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| Abstract | <p>The <i>Theaetetus</i> and the <i>Sophist</i> depict one of Plato’s most well-known ideas about thought, namely, the dialogue of the soul with itself. Unfortunately, what Plato means by this has been obscured by three habits in the scholarship: (1) to consider the notion as being self-evident, (2) to treat it as being about the immaterial and universal language of thought, and (3) to understand it through the distorting lens of the Christian-modern idea of inwardness and inner private space. I argue for a more tentative reading of “inner dialogue,” where its localization is understood in terms of “physical distinction” and its meaning is construed around Plato’s ideas of polyphony and “microcommunity.” We thereby learn that thinking is a psychophysical process associated with breathing and that it consists of a “coming-together” of multiple “voices.” “Inner dialogue” is mirrored in the overall structure of Plato’s works, and it represents the very way philosophical debate ought to be conducted.</p> | |
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Chapter 4

Plato and the “Internal Dialogue”: An Ancient Answer for a New Model of the Self

Alexandru-Ovidiu Gacea

4.1 Introduction

There has recently been a renewed interest in the dialogical aspect of the human mind. Not only in philosophy (of mind)¹ but also in neuroscience² and cognitive psychology³ is it readily accepted that the mind is “somewhat disunified” and opaque to itself that there is no immediate way to (consciously) access all the resources of the mind (Dennett, 1992). Moreover, we are now able to ascertain the dual or even manifold structure of our brain, and the fact that the activity of the brain consists of millions of different operations occurring per second without us having any awareness of it. It appears that there is, nevertheless, a mediate (and limited) access to the mind’s resources. Scholars have started to give serious consideration to the idea that (self-)consciousness or conscious thought usually unfolds as an “internal dialogue.” This dialogue would be responsible for assuring the “communication” between different parts of the brain and the “transparency” of some of the processes or operations of the mind.

However, these different fields of knowledge diverge on how we should understand this phenomenon. Although the starting point is always the same, namely, the intuitively familiar phenomenon of an “inner voice,” its meaning, role, and purpose and even origin are differently construed in each disciplinary context. For some,⁴ the internal dialogue is actually a monologue, and it represents a mental phenomenon

¹ To mention only some representative works: Ryle and Kolenda (1979), Gadamer (1989), Dennett (1991), and Blachowicz (1998).

² See Alderson-Day et al. (2015, pp. 110–120).

³ See Gazzaniga (1985), Fernyhough (1996, pp. 47–62) and Alderson-Day and Fernyhough (2015, pp. 931–65).

⁴ I partially base my classification on the one realized by Blachowicz (1999, pp. 177–200).

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25 accessible to or even constitutive of (self-)reflection, i.e., the capacity of the human
 26 mind to think of something internally, to evaluate it and criticize it, and to exercise
 27 introspection. For others,⁵ it is the internalization of the social or interpersonal dia-
 28 logue.⁶ Inner dialogue is not a kind of “subvocal rehearsal,” but it represents the
 29 nature of “higher mental functions,” in other words, functions that are essentially
 30 conscious, voluntary, and mediated and originate in social activity and interaction
 31 (Fernyhough, 1996). This means that the subject that carries a conversation with
 32 itself “takes on the voices of others,” that is to say, the others’ particular perspectives
 33 on reality, their belief and value system or set of attitudes toward reality. Dialogical
 34 thinking signifies the ongoing interplay between different perspectives on reality or
 35 the “simultaneous accommodation of multiple perspectives upon a topic of thought”
 36 (Fernyhough, 2008, pp. 232–233). According to this view, inner dialogue is not
 37 necessarily explicit, and it does not even need to appear *as* dialogue. It is not a men-
 38 tal phenomenon accessible to consciousness, but a capacity constitutive of consci-
 39 ousness.⁷ And there is a third way⁸ of conceiving dialogic thought, where it is less
 40 shaped by interpersonal conversation and more a phenomenon inseparably linked to
 41 the structure of the brain. In this case, it represents a genuine reciprocal “conversa-
 42 tion” between two sides, two distinct “voices”: one “more adept at articulation” or
 43 conceptual and the other one more intuitive or experiential (Blachowicz, 1999).

44 But where does this idea of the dialogic mind even come from? Because, to
 45 whatever extent it may be derived from the structure of the brain itself, it still has a
 46 history and a cultural context of origin, namely, ancient Greece. Even though all of
 47 these theories mention Plato’s seminal definition of thought as a “dialogue of the
 48 soul with itself,”⁹ this is only done *en passant* without giving too much attention to
 49 Plato or to the transformations that the notion underwent and to the tradition it
 50 engendered. I argue that by striving to understand Plato’s theory, to contextualize it,
 51 and to distinguish it (if possible) from the way the Christian and the modern philo-
 52 sophical tradition appropriated it and construed it, we can better understand some of
 53 our essential philosophical problems and difficulties concerning the *self* and
 54 *consciousness*.

55 The aim of this paper therefore is to revisit Plato’s idea of a “dialogue of the
 56 soul” without reading it through the distorting Christian-modern lens, i.e., the tradi-
 57 tion of “mental language,” “inner word,” and “inwardness.” I actually claim that our
 58 own way of seeing the dialogic mind is less indebted to the former than to the latter.

⁵For example: Fernyhough (1996, 2015).

⁶This is what the cognitive sciences call a developmental view of inner speech. According to this approach, inner speech represents the “endpoint of a developmental process involving the gradual internalization of linguistic (and other) semiotic exchanges with others” (cf. Fernyhough & McCarthy-Jones, 2013).

⁷Cf. Fernyhough (1996, p. 52): “consciousness requires at least the ability to ‘see’ an element of reality in different ways at the same time.” Thus, the key feature of dialogic thought is “the ability simultaneously to adopt multiple orientations to reality.”

⁸For example: Blachowicz (1999) and Gazzaniga (1974, 1985).

⁹*Theaetetus*, 189e-190a and the *Sophist*, 263e-264b. Translation (with slight modifications) is taken from Plato. *Complete Works* (1997).

One may consider this the source of our present difficulties in using the model of dialogic thought to *objectively* explain consciousness, because it always sends us back to a subjective feature of conscious experience. The “inner voice” is something most (if not all) of us experience, but in order to objectively understand this phenomenon, we need to go through the first-person perspective or the subject’s privileged access to his own interiority.

Our current research on conscious thought is permeated by specifically *modern* tension between subjectivist and anti-subjectivist orientations. Even our most “objective” ways of explaining conscious thought and the self cannot elude the metaphysical break between the internal and the external, the subjective and the anti-subjective, and the first-person and the third-person perspective. I claim thus that the “strangeness” of Greek thought, Plato in particular, could play an important role in our current debates, precisely because it does not recognize the aforementioned tension and because it seems to have a different meaning for “interiority” and “inwardness” and even to exclude the idea of privileged access to an “inner world.” What we can find instead is a polyphonic and *koinonic* view of the self. In other words, the dialogue that constitutes the human being is not only “dual” but polyphonic—it is a conversation between multiple (objective) “voices,” and it isn’t subjective but “communal.” It is more like a “thinking-together” than something characteristic to a private inner life. Inner dialogue refers to the nature of the thinking soul, and, thus, it represents a real conversation between different points of view or *voices* that constitute the soul as an embodied and communal entity.

