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PLATO'S PHILOSOPHICAL DEFINITION OF *CATHARSIS*

Plato's *Sophist* contains a definition of catharsis which is seldom passed over by scholars dealing with various aspects of pollution and purification in ancient Greek culture and philosophy. Some of the scholars no more than just mention it,[1] others treat it as one of important passages,[2] and there are some who regard it as the essential passage for understanding the Platonic idea of purification, as well as the Aristotelian concept of catharsis in tragedy.[3]

The definition itself is very simple despite the fact that Plato divided it between two utterances of the Stranger. It says that each separation which leaves what is better and rejects what is worse is called καθαρμός (*Soph*. 226 d 5–10).[4] A few lines below we see that, at least for Plato, no significant difference exists

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[1] Cf. Pierre S o m v i l l e. *Essai sur la Poétique d'Aristote et sur quelques aspects de sa postérité*. Paris: Vrin 1975 p. 73. The author gives the following attributes to the definition: "mécanique et d'ordre physique". Robert Parker, in his *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in Early Greek Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1983 p. 18), treats it in the same way. Even Louis Perraud, in his *Katharsis in Plato* only mentions it, without noticing that he has to deal with a definition. See Louis P e r r a u d. *Katharsis in Plato. A dissertation* […] *in* […] *fulfillment* [sic] *of the requirements for the degree of doctor of Philosophy*. Indiana University 1979 [available on microfilms], p. 136.

[2] Cf. Elizabeth B e l f i o r e. *Tragic Pleasures. Aristotle on Plot and Emotion*. Princeton 1992 pp. 295–296.

[3] Cf. Stephen G. S a l k e v e r. *Tragedy and the Education of the Dēmos: Aristotle's Response to Plato*. In: *Greek Tragedy and Political Theory*. Ed. by J. Peter Euben. Berkeley 1986 pp. 283–284. The attention is paid there also mainly to a particular type of catharsis, the art of *elenchos* by which a sophist is defined.

[4] *Soph*. 226 d 5–10: "{ΞΕ.} […] τῆς δὲ καταλειπούσης μὲν τὸ βέλτιον διακρίσεως, τὸ δὲ χεῖρον ἀποβαλλούσης [ὄνομα] ἔχω. {ΘΕΑΙ.} Λέγε τί. {ΞΕ.} Πᾶσα ἡ τοιαύτη διάκρισις, ὡς ἐγὼ συννοῶ, λέγεται παρὰ πάντων καθαρμός τις."

between κάθαρσις and καθαρμός (*Soph.* 226 e 5–6). The author of Platonic *Definitions* does not hesitate, therefore, to write: "Κάθαρσις ἀπόκρισις χειρόνων ἀπὸ βελτιόνων" (*Def.* 415 d 4).

Being so simple, it is also very inclusive. The Stranger is aware of it: he distinguishes between two domains of purification, each embracing many varieties: purification dealing with the body and that concerning the soul.[5] One may not overlook this characteristic of the definition, because it may help to elucidate the difficulty which the Greek language presents to us by referring to many various physical phenomena, as well as human works, religious rituals and even moral acts with the words κάθαρσις, καθαρμός, καθαίρω.

The definition ought not to be neglected also because due to Plato's declaration that he is describing the καθαρτικὸν εἶδος (*Soph.* 226 e 1) and because of the place of the definition in the most remarkable example of dialectical divisions, it is intended not only to be inclusive, but also essential. It will remain, however, only one of hints which bring us closer to the Greek understanding of purification and cast some light on instances like the one in the famous Aristotelian definition of tragedy in *Poetics*, if we do not try to judge to what extent Plato is accurate. First, therefore, I shall examine whether the Greek purifications might be explained in terms of the Platonic definition, second, if purifications peculiar to Plato match his own general 'form'.

