upon physical elements was a way of escaping pressing matters. Precise and impressive knowledge in that area could be a convenient disguise to hide what’s of real importance.

And so what we have here is an outline of an extended excerpt from both the **Phaedo** as well as the **Symposium**. The texts are presented sentence by sentence followed by notations however imperfect. In many ways that’s secondary. Of real value was simply the pleasure of presenting these observations. The English text is from **Plato Complete Works** edited by John M. Cooper (Indianapolis, 1997).

Phaedo 97b-98d

I do not any longer persuade myself that I know why a unit or anything else comes to be or perishes or exists by the old method of investigation, and I do not accept it, but I have a confused method of my own.

Socrates starts off in a typical self-effacing manner. He has persuaded himself (*peitho*, also as to prevail upon) to give up a former way of investigation, *tropos* and *methodos* or means and pursuit, scientific inquiry). Instead, Socrates prefers something he has discovered on his own which turns out to be one of the most important events in Western Civilization. The verb is *prosiemi* where the preposition *pros-* is indicative of direction towards-which. Socrates sticks with this *pros-*, if you will, even should it be confused, *phuro* also as to mix or to defile.

One day I heard someone reading as he said from a book of Anaxagoras, and saying that it is Mind that directs and is the cause of everything.

The small word *pote* as “one day” or at the time, then, is important because it sets the tone of a life-changing discovery that happened to Socrates, that is, without planning on it. However, all along he has been primed for such a change. The person reading from a book (*biblios* or scroll) is anonymous which contributes to a sense of drama as well as mystery when Socrates makes his discovery.

The author at hand, of course, is Anaxagoras...a so-called pre-Socratic...whose primary discovery was attributing mind or *nous* to be the direct and cause of all things (*pan*). *Nous* was presented in the Introduction. As for the two words at hand, they are *diakosmeo* and *aitios*. The former is a verb which centers around ordering but in a way which is becoming as well as thorough signified by the preposition *dia-* or through. The latter is an adjective, something like causing or being responsible for.

I was delighted with this cause and it seemed to me good, in a way, that Mind should be the cause of all.

Hedomai or to take pleasure with regard to *aitia* or cause (implies an occasion) which at the time seemed good to Socrates, *dokeo* also as to appear with the adverbial form of *agathos* (good) *eu-* often rendered as well. In other words, his delight or pleasure rested in that *Nous* + should be the cause of

everything, *aitios* and *pan*, both +.

I thought that if this were so, the directing Mind would direct everything and arrange each thing in the way that was best.

Ei touth' or "if so" suggests a possibility that may not come about. The issue, of course is *Nous* + as directing everything, *kosmeo* as to arrange, to set in a becoming as well as decorous order and *pan*, both +. Similarly *Nous* would set (*tithemi*, to place) each thing in a way that's best, *beltistos* being the superlative of *agathos* or good.

If then one wished to know the cause of each thing, why it comes to be or perishes or exists, one had to find what was the best way for it to be or to be acted upon or to act.

In order to know the cause of each thing (*heurisko*, to discover, to find out)—why it comes into existence, perishes or exists (*gignomai*, *apollumi* and *esti*)—the following three are necessary: *beltistos* + or best (superlative of *agathos*) as applied to *esti*, *pascho* and *poieo* or to be or it is, to bear or to suffer and to make, to produce.

On these premises, then, it befitted a man to investigate only about this and other things what is best.

Logos or word-as-expression is the noun for premises as pertaining to the three elements noted in the sentence above. They form the basis on which one does investigation as well as to what is best. The verb *proseko* also means to be at hand, to be present (*pros-* indicative of direction towards-which). Here it ties in with *skopeo* or to behold only this which is *Nous*. Also included are other things which are described as *aristos* and *beltistos* +, the former as best as the most virtuous or highest quality.

The same man must inevitably also know what is worse, for that is part of the same knowledge.

Similarly it's necessary (*anagkaios*) to know what is worse, *eido* also as to see, to perceive along with *cheiron* also as inferior. It serves to form the same knowledge or *episteme* which is acquaintance with a matter, skill or experience.