4.2 The “Dialogue of the Soul with Itself” in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*

The theme of the dialogic relationship that the $\psi\upsilon\chi\eta$ entertains with itself appears explicitly in the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist*.¹⁰ Naturally, one could argue that “dialogicity” represents one of Plato’s main concerns throughout the dialogues.¹¹ However, I prefer to isolate the way the issue is treated in these two dialogues, because stating *explicitly* that thought is the “dialogue of the soul with itself” appears to be indicative of a particular Platonic outlook on thought and selfhood. I claim that Plato is subtly moving away from a *descriptive* perspective, the way thought has always been conceived in Greek culture, toward a *prescriptive* one, the philosophical appropriation and reinterpretation of this cultural trait. I thus propose not to treat this notion as being self-explanatory.

We should not ignore the fact that the discussion about the soul’s silent dialogue occurs in both works in the context of establishing the possibility of falsehood and

¹⁰There is a third passage about the “internal dialogue” in the *Philebus* (38c-e), but this is more of an example than a description of dialogic thought.

¹¹ See Gill (1996), Gill and McCabe (1996), Gonzalez (1998), Cossutta and Narcy (2001), Corrigan and Corrigan (2004), Long (2013), etc.

95 of having false beliefs. If in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates seems to reject, by appealing
 96 to the notion of thought as “silent dialogue,” the possibility of false belief in terms
 97 of ἀλλοδοξία, “other-judging” (189b10-190e4), in the *Sophist*, the image of dia-
 98 logic thought is introduced after asserting the existence of falsehood and of false
 99 *discourse*. The reasoning is the following: if we can speak falsely (if our speech can
 100 “weave” together things that are not linked, e.g., “Theaetetus” and “flying”), then
 101 that means we can also think falsely given that thought is a form of λόγος. This
 102 doesn’t appear to say a lot about the virtues of dialogic thinking since it cannot
 103 guarantee truth.

104 One way to look at it is to say, as some scholars have done, that Plato is looking
 105 to criticize, in the *Theaetetus*, the image of thinking as “mental grasping,” which is
 106 fashioned on the model of “holding or grasping something in our hands” (Barton,
 107 1999). Plato’s solution, in the *Sophist*, would thus be to see thought as a gradual and
 108 partial process: we can only think of a thing “under one or more of its aspects,”
 109 under one or more concepts, because when we think of a thing we “say” different
 110 things *about* it. Another way to understand the discussion about falsehood and inter-
 111 nal dialogue is to say that error or falsehood in thought appears at a conceptual level,
 112 that is, when we incorrectly employ the common concepts, when we apply them
 113 unreflectively and implicitly to sense experience (e.g., Frede, 1989); or falsehood is
 114 due to the linguistic nature of thought, i.e., the compositionality of thought and
 115 judgment (e.g., Crivelli, 1998; Duncombe, 2016); or again, error is the result of a AU4
 116 botched self-examination, of the incapacity to detect and criticize refutable, false
 117 opinions or of the soul’s haste to reach a conclusion (e.g., Dixsaut, 2000; Long,
 118 2013; McCabe, 2006).

119 However, as we will see, the stakes are higher for Plato than simply stating that
 120 thought is not “grasping” but “gradually considering different aspects of a thing” or
 121 that silent inner dialogue represents discursive or intellectual or, again, dialectic
 122 thinking. I argue that these passages indeed refer to the compositionality of thought;
 123 by that, however, I mean the *multiplicity* inherent to thought. The thinking soul does
 124 not “speak” in a single authoritative “voice” on the issue it is examining. It is torn
 125 between different points of view, some of which are (partially) true and others (par-
 126 tially) false. In other words, “within” oneself false accounts of things are mixed with
 127 true ones,¹² because of the limited and perspectival condition of human thought.¹³

128 The very way the question is formulated—“Now by ‘thinking’ (δianoεῖσθαι) do
 129 you name the same thing as I do (ἐγὼ καλεῖς)?”¹⁴—seems to indicate a change in
 130 *denomination*. The “name” that Socrates alludes to is not the common word which
 131 Greeks (and generally Plato in other dialogues) use to designate “thinking,” that is,
 132 δianoεῖσθαι, but another one, more appropriate for trying to understand what think-
 133 ing is, namely, διαλέγεσθαι (“to dialogue” or “to converse”). We know from other
 134 dialogues as the *Cratylus* that *how* we name things says something about their

¹²This is why Plato affirms that truth and error “must be learned together [...] through long and earnest labor,” through (incessant) *conversation* (*Letter VII*, 344b).

¹³See Kahn (1996, p. 386), Kahn (2005), Gonzalez (2016), and Trabattoni (2016).

¹⁴*Theaetetus*, 189 e4 (translation slightly modified).

nature. Names do seem to possess, for Plato, “some sort of natural correctness” (391 a9-b2), and changing the name of something means somewhat to change the nature of that thing.¹⁵

In the case of διάνοια, Socrates appears to be saying that in order to grasp its nature, we need not focus on the apparent obviousness of its syllables, namely, διά, “through,” and νόος, “intellect,” “reason,” which comes to mean “through the intellect” (Chantraine, 2009) or, within the theoretical context of the *Republic*, the capacity of immediate, nondiscursive, intuitive comprehension of the intelligible realm. Therefore, δια-νοεῖσθαι does not refer to thinking in the sense of grasping immediately and without doubt the nature of beings. It is rather δια-λέγεσθαι, in other words, “through λόγος” or “traveling, crossing, finding a path/threading your way through words” (διὰ τῶν λόγων πορεύεσθαι, *Sophist* 253b).¹⁶ This “crossing” or “wandering” consists of the soul asking itself questions and answering them itself, affirming and denying. Put another way, thinking represents *wandering about* through λόγος,¹⁷ to explore it in an indiscriminate manner. Given the inherently multiple and disseminated nature of λόγος, thinking is thus defined as a creative and exploratory activity.

However, a more accurate translation would be “carrying on a discussion” or “talking things through.” This rendering has the advantage of taking διαλέγεσθαι as a nontechnical term. Plato is referring here to a more common and less methodical process than dialectic in the *Republic* (531c-535a). One argument for this reading can be found, as we have already seen, in Plato’s very choice of words: he describes διανοεῖσθαι as διαλέγεσθαι. Or, in the context of the *Republic*, “dialectic” explicitly refers to νόησις:

In the same way, when anyone by dialoguing (διαλέγεσθαι) attempts through reasoned/rational discourse (λόγος) without sense-perception towards what-each-thing-itself-is and does not give up before he grasps what-good-itself-is by means of intellection (νόησις) itself... what then, will you not call this process of thought dialectic (διαλεκτικὴν). (532a-b, transl. modified after Kahn, 1996, p. 296).