It would be an enormous task to inspect the cases of vocabulary of κάθαρσις in ancient Greek before Plato.[6] It is not necessary, either. The vocabulary of pollution and purification has already received a thorough treatment in *Le pur et l'impur dans la pensée des Grecs d'Homère à Aristote* by Louis Moulinier, in the chapter *Les mots et les intentions*.[7] The scope of this study is very large, Moulinier devotes much attention to purity in Plato's thought and to the ritual catharsis. The latter subject has been exhaustively discussed by Robert Parker in his book *Miasma. Pollution and Purification in early Greek Religion*.[8] I will try here only to reconsider briefly some of the authors' results.

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[5] Purifications of the body: *Soph.* 226 e 5 – 227 c 1, of the soul: 227 c 1 – d 11. Plato returns to the latter ones in the definition of the sophist in 230 a 5 – 231 b 8. He links also the ideas of purifying the soul and the body in *Cratylus*, where in the explanation of the name of Apollo he says that the god possesses the power of "καθαρὸν παρέχειν τὸν ἄνθρωπον καὶ κατὰ τὸ σῶμα καὶ κατὰ τὴν ψυχήν" (*Crat.* 405 b 3–4).

[6] It has been carried out by Daniel R. White in his dissertation *A Sourcebook on the Catharsis Controversy* (Florida State University 1984). I cannot refer to this work because of its difficult availability.

[7] Paris: Klinsieck 1952 pp. 152–176.

[8] See n. 1.

The physical cleansing is usually recognized as the first and basic denotation of cathartic vocabulary. As κάθαρσις is, at least from the linguistic point of view, nothing else than 'turning something καθαρός', it would be difficult to explain the physical catharsis without considering the physical purity, referred to by this adjective.

This adjective is usually translated as 'clean', 'neat', 'tidy' and assumed to have mainly a material value.[9] This cleanness may not be interpreted in terms of any particular process of cleansing: bathing, washing, winnowing, pruning, sifting. Hence arises a confusion, at least for a speaker of French: "La diversité des traductions de καθαρός indique que le français tient davantage compte de la nature de ces matières. L'emploi d'un mot unique par le Grec montre qu'il insiste surtout sur l'état de l'objet qui en est exempt".[10] This state often consists in being free from any external addition or admixture, like a clean man or pure gold. The concept of 'being itself, and not something else' may be applied, however, not only to physical objects, and we read e.g. about 'pure truth'.[11]

The meaning of καθαρός is not only negative. Often, it is clear that what the pure thing is deprived of is something abominable, repugnant, shameful.[12] Sometimes it is only undesirable. The bull Apis, venerated by Egyptians, is, according to Herodotus, "καθαρὴ τῶν προκειμένων σημηίων" (*Hist*. II 38, 6)[13] because it is devoid of any black stain, yet it does not mean that all other bulls are repulsive or vile in a way. We could rather say: they are just not as perfect as Apis is. It seems also that the idea of perfection allows to qualify as "καθαρά" objects which cannot lose their purity. Moulinier includes in this group all objects which "sont par eux-mêmes moins chargés de matière"[14]: light ones, like flour, steam, noble ones, like gold or light, the ones which take a higher place in the Greek Universe, like air and stars. All of them, considered as such, have properties close to those of fire and air, which are considered as the divine, life-bringing elements.[15] It is

[9] See M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 150.

[10] *Ibid*. p. 154.

[11] See *ibid*. p. 169.

[12] See *ibid*. p. 154.

[13] See *ibid*. p. 153.

[14] *Ibid*. p. 151.

[15] Already Anaximenes deemed air the vivifying element (see Diels–Kranz frg. A 5, and particularly A 10). Fire had this function in the conception of Heraclitus (see e.g. Diels–Kranz B 30) and even of Aristotle (see *Gen. Anim*. II 3, 736 b 2 –737 a 7).

natural that "le matériel se prolonge immédiatement dans le religieux",[16] and the pure light in Pindar's *IX Pythian ode* is the one which shines from Charites.[17]

Despite this diversity, Moulinier emphasizes "l'unité de la notion ancienne de κάθαρσις".[18] He leaves, however, to his reader the task of articulating this single idea. In order to accomplish it, first I shall try to find out a single idea which might describe various types of physical purity.