As I reflected on this subject I was glad to think that I had found in Anaxagoras a teacher about the cause of things after my own heart, and that he would tell me first whether the earth is flat or round, and then would explain why it is so of necessity saying which is better, and that it was better to be so.

Logizomai is the verb to reflect, more along the lines of to calculate or to reckon where Socrates concludes that he's glad (*asmenos*, also as well-pleased) to have found a teacher (*heurisko* + and *didaskalos*) in Anaxagoras. In other words, this man taught about the cause of things in accord with his own heart, *aitia* and *nous* (both +), the latter with the preposition *kata*, in accord with. This *aitia* pertains to natural phenomena. The way Socrates presents this as well as in subsequent sentences hints that he's not satisfied with the way Anaxagoras presents *Nous* and wishes to apply it to ethical and philosophical matters.

If he said it was in the middle of the universe, he would go on to show that it was better for it to be in the middle, and if he showed me those things I should be prepared never to desire any other kind of cause.

With regard to what Anaxagoras says about the earth's position in the universe Socrates concurs that he should be prepared never to desire any other cause. In sum, he should subscribe to Anaxagoras' position. *Paraskeuazo* or to prepare also means to get ready, *para-* or being beside as inferred, that is, a preparing done beside or close by oneself. Here the verb concerns never yearning after (*potheo*) any other *eidos*, literally that which is seen and is different from *aitia* or cause.

I was ready to find out in the same way about the sun and the moon and the other heavenly bodies, about their relative speed, their turnings and whatever else happened to them, how it is best that each should act or be acted upon.

Socrates states his readiness to follow what Anaxagoras proposes with regard to other celestial bodies, *paraskeuazo* + similarly used.

I never thought that Anaxagoras who said that those things were directed by Mind would bring in any other cause for them than that it was best for them to be as they are.

Here Socrates' faith in what Anaxagoras says concerning *Nous* comes into question. It's with regard to how *Nous* directs physical reality, *kosmeo* + more along the lines of putting in an order which is both decorous and becoming.

Once he had given the best for each as the cause for each and the general cause of all, I thought he would go on to explain the common good for all, and I would not have exchanged my hopes for a fortune.

Again, Socrates' faith comes into question with regard to *Nous* and *aitia* +. He thought Anaxagoras would explain the common good for all, a genuine disappointment. The verbal root at hand is *diegeomai* or to set out in detail prefaced with *epek* combined of *epi* and *ek*, upon and from. If Anaxagoras carried through on this, he wouldn't have exchange his hopes for anything, the verbal root *didomai* or to give prefaced with the preposition *apo-* or from.

I eagerly acquired his books and read them as quickly as I could in order to know the best and the worst as soon as possible.

Nevertheless, Socrates was eager to get at the root of things. He read everything by Anaxagoras in order to know or *oida* + both the best and worse. *Taxista* or the superlative of *taxus* (quick) show how eager Socrates was to find what he was hoping to discover.

This wonderful hope was dashed as I went on reading and saw that the man made no use of Mind nor gave it any responsibility for the management of things but mentioned as causes air and ether and water and many other strange things.

Socrates describes his hope or *elpis* as wonderful or *thaumastos*, marvelous. Unfortunately it was dashed, *oichomai* also as to be undone when he found out that Anaxagoras made no use of *Nous* +, *chraomai*. Similarly he failed to give *Nous* responsibility for managing things, *diakosmeo* +. Again this is an important word because it connotes a combination of order and beauty made all the more striking by reason of the preposition *dia* or through.

That seemed to me much like saying that Socrates' actions are all due to his mind, and then in trying to tell the causes of everything I do, to say that the

reason that I am sitting here is because my body consists of bones and sinews because the bones are hard and are separated by joints, that the sinews are such as to contract and relax, that they surround the bones along with flesh and skin which hold them together, then as the bones are hanging in their sockets, the relaxation and contraction of the sinews enable me to bend my limbs, and that is the cause of my sitting here with my limbs bent.