This is the “power of dialectic-dialogue (διαλέγεσθαι)” (511b): “to give an account of the being of each thing” (534b) and of the Good “according to truth and

¹⁵ See, for the role of “voicing” the words differently and of searching through their “phonic matter” in Plato’s *Cratylus*, Année (2011, pp. 1–45). Magali Année claims that we cannot understand Platonic etymologies in the *Cratylus* by way of the comparative grammar and our separation between “oral” and “written” language (p. 3), because they are relevant for a specific way of understanding language, namely, based on the “sound rhythm” of the Greek language (p. 2). In ancient Greek, the way we are voicing words creates a kind of “underlying meaning” (signification sous-jacente) of language (p. 2). Voicing means decoding, encoding, and re-encoding language (creating meaning) in order to establish a kind of “particularly language” (p. 5). The way language weaves sounds together is the way we need to weave it anew—as a *sumploké* (“weaving together”)—in order that new meaning arise.

¹⁶ The νόος is thus eliminated from the “etymology” of thinking. This marks a considerable difference from the “mainstream” Platonic view of thought.

¹⁷ I am referring here to M. Dixsaut’s notion of *errance*, “wandering/erring” (see Dixsaut, 2000, pp. 185–190).

166 what-is (οὐσία) rather than according to opinion and what-seems (δόξα)” (534b-c,
 167 after Kahn, p. 296). The kind of dialogue Plato is referring to in the *Theaetetus* and
 168 the *Sophist* is, however, centered on questioning and answering and ends in δόξα;
 169 and it does not suppose, in the two relevant passages at least, intellection, truth as a
 170 criterion and the (contemplation of the) Forms. It is the kind of dialogue which can
 171 put to the test different accounts of knowledge without being able to tell at the end
 172 what knowledge in itself is but only to have a true opinion about it. The soul’s inner
 173 silent dialogue appears to be closer to informal conversation than to dialectic. It
 174 does not mean “to ask and answer questions in the most scientific way” (534d) or a
 175 rule-governed activity. It does however appear to require philosophical education or
 176 familiarization with different philosophical questions. Hence, another reason for
 177 distinguishing the inner dialogue from dialectic is that the latter is a systematic and
 178 methodical activity imposed on the philosophical search, whereas the former repre-
 179 sents the very nature of the philosophic thought-community.

180 But let us now briefly return to the way the *new* theory of thought is presented by
 181 Socrates and the Visitor and then to the way it is received by Theaetetus. What, I
 182 think, raises some difficulties is, firstly, the fact that Theaetetus doesn’t seem to have
 183 any problem in grasping the meaning of Socrates’ or the Visitor’s description
 184 (*Theaetetus* 190a8; *Sophist* 263e-264b). He doesn’t ask for further explanation, and
 185 the matter seems well-known and obvious. Secondly, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates,
 186 unlike the Visitor in the *Sophist*, presents his idea “in all ignorance” as it appears
 187 “subjectively” to him (189e8-9). Some commentators were led to believe that this
 188 means that the definition is purely nominal, i.e., it does not bear on the essence of
 189 the thing defined but on its name; and its “content” or “referent” may change accord-
 190 ing to the representations each of us has of thinking (Dixsaut, 2000, p. 48).
 191 Nevertheless, as we have already shown, the change in denomination should not be
 192 taken lightly or as innocent. Moreover, this does not explain why Theaetetus so
 193 readily agrees and understands Socrates “definition,” given that at other moments in
 194 the dialogue, he does not hesitate to ask Socrates for clarifications (152d1, 154b10,
 195 164c3,7, 199c12, 201a6, etc.).

196 I argue that Socrates, by renaming “thinking,” is actually accomplishing two
 197 things at once: he evokes a common experience that all Greek culture, from Homer
 198 to the present time, shares and knows, and, at the same time, he is surreptitiously
 199 forging a new etymology for the word διάνοια. Thinking (διανοεῖσθαι), he says, is
 200 fundamentally “having a dialogue” (διαλέγεσθαι). This doesn’t amount to saying
 201 that *all* thinking is or should be *dialogical* in that sense but that he’s talking about
 202 *his* idea and the “picture” he has about thinking. And yet, this does not necessarily
 203 mean that Socrates is expressing his personal/subjective view about thinking.
 204 Socrates, as we know, is in Plato’s dialogues more than *this* particular individual,
 205 the historical Socrates. He is a *character* that usually stands for the embodiment of
 206 philosophy.¹⁸ His (objective) view on the matter may thus be taken as something
 207 almost prescriptive about philosophical thought.

¹⁸ See, for example, Blondell (2002) and Loraux (1982).

But what is so special about Socrates’s description of thought, also restated by the Visitor in the *Sophist*? Isn’t he simply using the model of the empirical dialogue, by removing the elements of orality and of the presence of the other, and applying it to thought?¹⁹ Isn’t he talking about a form of self-sufficient reflection necessary to all philosophers?²⁰ If that is the case, then it seems that Plato finally found a form of perfect, ideal, and authentic dialogue, with all the advantages and none of the frustrations of real-life conversation.²¹ No more non-compliant interlocutors and intellectual incompatibility, because everything happens *internally*, in a world directed entirely by the individual philosopher himself according to his rules. And if when conversing with someone else, “one can always pretend to be asking or answering questions, this would be absurd when talking to oneself” (Dixsaut, 2000, p. 53), because one *is* always honest toward oneself, and, facing oneself, one can never pretend.

I have two general objections to make to this type of reading. The first one concerns the fact that Plato did not choose to represent or depict this so-called ideal (or paradigmatic) dialogue in his writings. Because that type of dialogue is nowhere to be found: inward or outward. We never find descriptions of Socrates (paradigmatically and) explicitly talking with himself.²² This is not the same as saying that we cannot find allusions to a form of Socratic “solitary” reflection or inner dialogue.²³ What are we to make of this? Socrates has conversations with himself, yet these conversations are in no way more truthful or authentic than his conversations with others. So, maybe Plato is showing what conversation (internal or external) *ought to be*: the only way of having a real dialogue is by taking into account other positions, by bringing them together in a responsive relationship, and by accepting the imperfections, the interruptions, the unwillingness, arrogance, and stubbornness to change one’s point of view as a contribution to objectivity.

The second objection is that the silent dialogue is, in a certain sense, a form of internalized social conversation, “an internalization of the content and patterns of interpersonal discourse” (Gill, 1996, p. 47). As such, it comes with most of the difficulties and flaws of social dialogue, as it also comes with its advantages, namely, the multiplicity of different “voices” or perspectives. Dialogic thought is therefore more likely about preserving the plurality and communal aspects of interpersonal conversation even when somebody is by himself.

This would be the general outlook. If we look now in more detail at the two passages, we can notice that the image of dialogic thought seems more complicated

¹⁹This is what Dixsaut (2000, p. 50) thinks. See also Long (2013) for a similar reading.

²⁰As Long (2013) thinks is the case.

²¹As Dixsaut (2000) and Long (2013) think is the case.

²²The case of the *Hippias Major* (286c, 293d-294e; 298b; 297e-300b) is somewhat controversial (see Long, 2013; Woolf, 2008). Even if it is Socrates who is having a conversation with himself, the dialogue represents this conversation as any other (“Socratic”) dialogue and not as a form of introspective reflection.