We could see that in certain cases the adjective καθαρός was referred to objects free from any external admixture, 'being just itself', while in some other cases it denoted things free from a bad admixture. Yet in some other instances, it was natural perfection that appeared to be the feature which καθαρός stressed. Presumably, the concept of perfection brings us closest to a single idea conveyed by this adjective. This concept does not allow for an easy explanation, i.e. an explanation that would not presuppose a vision of the world. It is hard, however, to imagine any account of perfection which would deny that what is perfect is better in some or every way than anything else. Moreover, this 'quality' of goodness results from what the perfect thing is rather than from its possible applications.

This notion of perfection may be assigned to all three types of being 'pure' that we have distinguished. What is free of any alien admixture attains the highest level of perfection it may reach. 'Pure' gold is perfect *as* gold, despite the fact that it is not suitable for production of rings. This perfection is more evident in the case of 'bad' admixtures. It is a natural property in the instances of the third group, that is the celestial bodies of various types.

However, the perfection of objects referred to by the word καθαρός is different from what we usually mean by 'perfection'. Our modern notion of perfection results from a transformation of the Greek notion of 'limit'. The word 'perfection' may be associated with the Greek adjective τέλειος. What links objects which were, according to Greeks, καθαροί, is rather a kind of intrinsic good quality. This objective state cannot be separated from an approval on the part of the speaker, as the pragmatic aspect of the language may never be detached from the semantic one. "Seulement notre façon de concevoir scientifiquement le monde le vide de plus en plus de toute valeur affective, tandis que [le Grec] le voyait, lui, rempli de valeurs hiérarchisées".[19] Therefore, a clean hand would be a hand in an favourable state, the one which is desired. Could it be a health hand? Moulinier

[16] M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 152.
[17] *Pyth*. IX 89a–90: "Χαρίτων κελαδεννᾶν | μή με λίποι καθαρὸν φέγγος".
[18] See p. 167.
[19] M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 167.

invokes many cases in *Corpus Hippocraticum*, in which this adjective should be translated as, if not 'sound', at least as 'cured'.[20]

Moreover, in the cases of things which allow addition or admixture, the idea of their better state is hard to be separated from the concept of being itself, free from anything external. A clean hand is free from any external element and, therefore, not impeded in its normal action. We may imagine, obviously, a condition in which some dirt on it would be desirable, as it seems necessary for soldiers of our times to have dirty faces. However, a Greek might say that as soldiers they are 'pure': Herodotus calls the good part of an army "τὸ καθαρὸν τοῦ στρατοῦ" not because the soldiers constituting it are physically clean, but because it is free from ἀσθενεῖς, the weak men.[21] As an army, it is 'clean', or rather 'pure', not impeded in 'being an army'. It seems that a Greek mind indulges more easily than our does in the right to separate an aspect from a thing and to *reify* it. At least, a Greek mind may sometimes see the same thing at once from many angles. Heraclitus, for example, says: "The sea — the purest and the foulest water, for fish drinkable and salutary, for men undrinkable and pernicious".[22]

We could conclude, therefore, that Plato seems closer than any modern lexicographer to the way in which his contemporaries conceived of the world. His definition of catharsis: rejecting what is evil, leaving what is good; corresponds very well to the idea of 'originally material' purity. Only things which allow an admixture may be subject to such a separation. Once devoid of the bad element they remain what they are, or at least, what the meaning of the name that people give them assumes them to be.

Unfortunately for us, the every-day ancient Greek language did not display the action of καθαίρειν or κάθαρσις as turning something καθαρός. These words in ancient Greek usage "ne désignent au propre qu'un nettoyage avec un objet sec, mais jamais un lavage".[23] The vocabulary expressing washing was too strong to be ever replaced by words from the family of καθαίρω. Nevertheless, the semantic link did not disappear and got revived in the second type of purity and purifications, those belonging to the medicine.

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[20] See *ibid*. p. 150.

[21] *Historiae* IV 135, 8–10: "[…] <ὡς> αὐτὸς [sc. Δαρεῖος] μὲν σὺν τῷ καθαρῷ τοῦ στρατοῦ ἐπιθήσεσθαι μέλλοι τοῖσι Σκύθῃσι, […]".