Socrates sees the basic flaw in Anaxagoras' system as a divergence between his action as supposedly due to his mind or *nous* + while trying to give an account of all his actions as coming from the interaction of his skeletal structure and the sinews binding it together.

Socrates mimics Anaxagoras by observing how his own body is composed of various elements working together so that he can function. There's another side to this physicality to which Socrates would subscribe and most likely does though he doesn't spell it out. That consists in being aware to our bodily functions which operate on their own, that is, automatically and blindly. By focusing on this blind activity in and by itself we discover that it insinuates a type of awareness which is transcendent by nature and governs these functions. Extending this out, we see it has universal application.

Paradoxically by focusing upon the corporal nature described in such a straight-forward as well as humorous way by Socrates we're able to come in contact with ultimate awareness or what Anaxagoras started off well with, *Nous*, that which had attracted Socrates but later made him go his own way. The reason? Such contact is direct by our awareness, no intermediary. When Socrates parts ways with anyone as is the case at hand, never does he leave with spite or anger. He has a unique way of realizing the facts and putting them out there for all to behold after which he walks away.

This may be taken as a small digression but it reveals the fundamental weakness not just in Plato's **Dialogues** but the whole of the Western approach to things. In sum the West lacks terms dealing with awareness or consciousness. If it had such words chances are we'd be in a much better place. Compare, for example, what comes from the East as in Buddhism. There we find an abundance of terms relative to awareness that could at least in part be applied to our tradition. Anyway, such is a comparison that came to mind while going through this section.

Now some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through child birth with immortality and remembrance and happiness as they think for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely are those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth.

At issue in this section lifted from the **Symposium** is being pregnant or *egkumoneo* literally according to the body (*kata* with *soma*) which is an attempt to attain immortality, remembrance and happiness: *athanasia*, *mneme* and *eudaimonia* (no death, memory). The last is perhaps the most significant of the three insofar as it represents a *daimon* or divine being within oneself which here is prefaced with *eu-*, the adverbial form of *agathos* (good). Being an adverb suggests that the *daimon* at hand is active, not static. Note that Socrates adds “as they think” or *oiomai* also as to suppose, this hinting at incompleteness and even can apply to what’s illusory.

On the other hand are persons who are pregnant according to the soul, *kata* with *psuche* or life principle, that which animates a person. This is more important that the above mentioned being pregnant with regard to the body. The former state befits (*proseko*: to be present; *pros-* or direction towards-which) the soul and needs to be brought forth through birth.

And what is fitting?

I.e., what is *proseko* + as just noted.

Wisdom and the rest of virtue which all poets beget as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative.

Gennetor or begetter, the task of poets and creative craftsmen: *poietes*, also as one who makes and *demiourgos*, literally as one who works for the public good modified by *heuretikos* also as inventive. Both as *gennetor* of *phronesis* and *arete*, the former as purpose or intent and the latter as the best of anything.

But by far the greatest and most beautiful part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice.

The superlative of *megas* and *kalos*, big and beautiful with regard to wisdom or *phronesis* + which deals with the *diakosmesis* of cities and households. This noun is comprised of *kosmos* or well-ordered arrangement prefaced with the preposition *dia-* or through. Such is another name for moderation and justice, *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune*, the former also as temperance.

When someone has been pregnant with these in his soul from early youth while he is still a virgin and having arrived at the proper age, desires to beget and give birth, he too will certainly go about seeking the beauty in which he would beget; for he will never beget in anything ugly.

Egkumon or pregnant (with regard to *psuche* + or soul) with the above mentioned *sophrosune* and *dikaiosune*, that is, from youth reaching to the proper age (*helikia*, prime of life). Such a person desires to beget and give birth (*tikto* and *gennao*). Thus he goes in search (*zeteo*) of the beauty (*kalos* +) in which he will beget. Note the wording: first comes the seeking and then comes the beauty, the place-where of begetting. In other words, *kalos* followed by *gennao* +. Such a person never will beget in anything (again, presence-in) that's ugly, *aischros* also as shameful.