²³See, for example: *Apology* 21d; *Charmides* 166c; Socrates’ philosophical “autobiography” in the *Phaedo* 96a-102a; Socrates’ “strange behavior” in the *Symposium* 174d, 220c-d; etc.

243 than that. I'm referring here to the distinction between an internal and an external
 244 dialogue. Plato doesn't make this distinction, and the word "internal" or rather
 245 "placed inside" (ἐντὸς) appears only in the *Sophist*. In the *Theaetetus*, thinking is "a
 246 talk (λόγον) which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration,"
 247 and this means in fact διαλέγεσθαι, "carrying on a discussion," in which "it asks
 248 itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies." However, at some
 249 point, the soul arrives at something definite, and "it affirms one thing consistently
 250 and without divided counsel," and this is not called dialogue anymore but δοξάζειν,
 251 "having a belief," which is identical to λέγειν ("speaking"). We thus have dialogue,
 252 on the one hand, and belief, on the other. The moment of *having* a belief seems to
 253 stand for the *cessation* of dialogic thinking. This is one distinction. The other one is
 254 between the belief thus reached or the speech (λόγον) which "is not addressed to
 255 another person or spoken aloud (οὐ μέντοι πρὸς ἄλλον οὐδὲ φωνῆ) but silently
 256 (σιγῆ) addressed to oneself" (190a6-7) and the belief accompanied by sound and
 257 addressed to someone else.

258 In the *Sophist*, the description is couched in different terms, making the distinc-
 259 tions more explicit and adding some other elements: "Thought (διάνοια) and speech
 260 (λόγος), says the Visitor, are the same, except that what we call thought (διάνοια) is
 261 dialogue (διάλογος) that occurs without the voice (διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς), inside
 262 the soul (ἐντὸς τῆς ψυχῆς) in conversation with itself. [...] And the stream of sound
 263 from the soul that goes through the mouth is called speech (λόγος)" (263e3-8). We
 264 find out that dialogic thought and speech are not identical but of the same kind,
 265 namely, λόγος. Διάλογος is a type of λόγος but not in the same way uttered speech
 266 is λόγος, i.e., *doxic* λόγος. The dialogue "placed inside the soul" occurs "without
 267 sound or voice," but speech is always uttered, it is something that is "breathed out."
 268 Not all speech is thought or dialogue, but all thought can become speech when it is
 269 accompanied with sound or when it is exteriorized. Furthermore, the λόγος that is
 270 *exteriorized*, "breathed out," is not the dialogue but its "conclusion," i.e., the δόξα.
 271 The belief marks the cessation of the conversation, the moment when the soul
 272 doesn't doubt anymore.

273 So, silent dialogue is *relatively* distinguished from silent belief and from uttered
 274 speech. Nothing is said about the relationship between the soul's inner dialogues
 275 and interpersonal dialogue. Plato's silence on this should not be taken as indicative
 276 of any kind of dichotomy. The social dialogue is not an imperfect embodiment of an
 277 ideal internal dialogue. I don't think this is what Plato is suggesting here. When
 278 talking about distinctions, one should not have in mind absolute or metaphysical
 279 distinctions. If we consider a third passage about the dialogic thought that occurs in
 280 the *Philebus* (38c2-e7), we notice that the silent conversation the soul is carrying
 281 with itself might also be taking place, aloud, with someone else, without changing
 282 in any way its nature or its "authenticity." The *Philebus* illustrates the way thinking
 283 takes place. It presents the situation where someone, "who cannot get a clear view
 284 because he is looking from a distance," tries "to make up his mind about what he
 285 sees." Hence, he starts to ask himself questions and tries to find an answer, but he
 286 might as well say it out loud, if he were in someone's company, it would not change

anything. And, finally, he might either get it right or be mistaken about what he is seeing. Either way, he will have a belief (true or false) about it.

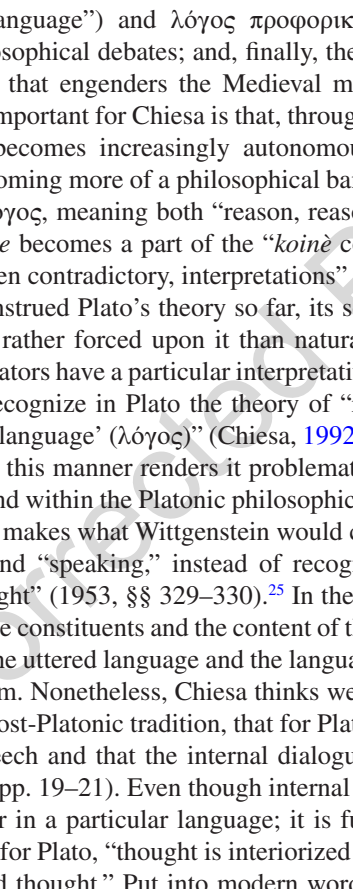
So, there isn’t any *valorizing* separation between silent dialogue and the uttered one; dialogic thought isn’t a sort of ideal dialogue or something that guarantees “getting things right.” The fact that the dialogue occurs *in* the soul does not bestow any special qualities upon it, like authenticity, originality, veracity, sincerity, or even privacy. And there doesn’t seem to be any privileged and infallible access of the individual soul to it. At least, Plato isn’t suggesting any of this. Thinking is not for Plato some mysterious, peculiar, and immaterial process that gets its virtues from taking place *inward* and by being the basis of linguistic expression. In a way, thinking is a form of *λόγος* because it is a kind of “speaking”; the dialogue is always putting something into words, in a certain language, a “weaving of name and verb together” (*Sophist* 262c). From another point a view, it is not entirely (yet) *λόγος* because it is not either (simple) discursive reasoning or speech in the sense of affirming or denying one definite thing but “weaving” together of question and answer, “aimlessly” wandering about, finding the right path, losing it, and start looking for it anew.

4.3 The History of the Notion of Inner Dialogue. The Augustinian Moment or How Thinking Turns into a “Spiritual” and “Inner Private” Process

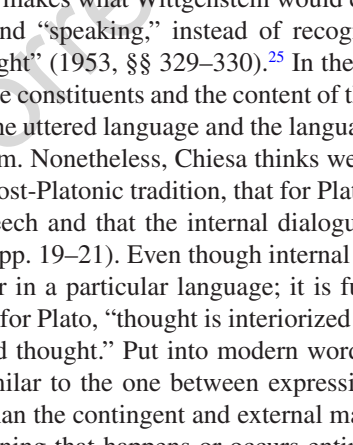
Where does the idea that thinking is the phenomenon which occurs in the innermost and ineffable part of the soul, in a *space* so private and authentic that it represents, exhibits, and even constitutes one’s truest self; in a place where there are no means to elude thinking by oneself, to avoid honestly asking questions to oneself and answer them sincerely come from? I argue that, even though there is no precise magical moment when this notion came to life, it doesn’t seem to come from Plato, because it presupposes a series of distinctions unknown to Plato and to the Greeks in general. I am referring to the one between inner world/life and external world (cf. Burnyeat, 1982) or between inner-authenticity and external-inauthenticity or even self and community.