[22] "θάλασσα ὕδωρ καθαρώτατον καὶ μιαρώτατον, ἰχθύσι μὲν πότιμον καὶ σωτήριον, ἀνθρώποις δὲ ἄποτον καὶ ὀλέθριον". Diels–Kranz, frg. B 61. Translation by the author. Cf. W. K. C. G u t h r i e. *A History of Greek Philosophy*. Vol. I. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1962 p. 445.

[23] M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 156.

Κάθαρσις is for a Greek doctor, at least for the one trained in the earlier tradition,[24] almost identical with healing.[25] This association is due to the specific Greek conception of health, according to which health consists in the balance of the four humours in the human body: blood, phlegm, yellow and black bile, that should remain in harmony.[26] If one of these substances or of one their composites is in excess, the body either evacuates it itself or requires that a doctor provokes a purification. Evacuation not associated with healing may receive the qualification of κάθαρσις provided that it "tâche de produire ou de rétablir un ordre, une harmonie".[27]

It could be difficult to deny the association of this type of catharsis with the physical purification, even though some evidence discussed by Parker may suggest its links with the religious conception of disease.[28] It is worth noting, too, that the usage of the word κάθαρσις in medical texts goes beyond the range of application of this word in informal language. While in every-day ancient Greek it could only be referred to 'dry cleansing', in medical texts a κάθαρσις may be performed by a bath.[29] The most striking thing is that discharges like bleeding of a wound are never called catharsis. Even if purification yields death, as Moulinier assures, "l'évacuation en elle-même, la catharsis, est un bien",[30] it is something good, because it always aims to remove the dangerous or unnecessary factors from our body. For the second time, therefore, we may feel compelled to acknowledge that Plato was very close in his insight to the intentions of the language of his contemporaries.

The remaining types of purification might be referred to by the general qualification of 'ritual catharsis'.[31] Ritual pollution and purification in ancient Greece was a complex phenomenon which admits different approaches. Mine one will be

[24] Cf. P a r k e r. *Miasma* p. 214.

[25] Moulinier devotes a big passage of his work to various particular aspects of medical purification (pp. 158—166). Here, I take under consideration only the most general of them.

[26] Cf. e.g. H i p p o c r a t e s. *De natura hominis* 4, 1–7: "Τὸ δὲ σῶμα τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἔχει ἐν ἑωυτῷ αἷμα καὶ φλέγμα καὶ χολὴν ξανθήν τε καὶ μέλαιναν, καὶ ταῦτ᾽ ἐστὶν αὐτέῳ ἡ φύσις τοῦ σώματος, καὶ διὰ ταῦτα ἀλγέει καὶ ὑγιαίνει. Ὑγιαίνει μὲν οὖν μάλιστα, ὁκόταν μετρίως ἔχῃ ταῦτα τῆς πρὸς ἄλληλα κρήσιος καὶ δυνάμιος καὶ τοῦ πλήθεος, καὶ μάλιστα μεμιγμένα ᾖ· ἀλγέει δὲ ὁκόταν τι τουτέων ἔλασσον ἢ πλέον ᾖ ἢ χωρισθῇ ἐν τῷ σώματι καὶ μὴ κεκρημένον ᾖ τοῖσι ξύμπασιν."

[27] M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 167.

[28] See P a r k e r. *Miasma* p. 213–216.

[29] See M o u l i n i e r. *Le pur et l'impur* ... p. 160.

[30] *Ibid*. p. 166.

[31] In my treatment of 'ritual catharsis', I rely mainly on the information provided by Robert Parker in *Miasma*. In the case of each type of ritual purification, I try to find its essential traits taking under consideration facts and interpretations presented by this book.

very restricted. I shall abstract from purificative ceremonies, from legal, theological, political, and even linguistic aspects of purification, because in order to know whether Plato's definition is accurate we need only to see what a purification was as such.