Since he is pregnant, then, he is much more drawn to bodies that are beautiful than to those that are ugly; and if he also has the luck to find a soul that is beautiful and noble and well-formed, he is even more drawn to this combination; such a man makes him instantly teem with ideas and arguments about virtue—the qualities a virtuous man should have and the customary activities in which he should engage; and so he tries to educate him.

Being pregnant (*hueo*, also to conceive), such a person is drawn to bodies (*soma* +) that are beautiful instead of those that are ugly, *kalos* and *aischros* (both +). The verb at hand is *aspazomai* or to welcome kindly.

Hopefully he will have the good fortune to find a soul which is beautiful, noble and well-informed. The verb is *tugchano* or to hit upon prefaced with the adverbial form *eu-* with respect to *kalos* +, *gennaios* and *euphes*. The first pertains to being suitable to one's birth and the third being naturally suited or adapted. It too is prefaced with *eu-*. Thus he'll drawn to this combination, *aspazomai* + with *sunamphoteris* or both together, *sun-* as with.

Such a person at once (*euthus*) makes others be drawn to (*pros*, direction towards-which) him with ideas and arguments concerning virtue, *arete* +. The

verb is *euporeo*, another word prefaced with *eu-* meaning to prosper, thrive. Each person should have these qualities (*peri hoion*) a man of virtue should have, *agathos* + or good. By engaging in such activities a person will try to educate the soul described above in this section as beautiful and noble, *epicheiro* and *paideuo*. The former as literally to put one's hands upon and the latter as to bring up or rear a child, this continuing all one's life.

In my view, you see, when he makes contact with someone beautiful and keeps company with him he conceives and gives birth to what he has been carrying inside him for ages.

Oimai or to suppose, to think where Socrates speaks of someone who makes contact with a beautiful person and keeps company with him. *Hapto* + or to touch, to fasten upon with regard to *kalos* + and *homileo* also as to attend to, to be busy with. Both *hapto* and *homileo* enable one to conceive and give birth to what he or she has been carrying within for a very long time (*palai*, also as in olden times). Three verbs with regard to birth: *keuo*, *tikto* and *gennao* or to be pregnant, to beget and to be born or to produce.

And whether they are together or apart, he remembers that beauty.

The verb *eimi* or to be is prefaced with two opposite pronouns, *para-* or beside and *apo-* or from. In both cases one remembers such much beauty (*pan* +), *mimnesko* or to recall to memory.

And in common with him he nurtures the newborn; such people, therefore, have much more to share than do the parents of human children and have a firmer bond of friendship because the children in whom they have a share are more beautiful and more immortal.

Koinos or common with the verb *sunektrephe* or to rear up along with, that is, *trepho* prefaced with *sun-* and *ek-* or with and from.

Socrates then makes the amazing observation that natural bonds (*philia* also as friendship, affection) aren't as binding as bonds between those who share that which is more beautiful and more immortal, *kallos*² and *athanatos*. As for the bonds at hand, they rest upon the two prepositions *sun-* and *ek-* noted above, something not common with regard to physical birth.

²*Kallos* often is spelled as such compared with *kalos*.

Everyone would rather have such children than human ones and would look up to Homer, Hesiod and the other good poets with envy and admiration for the offspring they have left behind—offspring which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance.

A contrast between such children noted in the section above. This is mirrored in the poets Homer and Hesiod as well as in other good poets. They are presented so that people would look up to them, the verb *apoblepo* or literally to look away from (*apo*) with *eis*, into) them. The idea seems to be focusing attention upon one object and rejecting all others.

These notables create in us envy and admiration for their offspring, *zeloo* or to be jealous and *kataleipo* or to leave behind. Such offspring are immortal (*athanatos* +) and by reason of this, impart to their parents immortal glory and remembrance, *kleos* as report or fame and *mneme*. The verb is important, *parecho* or literally to have beside or *para-* with regard to such glory and remembrance.

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