The Platonic notion was informed and reformed within the subsequent philosophical tradition by the debate around the relationship between thought and language. It would thus be about the identity between thought (*διάνοια*) and language (*λόγος*).²⁴ Plato would be held responsible for asserting this identity and, at the same time, for using it to differentiate the mental/internal language or discourse from the uttered (oral or written) one. Plato’s image of thought became the *doctrine* of internal and external discourse/language.

²⁴ See Chiesa (1992, pp. 15–30), and Panaccio (1999).

324 It seems that the Platonic dichotomy between internal and external language and
 325 the Aristotelian trichotomy between letter, sounds, and thoughts or states of mind in
 326 *De Interpretatione* are at the basis of the medieval conceptual framework of the
 327 three types of human language: internal language, oral language, and written lan-
 328 guage (Chiesa, 1992, p. 16). The internal language is to be understood in this con-
 329 text as a universal mental language, distinct from the oral and the written, prior to
 330 and independent of any particular language. According to C. Chiesa, there are four
 331 important moments in the Ancient tradition of “internal language”: the Platonic
 332 moment; the Aristotelian one; the Stoic one when the distinction between λόγος
 333 ἐνδιάθετος (“internal language”) and λόγος προφορικός (“uttered language”)  becomes current in philosophical debates; and, finally, the Porphyrian synthesis of
 334 these different elements that engenders the Medieval model of three discourses
 335 (p. 16). But, even more important for Chiesa is that, throughout this time, the theme
 336 of “internal dialogue” becomes increasingly autonomous, referring less to the
 337 Platonic context and becoming more of a philosophical banality related to the poly-
 338 semy of the notion of λόγος, meaning both “reason, reasoning” and “speech, lan-
 339 guage.” *Internal dialogue* becomes a part of the “*koinè* conceptual language” and
 340 knows “different, and even contradictory, interpretations” (pp. 17–18).

342 Given how I have construed Plato’s theory so far, its so-called *founding* role in
 343 this tradition may seem rather forced upon it than natural. But both modern and
 344 (many) ancient commentators have a particular interpretative framework that claims
 345 that one should easily recognize in Plato the theory of “relative identity between
 346 ‘thought’ (διάνοια) and ‘language’ (λόγος)” (Chiesa, 1992, p. 18). Not surprisingly,
 347 reading Plato’s theory in this manner renders it problematic, from a general philo-
 348 sophical point of view, and within the Platonic philosophical system as well (p. 19).

349 In the first case, Plato makes what Wittgenstein would call a “category error” by
 350 identifying “thinking” and “speaking,” instead of recognizing that “language is
 351 itself the vehicle of thought” (1953, §§ 329–330).²⁵ In the second case, since Plato  does not explain either the constituents and the content of the “language of the soul”
 352 or the relation between the uttered language and the language of thought, his theory
 353 cannot withstand criticism. Nonetheless, Chiesa thinks we can plausibly affirm, by
 354 taking into account the post-Platonic tradition, that for Plato the thinking soul is the
 355 source and origin of speech and that the internal dialogue is *essentially* different
 356 from its externalization (pp. 19–21). Even though internal language is structured as
 357 speech, it does not occur in a particular language; it is fundamentally “spiritual.”
 358 This does not mean that, for Plato, “thought is interiorized language” but rather that
 359 “language is externalized thought.” Put into modern words, “the relation between
 360 *logos* and *dianoia* is similar to the one between expression and content” (p. 21).
 361 *Logos* is nothing more than the contingent and external materialization of a univer-
 362 sal spiritual content/meaning that happens or occurs entirely *inside* the soul. As a

²⁵ According to Chiesa (1992, p. 19), Plato would be thus responsible for a certain « mythologie de la pensée qui fait de celle-ci un processus étrange et mystérieux en la considérant à la fois comme un langage et comme un processus incorporel qui accompagne nécessairement l’expression linguistique ».

result, Plato’s theory, albeit a “strange” one within his philosophical system, does not exceed the “already common psychophysical dualism.”

I claim, however, that this tradition and the way it was reconstructed by scholars today misconstrue Plato’s notion of dialogic thought. We should rather try to understand its *distinctiveness* in contrast with the tradition it engendered. Three remarks are in order. Firstly, at the very basis of these interpretations is the idea that, beginning with Plato, thought has been conceived as *language*.²⁶ But Plato is not really innovating on this matter. Thought has been seen as a kind of “speaking” or as “having a conversation with oneself” even before him, throughout Greek culture in general.²⁷ The relationship between thought and language—and the fact that silent thought is not “universal” and “spiritual” but takes place in a given language, namely, ancient Greek—does not seem to be problematic for the ancient Greeks but rather an implicit cultural trait that need not be questioned.

Secondly, a common characteristic of this tradition is terminological homogenization. We find fewer traces of the “silent dialogue placed inside the soul” and more of inner λόγος, “language,” “discourse,” and “reason.” Identity seems to have become absolute: the silent dialogue of the soul is nothing more than a *mental language* or “inner word” and “internal speech.” And this is not without consequences for the interpretation of Plato. It equates the διαλέγεσθαι of the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* with the διανοεῖσθαι of the *Republic*, which is discursive thinking.²⁸ However, dialogic thought doesn’t mean either discursive thinking or conceptual thinking.²⁹ It is neither simply propositional thought nor solely logical thinking, but rather *dialogical*, i.e., a continual to-and-fro movement from question to answer and from answer to question. In contrast with reasoning, which describes the necessary movement from premises to a conclusion, or the discursive mode that proceeds deductively from hypotheses to a conclusion, dialogic thought can wander, can err and stray from a given path, and it can even explore only for the sake of exploring.³⁰ The dialogue ceases (momentarily) its “wandering” when it “stumbles on” δόξα. In other words, the soul can arrive at something definite “either by gradual process or a sudden leap.” Thinking does not necessarily wander about in order to find the *right* path. It wanders about so that it can *know* all possible paths. When it wanders, it

²⁶This is not the case for all readings. Gadamer (1989), for example, claims the contrary: Plato would actually be the one responsible for recognizing the separation between language and thought and that it is only beginning with Augustine that we started conceiving their *unity* and *identity*. But the essential problem is that he, as other authors, misreads Plato’s theory as being about the *relation* between thought and language, whereas, I think, for Plato such a question is not even conceivable. Because for the ancient Greeks there is no conception of a preverbal and spiritual thinking that lies at the foundation of language, only thinking as a kind of speaking.

²⁷See Gill (1996) and Onians (1988).

²⁸For a more extensive treatment of the different types of *thought* in Plato, see Dixsaut (2000, pp. 47–70).

²⁹See, for example Frede (1989, pp. 20–49).

³⁰I am, once again, borrowing and radicalizing Dixsaut’s notion of *errance* (2000, pp. 185–190).