A big part of ritual purifications consisted in getting rid of a blemish, a μιάσμα, either by necessary operations or rites, or by allowing time to restore purity. There is, however, no one μιάσμα, different situations and deeds entail pollution: death, birth, sexual intercourse, curse, disease or folly engender a type of μιάσμα, requiring various observances. It seems hard to show that they might be conceived of as something one.

The body of a dead man causes pollution to everyone coming into contact with it.[32] Pollution is contagious, it passes onto everyone touching the polluted man, if he has not yet purified himself. It should not be avoided by the relatives of the dead, but all other people should protect themselves from it, particularly the priests. Shrines, and other places devoted to gods, must be protected from it, too, because the gods hate it in particular, except, of course, for the gods of the underworld. The corpse itself is not polluted, either.

We might say that this pollution represents death itself. Parker emphasizes the passage from *Antigone* of Sophocles, where pollution is identified with tiny fragments of the corpse.[33] It possesses, therefore, a quasi-material character.

Birth produces similar pollution, only less dangerous one.[34] This types of pollution may seem more mysterious for us than the former one, since it does not allow for an easy explanation. One might say that it accentuates, too, the barrier between death and life. The child and his mother were probably perceived as belonging for a certain time to a hostile world. Parker, by insisting that it lasted as long as the most dangerous period for the mother and the child, resolves, presumably, the difficulty: the pollution comes from death which is close to them.[35]

Murder also provokes pollution.[36] It is contagious as the former types, but it does not result only from the contact with the corpse of a murdered man. It is born in the very act of assassination and may be perceived in two ways: either as a stain of blood remaining on the hands of the killer and those who approach him, or as the rage of the victim's shadow, represented by demons (ἀλάστορες), which affects the murderer and all who, even unwittingly, impede the revenge. This

[32] See P a r k e r. *Miasma* pp. 32–48, 64–66.
[33] *Ibid*. p. 44. Cf. S o p h o c l e s. *Antig*. v. 999–1015.
[34] See *ibid*. pp. 48–66.
[35] *Ibid*. p. 65.
[36] See *ibid*. pp. 104–143, 367–374.

'double nature'" of pollution of murder is reflected in the double character of the rites of purification: they involve a kind of cleansing of the invisible stain, with fire and blood of sacrificed animals, and a ceremony of accepting the murderer to a new family in another *polis*, as if he acquired a new identity.

One might say that the two paradigms of pollution caused by bloodshed need not be mutually exclusive. The society must restore the internal order, δίκη must be paid to the one deprived of his life and to the family deprived of its member. This necessity alters the status of the killer himself. Having committed the crime, he is not the same man. One cannot see it, but were he the same as before, there would be no reason to persecute him; after all he does not possess the life of the killed one. The consequences, both moral and social, of his evil act seem to materialize in the pollution which he incurs.

Pollution entailed by a sexual intercourse had less grave consequences.[37] It only did not allow to enter shrines and take part in celebrations. A short period of abstinence, different for different cults, was sufficient to expel it. Priests had to observe chastity for longer periods, and some cults might have proposed a higher ideal of chastity, however, rather a temporary one.

Ancient Greece did not know any other types of pollution associated with sexuality. Chastity or abstinence from a particular form of sexual behaviour was required in some situations either by law or by custom, but a person who did not obey them was not deemed impure. It is not easy, therefore, to explain why human sexuality was so abominable to most gods. Parker insists on separation between private and public life, signified by this pollution, and on the fact that a human presenting himself before a god should respect him by physical cleanness. The diverse secretions associated with sex were perceived as dirty substances, and being free from their traces could be incorporated in the ritual requirement of physical purity.

Why, therefore, was it not sufficient to take a bath to approach a shrine? Why did many other domains of life not need such a separation? An answer to these question should rather be given by a student of religions, not by someone who is interested in definitions. Could sex be conceived of as something human, a necessity of mortals, who *need* to procreate while gods only *may* procreate? It will be enough for us to say that this pollution expressed a state, acquired by a sexual intercourse, which did not allow to face gods. One should also remember that gods were perfect creatures in comparison with mortals and that it is little probable that a state of men appelling to gods might have ever been a perfect state.

[37] See *ibid*. pp. 75–102.