395 learns that it does not know the right path and that even if it comes upon it, it was
 396 only by “accident” (by δόξα ἀληθής) that it happened.³¹

397 Finally, and most importantly in my view, one of the leitmotifs of the story of
 398 mental language is the internal-spiritual character of thought. But what if the notion
 399 of interiority has a different meaning for Plato than for the Christian-modern out-
 400 look? Let us consider the fact that, as M. Burnyeat observes, the division into the
 401 inner (subjective) world—the designated *space* where all subjective and introspec-
 402 tive experience takes place—and an outer (objective) world does not seem to have
 403 anything to do with Plato and with the Greeks in general (1982, pp. 26–40). Hence,
 404 saying that Plato entertains the idea of a spiritual and internal thinking as the source
 405 and foundation of uttered speech or as that which organizes and explains through its
 406 categories the nature of the world, stands at least as proof of an anachronism. Thought,
 407 for Plato, “must be of something independent of itself,” and it is “relative, essentially
 408 of something else” (pp. 21–22). It is thus incapable of any foundational task.

409 However, if our ideas of inwardness and interiority don’t originate in Plato’s
 410 philosophy, where do they come from?³² As Philip Cary argues, the Western tradi-
 411 tion of inwardness was inaugurated by Augustine’s conception of inner life and his
 412 invention of the self as a *private inner space* (2000, 2011). Augustine’s version of
 413 the soul’s silent dialogue is the *verbum interius*, “inner word.” The first distinctive
 414 feature of Augustine’s inner word is that, unlike Plato’s dialogue of the soul, it
 415 explicitly denies being about “the kind of thinking we do when we silently use the
 416 words of a particular language” (Cary, 2011, p. 192).³³ The inner word is not only
 417 prior to sensible sound but also to imagined sound; it is intelligible and not sensible:
 418 “... the inner word is an intellectual word, the product of intellect in its love of vision
 419 [of God]” (p. 193).³⁴ The second feature of the inner word is that it is *introspective*,
 420 namely, generated by the “active turning or conversion of the mind to itself, which
 421 puts itself directly in its own mental sight” (p. 193). The inner word represents the
 422 way the soul can understand itself by thinking about itself, by turning inward. And
 423 by this “journey inward,” the soul gets in fact closer to the “ultimate inwardness of
 424 God” (p. 194).³⁵ A third feature of the inner word is that it remains *immutable* and
 425 somewhat *ineffable*. Even if it “incarnates” in sound, it always remains *in* the soul,
 426 unchanged, whole in itself and, consequently, inadequately expressed.

427 Thinking is, for Augustine, a deep, inward, preverbal experience, an “experience
 428 of the divine that is too deep for words” (pp. 196–197). However, thinking still is a
 429 kind of speaking: “he who thinks speaks in his heart” (Augustine, *On the Trinity*,
 430 XV, 10, 17). Except that there are two kinds of speech, “speeches of the heart” or

³¹ See also *Meno*, 97a-b for the role of true belief in the image of knowing the way to Larissa without having been there. The role of (true) belief in Plato would require a more detailed study.

³² This question would require a more detailed account than the current paper allows it. I will limit my answer to a few distinctive features of Augustine’s notion.

³³ Also, see Augustine, *On the Trinity* XV, 19.

³⁴ Because “the inner is higher, better, more intelligible, and closer to God than are external, sensible, and bodily things, including the sounding words of human language.”

³⁵ Also, see Cary (2000, Chaps. 3 and 5).

thoughts, and speeches of the mouth (XV, 10, 18). Furthermore, *inwardly*, these “speeches of the heart” are “also acts of sight, arising from the sight of knowledge... For when these things are done outwardly by means of the body, then speech and sight are different things; but when we think inwardly, the two are one” (XV, 10, 18). Thinking is a form of seeing and speaking at once. The “voice” of the heart has nothing to do with any particular natural language (*linguae gentium*), but it resembles the Divine Word (John I, 1) (XV, 10, 19). The silent dialogue thus becomes *Word*, an act of seeing and mostly listening somewhere deep inside the soul.

When the soul thinks, it *journeys inwardly*, and it grasps its own incorporeal nature and then discovers a “voice,” a “voice” more profound and truthful than any human voice, the “deep voice” of Truth, of God, present within itself. And this “voice” speaks to the soul, teaches it, admonishes it, and transforms it. By means of the inward turn, one finds one’s true self and God, who is separated from the soul but can only be found inside it. Augustine’s search for God “requires the double movement, first *in* then *up*” (Cary, 2000, pp. 38–40; 117). It is the very inward turn—or “in the interval between the turning in and looking up”—that generates an inner space proper to the soul, “a whole realm of being waiting to be entered and explored” (p. 39).

There isn’t any trace of Platonic dialogue left, because the multitude and diversity of “voices” is reduced to a single authentic and commanding voice, because the conversing is transformed in simple listening and learning. As Jean-Pierre Vernant claims, with the Christian thought of the third and fourth centuries, and especially with Augustine,³⁶ “a new form of identity takes shape...: it defines the human individual by way of his most intimate thoughts and secret imaginings, nocturnal dreams, sinful drives, and the constant obsessive presence in his innermost heart of all forms of temptation” (1991, p. 332). Put another way, it defines the human individual by his capacity to observe and introspect his inner world, which becomes henceforth the very source of Truth and authenticity. This kind of individual “separates himself from the common herd and disengages himself from the social group only in order to set out in quest of his true self” and in the search for God; “the search for God and the search for the self are two dimensions of the same solitary ordeal” (p. 332).

4.4 Plato and the Polyphonic-Koinonic Model of the Self

If Plato did not have something similar to our notion of interiority, no idea about an immaterial “inside,” about privileged access to a life and a world existing only inside our souls, hidden and mysterious, truthful and authentic, how should we then

³⁶We should add that the Augustinian “inward turn” radicalizes with Descartes’s discovery of an inward reality (as opposed to the external one). The interiority, conceived as the privileged space where conscious thought takes place or where the “I” “sees” and “hears” everything, is the source of all intelligibility, consciousness, truth, and self-knowledge (see also Burnyeat, 1982; Dennett, 1991, p. 107).

466 construe his use of the word ἐντὸς regarding the silent dialogue of the soul? We
 467 would still be tempted to ask exactly *where* this dialogue takes place. Only that the
 468 answer would be disarmingly simple and it may not require our own metaphorical
 469 language. I am suggesting here that the way, for example, the Stoics understood the
 470 distinction between λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός may constitute a bet-
 471 ter starting point for understanding Plato's theory. C. Chiesa thinks that the Stoics
 472 framed the distinction within a "strange monist outlook" (1992, p. 25). This may
 473 nevertheless be less "strange" for Plato than for us, and it may be "strangeness"
 474 which we should look for when understanding Plato.

475 The Stoics consider the internal/external dichotomy as referring to a "physical or
 476 local distinction." Thoughts are configurations (or physical states) of the material
 477 πνεῦμα (i.e., a breath-like substance); they are bodies the same way voice is a body.
 478 Although in Chiesa's view the internal language does not designate *anymore*, for the
 479 Stoics (as *apparently*, it did for Plato), "the mental and spiritual dialogue which the
 480 immaterial soul has with itself, but the air located in the trachea artery before getting
 481 out through the mouth in the form of sounds of the voice" (p. 25), and I claim this
 482 view may actually be closer to Plato's dialogic thought than we are inclined to
 483 believe. I am therefore saying that we should take the idea of *internal localization*
 484 literally. We could understand it in terms of *material place*, and not of some meta-
 485 phorical "inside." Henceforth, the question of knowing *where* thinking takes place
 486 can only bear one answer, i.e., inside (and outside) our animated bodies.

487 One can easily see how this idea of "air" or "stream of sound" not-yet exterior-
 488 ized could evoke Plato's description of thought in the *Sophist*. However, this more
 489 or less apparent link could hardly be considered as an argument for such a "strange"
 490 reading of Plato. The rest of my argumentation may seem to some speculative in
 491 nature due to the fact that the reasons I will give are rather implicit in Plato's dia-
 492 logues and somewhat controversial.

493 A first clue can therefore be found in the *Sophist*, where the distinction of thought
 494 from speech seems to stand on the presence or absence of "sound": "[...] thought is
 495 dialogue that occurs without the voice, inside the soul in conversation with itself.
 496 [...] And the *stream* that *flows from* the soul *through* the mouth in vocal expression
 497 is called speech" (263e, transl. modified). It is worth noting that the "stream" comes
 498 *from within* the soul, goes *through* the mouth, and, only at this point, becomes
 499 accompanied by sound. Even if Plato conceives the soul as incorporeal, this does
 500 not suppose an immaterial inner space. The "stream" could only come from an
 501 embodied soul. It could, thus, well mean that Plato is referring here to a stream of
 502 air, although nothing is said explicitly about the presence of "air" or "breath,"
 503 πνεῦμα. It is possible that thinking and speaking both imply breathing or the same
 504 stream of air, only that the latter also involves sound. Nothing is said because it goes
 505 without saying. It is only alluded to. Hence, thinking and speaking may share the
 506 same material vehicle.

507 Moreover, in the *Theaetetus*, we can find another argument in favor of the "Stoic"
 508 reading. When discussing the three meanings of λόγος, the first one that Socrates
 509 identifies is "making one's thought apparent through sound with words and phrases,
 510 *molding/impressing/stamping* (ἐκτυπούμενον) one's belief (δόξα) into/upon the

stream flowing through the mouth as if into/upon a mirror or water” (206d; translation modified). The language in this passage is strikingly similar to the Stoic’s discussion of “impressed $\piνεϋμα$.” But more importantly, it is not the image of one’s belief (as in M. J. Levett’s—revised by Myles Burnyeat—translation) that one impresses upon the “stream flowing [from the soul] through the mouth” but the very belief itself. The analogy with the mirror or water can be misleading here. It is not that belief is reflected in uttered speech as an object is reflected in a mirror or water, that is, in/through an *image*. It is rather that belief is *impressed upon* “the stream flowing through the mouth” as an object is “impressed” upon the mirror or the water in which it is reflected, i.e., a material object leaves a mark in another material object. The language here used may reasonably lead us to believe that “thought,” “belief,” “speech,” and the “stream flowing through the mouth” have the same breath-like nature. We can therefore safely assume that the same stream of air contains thought and speech, thought and sound. And that means that thought and speech are materially identical; otherwise, we will be forced to explain how can something incorporeal could be impressed upon something corporeal and why Plato does not make the “right-up-his-alley” distinction between incorporeal thought and corporeal speech.

Finally, we need to take into consideration the fact that, however innovative Plato’s philosophy may be with respect to its cultural background, it is not implausible to still assume that he shares *similar* (and not identical) beliefs and views about thought and the soul with, for example, the Homeric Greeks or with some other predecessors. One important similarity is the fact that the early Greeks describe thinking as “speaking” and as being located mostly in the $φρενες$, “lungs”; and “deep reflection is [described as a] conversation of one’s self with one’s *thumos* or of one’s *thumos* with one’s self” (Onians, 1988, p. 13). Thinking is thus *physically* located (although not limited to) somewhere inside the body and, most importantly, is associated or identified with physical processes or elements, such as breathing or rather something “vaporous” related to the blood. Therefore, the early (and some of the later) Greeks conceived what we today call abstract or immaterial entities, like thought and emotions, as *material entities*. Conceiving thought, speech, or emotion materially as breath or as some other bodily expressions did not mean for them as it usually means for us “thinking that the latter are *epiphenomena* or after-effects” but rather that they represent the *one* and the *same* process (Onians, 1988, pp. 52–3).³⁷

If thinking is a type of speaking, then thinking follows the same path as speaking and, consequently, as breathing, i.e., the action of inhaling and exhaling. And one cannot look for the source of thinking “inside” or “outside” for it is the interplay between “inward” and “outward.” It would be like saying that breathing is something done entirely inside our bodies rather than the process of inhaling and exhaling, or the process of moving air *in* and *out* of the lungs. Thinking, for Plato, does not therefore emerge internally, it is not a process entirely made inwardly and only

³⁷ See also Clarke (1999): “There is no ‘ghost in the machine’: the Homeric man does not *have* a mind, rather his thought and consciousness are as inseparable a part of his bodily life as are movement and metabolism” (p. 115).

552 waiting to be uttered. The same way as speaking is not the simple exteriorization of
 553 a thought already made inwardly. For the early Greeks, as Onians argues, the asso-
 554 ciation of thought with speaking and breathing means that speeches “come forth
 555 with the breath that is intelligence in them, they are parts of it, and the listener puts
 556 them, takes them, into his *thumos*, thus adding to his store, his knowledge. They
 557 pass from lung to lung, mind to mind” (p. 67 and pp. 69–70).³⁸ Thinking is not
 558 entirely done in one place. It is about the dynamic of hearing and speaking, inhaling,
 559 and exhaling. That is why the separation of thought from speech should not be taken
 560 as absolute. When we speak, we don’t stop breathing, and we don’t stop thinking
 561 and vice versa. Thinking is conversing because thinking is speaking, and all of this
 562 is nothing but breathing. Air is what constitutes the corporeality of thinking.

563 Saying, though, that for Plato the “internal/external dialogue” is a question of
 564 physical distinction does not exhaust the issue. We still need to explain what exactly
 565 he means by *silent dialogue of the soul with itself*. A first remark that needs to be
 566 made is that, “internally” and “silently,” the dialogue is not actually more mono-
 567 logic in nature than the interpersonal conversation. It is actual genuine dialogue and,
 568 furthermore, *polyphonic* dialogue. I’m not solely referring here to B. Williams ethi-
 569 cal concept of “internalized other” (1993, Chap. 4). I actually prefer to call this
 570 internalized *somebody* by the name of “voice.”³⁹ By doing so, I think we can avoid
 571 referring to an *internal* arena/space/world/theater where one can accommodate,
 572 “see,” and “hear” the “internalized other.” Because the notion of voice evokes, on
 573 the one hand, an *external* source, the fact that it comes from somebody else or from
 574 somewhere else, and, on the other hand, a voice is something that needs to be uttered
 575 in order to be heard. The inner dialogue thus represents “internalization,” i.e., hear-
 576 ing of the voices of others, and “externalization,” i.e., uttering or speaking. The
 577 inner dialogue resembles the inspiration-expiration process of breathing.