Gods could have been offended not only by a man stained with sex. Failing to dress suitably, bringing to the shrine objects disliked by gods, produced pollution associated with sacrilege.[38] Obviously, these were only its slightest forms; presence of a killer in a temple, robbery in it, entering the forbidden area, failing to pay debts to a sanctuary, mutilation of sacred images, neglecting the most sacred of gods' privileges: the rights of suppliants and of herolds — all these acts of disrespect towards gods engendered a pollution. The pollution expressed itself in exclusion from worship and in the threat of divine vengeance.

Disease could have been conceived of as pollution, too.[39] In earlier conceptions, disease was a kind of impurity, or rather disorder, caused by divine anger or caprice, and was driven away by sacrifices and baths. When the 'scientific' medicine emerged and when the Greeks realized the existence of natural causes of sickness, the earlier approach lingered on partly in the practices of priests of Asclepios, and partly in superstition. The old idea of intrusion into the human body was passing away, together with the particular conception of νόσος which comprised not only physical sickness, but also many other 'bad things' i.e. various unfortunate conditions oppressing men: madness, bad luck, bewitchment, consequences of evil omens and dreams, even love which is uncalled for.[40]

The types of pollution considered until now betray a few common characteristics. Each of them is a state, a condition which many people may happen to acquire. Very often, this state does not allow the affected ones to contact either other people or gods. The polluted one is shunned because he is different, even though the difference might be not visible. It is not the society which tries to separate itself from the murderer and invents the pollution, it is rather the murderer himself who becomes other than the rest of the society. The society would not admit that it persecutes or avoids someone without any reason, and this reason remains in the culprit. Sometimes it is only a consequence of his act and cannot be seen, but it is something in him.

Pollution is a good name for such a deviation from the normal human condition. All the 'ritual' pollutions considered hitherto result from, or rather just *are*, states worse than the normal condition. Getting into contact with a dead man brings us closer to the underworld, to the end of our lives. A new-born baby and his mother are both in grips of death. A murderer is someone dangerous and carries death in himself which he should repay as his δίκη. The bad condition of a sick man is easily visible. It needs more effort to realise the misfortune of the unlucky one, but

[38] See *ibid*. pp. 145–190.
[39] See *ibid*. pp. 206–256.
[40] Cf. P a r k e r. *Miasma* pp. 220–222.

the misfortune remains in him in the same way. The one who cannot offer sacrifices, hated by gods, bears either a mark of sexuality, or consequences of his offense. In all these cases there is something like a stamp of evil, which may be removed, analogous to the unpleasant dirt referred to by the word μιάσμα.

All purifications, whatever are the procedures are used, attempt to remove this stamp of evil. So far, therefore, we are not remote from the Platonic sense of the word κάθαρσις.

In the remaining ritual purifications, a particular group of purifications leading to salvation may be easily discerned as best defined and most important ones. These purifications are associated with the religious movements alternative to traditional beliefs: Orphism, Pythagoreanism, and the religion preached by Empedocles. Maenadism and religion of mysteries might be included here, too, but only to the extent to which the Orphics adopted the rites of these cults.[41]

In these beliefs purification is the reverse of the purifications of traditional religion, because it aims to separate believers as much as possible from the 'normal' life of mortals. Empedocles in his *Καθαρμοί* expounds the reasons for purification: men are δαιμόνες banished from Olympus because of their crimes.[42] The proper human state is the divine one, but in order to return to it, one must release himself from the forms of life characteristic of mortals. There are many methods to achieve it, but all of them are dubbed purifications. All of them lead to a 'pure life'. Maenadism and Eleusian mysteries might be adopted as such methods (however, rather by the Orphics) as well as, probably, the study of truth.[43]

Pythagorean and Orphic conceptions were presumably slightly different. There are too few testimonies to reconstruct the precise doctrine of Pythagoreans on salvation. In the Orphic views, the divine element in men was made up by the remains of body of Dionysus. The god was resuscitated by Zeus from the ashes of Titans who had devoured him, but the titanic part of these ashes, with an admixture of the divine element, served as a material to create men. Men may discharge their titanic part through various purifications and become gods.

In all these purifications men are supposed to return (at least partly) to their 'pure' state, free from admixture of alien elements. It must not be overlooked, however, that these alien elements are substances lower in rank and worse in character than divine element which forms the true nature of men. One might say, therefore, that this particular type of purifications which impressed Plato so much matches very well his definition from *The Sophist*.

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[41] See *ibid*. pp. 281–307.

[42] Cf. part. Diels–Kranz frg. B 115.

[43] Cf. G u t h r i e. *A History of Greek Philosophy* vol. I pp. 206–207.

We have still one more type of purifications to consider: the purifications not having a clearly defined object. This type includes purification of the city by expulsion of scapegoats, purification of a shrine, washing statues of gods, purificatory sacrifices and ceremonies before people's assembly, before mysteries, or just before entering a shrine.[44] One should include here also monthly offerings to Hecate. All these purifications have, according to Robert Parker, a double function. Firstly, they separate different periods of human life and, within these periods, they separate moments of contact with the sacred from the profane rest.[45] Secondly, they "create or restore value".[46] One might say that the new period or status they create is better than the former one, even though we do not know what the defilement of the former consisted in.

Considering even these vague cases of purification we may not escape the ideas mentioned in the general definition of Plato. It seems that all Greek purifications embody the 'form' that Plato discovers in his analysis. Are we not, however, the victims of Plato's approach to the language?

It is doubtful that ancient Greeks of Plato's times conceived of catharsis as separating good from evil. Even in *The Sophist* Theatetus does not know which name he should have given to such a separation, and only the Stranger from Elea knows the correct answer to his own question (*Soph.* 226 d 5–10). Each of them adopts a different attitude: Theatetus resembles a ordinary man, perceiving meanings of words by the things these words denote; the Stranger, a philosopher, looks for an εἶδος, a common form. We do not learn anywhere in *The Sophist* that εἶδος might be also a separate form, but was not it the Eleatic principle of "τὸ γὰρ αὐτὸ νοεῖν ἐστίν τε καὶ εἶναι"[47] that enabled the 'discovery' of these forms?

According to the doctrine of *Cratylus*, the structure of language reflects the relations between ideas, however, only in so far as the Law-giver, the creator of a particular language was a good imitator of the ideal world.[48] The Stranger only avails himself of the existing order of the language, but to his interlocutor this order is concealed. A philosopher re-establishes it in his mind.

For us, the Stranger resembles rather a law-giver from *Cratylus*. Where we hardly see anything more than a bundle of meanings and metaphors, he introduces a strict definition. His definition embraces the current usages and allows new pos-

[44] See P a r k e r. *Miasma* pp. 18–31, 257–280.

[45] Cf. *ibid.* p. 23.

[46] *Ibid.* p. 31.

[47] Diels–Kranz: Parmenides B 3, 7.

[48] Cf. *Crat.* 388 c – 390 d for the Law-maker, 422 b – 424 a for imitation through names, 430 a – 432 d for possibility of imperfect imitation, 438 e – 439 c for ideas as the proper object of language.

sible applications of the idea of purification. It owes this characteristic to the fact that Plato's insight unveils the principle of the metaphoric applications of the concept of κάθαρσις. It is, nevertheless, evidently corrective: the Greek rarely confuses types of purity and procedures of κάθαρσις, i.e. rather physical cleansing, and καθαρμός, a ritual purification.[49]

Such a definition may yield double consequences: firstly, for the development of the Greek language, secondly, for its students. It would be difficult to verify if this definition influenced the actual way of speaking of ancient Greeks. Any attempt shall, obviously, start from Plato himself. It also seems improbable that Plato managed to change the current Greek, it would be worth it, however, to look for some evidence in scientific texts. Plato's insight is more important for a scholar of Greek language and Greek ideas, mainly because it facilitates the difficult task of laying aside for a while our own ideas and associations when they veil for us the concepts of Greeks.

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[49] Cf. P a r k e r. *Miasma* p. 4.

PLATOŃSKA FILOZOFICZNA DEFINICJA *KATHARSIS*

S t r e s z c z e n i e

Artykuł stanowi próbę weryfikacji trafności definicji formy κάθαρσις, jaką Platon daje w *Sofiście* (*Soph*. 226d 5-10 jako καθαρμός, 226e 5-6 utożsamiony z κάθαρσις), a którą streszcza autor *Definicji Platońskich* jako „oddzielenie tego, co gorsze, od tego, co lepsze" (*Def*. 415d 4). W tym celu dokonano przeglądu różnych typów oczyszczeń i różnych typów μιάσμα, znanych kulturze greckiej, a zaprezentowanych w publikacjach Louisa Mouliniera i Roberta Parkera.

Oczyszczenie jest przywróceniem stanu czystości. Stan ten, określany przez Greków słowem καθαρμός, był rozumiany przez analogię do stanu czystości fizycznej. Czystość fizyczna, niezależnie od sposobu, w jaki została osiągnięta, jest dla Greków stanem bycia sobą, wolności od domieszek. Z tego względu jest pożądana jako stan dobry. W tym też sensie człowiek zdrowy jest człowiekiem czystym.

Nazwa κάθαρσις stosuje się wszelako w języku greckim wyłącznie do oczyszczenia na sucho, bez użycia wody, oraz do uleczenia, w tym wypadku już w dowolny sposób. Natomiast nazwa καθαρμός jest używana jedynie na oznaczenie oczyszczeń rytualnych.

Wydaje się, że cel wielu oczyszczeń rytualnych można ująć jako usunięcie piętna zła. Przez jakiś zły postępek lub przez kontakt ze złem, ze śmiercią, przez obrazę bogów pojawia się na konkretnym człowieku rodzaj niewidocznego brudu, μιάσμα. Brud ten stwarza barierę między owym człowiekiem a bóstwem lub społeczeństwem. Jego usunięcie, analogiczne do obmycia się z brudu, pozwala na powrót do społeczności i ponowienie czynności sakralnych.

W kulturze greckiej istniały ponadto oczyszczenia rytualne o charakterze zbawczym. Dzięki nim miało być możliwe zbliżenie człowieka do bogów. W koncepcji Empedoklesa służą one oczyszczeniu dajmona, którym w istocie jesteśmy, ze wszystkiego, co ziemskie; mit orficki pozwala w nich widzieć oddzielenie boskiej cząstki w nas od tego, co śmiertelne. Nie wiadomo jednak, jak dokładnie rozumiano wiele rodzajów oczyszczenia zbawczego. Zapewne też nie zawsze było to jasne dla ludzi, którzy takie oczyszczenia praktykowali. Dokonywano także wielu oczyszczeń o zupełnie niejasnym przedmiocie i celu.

Oczyszczenia rytualne można by przeto, zgodnie z intencją Platona, ująć jako rodzaj oddzielenia zła i dobra, podobnie jak przywrócenie czystości fizycznej i uleczenie, lecz należy zarazem pamiętać, że jest to już interpretacja nałożona na grecki uzus i związane z nim intencje. Interpretacja taka uznaje za mało istotne dwa fakty: to, że dla Greka słowa κάθαρσις i καθαρμός nie miały tego samego znaczenia, oraz to, że często nie był on w stanie w danym typie oczyszczenia wyraźnie wskazać dobrego z natury przedmiotu oczyszczenia i usuwanego zeń w jakiś sposób zła.

Definicja Platona nie oddaje więc istotnego, choć być może dla nie-filozofów niejawnego sensu greckich słów κάθαρσις i καθαρμός. Platon raczej sens ten modyfikuje: przekształca w ścisły i filozoficzny termin coś, co dla Greków było tylko zbiorem niezbyt jasno zdefiniowanych słów i wiążących się z nimi podobnych, lecz zarazem licznych i w szczegółach odmiennych idei.

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Słowa kluczowe: Grecja starożytna, religia, filozofia, Platon, *katharsis*, *katharmos*, oczyszczenie.

Key words: ancient Greece, religion, philosophy, Plato, *katharsis*, *katharmos*, purification.