578 But, where are the “voices” to be found in the two passages about silent dia-
 579 logue? If anything, there appear to be no voices, only the individual soul with itself.
 580 In the *Theaetetus*, it is explicitly stated that “‘belief’ [is] a speech which is not
 581 addressed to another person (οὐ μέντοι πρὸς ἄλλον) or which is without voice (οὐδὲ
 582 φωνῆ) but silently (σιγῆ) addressed to oneself (πρὸς αὐτόν),” and in the *Sophist* it
 583 is even more clearly said that what “we call thought is dialogue that occurs without
 584 the voice (διάλογος ἄνευ φωνῆς), inside the soul in conversation with itself.” But

³⁸ Thus, “the words, thoughts that issue forth, portions of it, are feathered, ‘winged’ like birds ... to the hearer. Unspoken, kept in the phrenes, they are ‘not winged’.” Onians thinks that these early conceptions may have suggested to Plato the image of the mind as a cage full of birds in the *Theaetetus*, 197c. Moreover, the belief that thoughts come from (or are breathed forth from) and are taken into the lungs or the chest can also be found in Plato’s *Phaedrus* (235c) and *Republic* (III, 411a) (p. 71).

³⁹ My concept of voice is based on different (heterogeneous) ways of understanding it in separate fields of knowledge. I should mention the researches about the dialogic mind in cognitive sciences (Ferryhough, 1996, pp. 47–62), the studies about polyphony in literature (especially M. M. Bakhtin’s works), and the interpretations of some Platonic scholars (Corrigan & Corrigan, 2004). But, one of the most significant, yet implicit, influences was exerted by Julian Jaynes’s book, *The Origin of Consciousness in the Breakdown of the Bicameral Mind* (1976).

the distinction πρὸς ἄλλον/πρὸς αὐτόν does not refer to two *qualitatively* different types of address: one authentic and the other inauthentic and one subjective or introspective and the other interpersonal. It only states the fact that inner conversation is not directed toward a flesh-and-blood individual present before us. It is directed toward the soul itself. Yet, even if thought is the dialogue addressed to oneself (or *for* oneself and *with* oneself), it may well still be polyphonic. Polyphony does not imply that the soul addresses another person. It only supposes that different voices converse (“within” one’s soul) with each other.

What I mean by “voice” is an individualized, yet objective, perspective on the matter at hand. Every voice stands for a different perspective on reality or for a different “cognitive interest.”⁴⁰ In other words, every voice is the *concrete* and *physical* manifestation of a particular “ideology.”⁴¹ This kind of “voice,” which I claim is an ineluctable voice that is heard, is first suggested to in the expression “without divided counsel” (μὴ διστᾶζει, *Theaetetus*, 190a2-4). But it could equally be found in the idea that the soul asks itself questions and answers them itself, it affirms and denies. By “internal dialogue,” Plato, thus, apparently means to describe the inherent duality of the thinking soul or the fact that when one thinks the soul is divided into two: the part that questions and the part that answers, the one that affirms and the one that denies. However tempting it may be to conclude that Plato is referring to the “divided self” or to the intrinsic duality of the soul, I argue that we should tread carefully this logical leap. Just because the soul is somewhat divided into question and answer or, I would rather say, caught in the give-and-take of question and answer, that doesn’t mean it is divided into two “individuals,” questioner and answerer. In other words, the silent dialogue doesn’t consist in *only two* “voices” or *two* sides that converse. As the conversations depicted in the Platonic dialogues and as the “dramatic” elements of Plato’s work often prove,⁴² the (internal) dialogue embodies multiple “voices”; therefore, it is polyphonic in nature. It is indeed true

⁴⁰The expression is used by Blachowicz (1999). I also find it useful for explaining such examples as the one about dialogic thought in the *Philebus*, where it seems like the “voices” stand for the “voice” of (sensible) experience and the voice of “memory” or “reason.”

⁴¹See Bakhtin (1981) and Fernyhough (1996, p. 49): “[ideology] represents the instantiation of a particular perspective on the world, together with each of its ontological, axiological, conative and motivational elements.”

⁴²See Corrigan and Corrigan (2004) and Blondell (2002). Corrigan and Corrigan’s view of polyphony is concerned with the interplay between the “dramatic” and the philosophical aspects within Plato’s works and, consequently, with the overall construction of each work. Each dialogue is a “drama of many voices and many different characters (...). In a sense, each new voice adds another angle to all the voices of the drama” (p. 189). But, it is also “a drama of many different genres (...). all of them brought together into what is essentially a new artistic and philosophical form, that is, an experimental form of dialogues and characters nestling within one another, and not only this, but addressing, commenting, criticizing, reshaping, and trying each other.” There is, thus, in Plato’s dialogues a pervasive “dependence on the voice of the other,” where “the other” can stand for a character and a voice, but also for a different kind. Polyphony does not simply represent “double-voicedness” or diversity of voices, but “real dialogue pervaded by the speech of the other” or dialogic multi-voicedness.

612 that duality is the *minimal* condition for dialogicity, but this is not what fundamen-
 613 tally defines the silent dialogue or the Platonic dialogues as a whole.

614 The notion of voice thus has some essential advantages. It is particular, individu-
 615 alized, and objective at the same time. As we can repeatedly notice in the dialogues,⁴³
 616 it is the voice of a distinct *somebody* with his idiosyncrasies and specific beliefs. It
 617 is also the voice of *something*, as it stands for a certain perspective on reality, for a
 618 certain philosophical outlook and ethical type. The subjective features of the “voice”
 619 are philosophically, i.e., objectively, transfigured and vice versa.⁴⁴ In other words,
 620 the subjective in Plato’s dialogues, i.e., the characters of the speakers, is never acci-
 621 dental to the objective aspects, i.e., their perspective, vision, and “voice.” To every
 622 voice is assigned an individual face and vice versa.

623 The concept of voice equally enables the blurring of boundaries between internal
 624 and external aspects of the silent dialogue. On the one hand, the soul thinks multiple
 625 voices are in conflict *within* it. On the other hand, the voices are not completely
 626 internalized in the sense of being an integral part of a unified soul, a simple voice in
 627 one’s head. They are not, as we moderns might experience it, coming from *within*.
 628 They are “strange” and “different,” traveling from “outward” to “inward,” and they
 629 are “inspired” or, without the quotation marks, *breathed in* and *breathed forth*.
 630 However, the voices are not simple instruments of thought but the very “matrix of
 631 thought” (Renaut, 2013). Voices form, in-form and trans-form thought; they are the
 632 medium, the physical and “ideological” vehicle of thought.

633 I am thus arguing for a “polyphonic self” rather than a “self in dialogue” (Gill,
 634 1996). Because the dialogic relationship “within” one’s self does not amount to a
 635 conflict or debate between *two* types of reflection, *two* types of virtue, and *two*
 636 tendencies or faculties but to a coming-together of a plurality of “voices.” In this
 637 “coming-together,” there is conflict, but most importantly, the “voices” are brought
 638 into a responsive (and not necessarily harmonious) open-ended relationship. The
 639 polyphony of Plato’s dialogic thought is not simple “double-voicedness” in the
 640 sense of “diversity of voices” but “real dialogue pervaded by the speech of the oth-
 641 ers” (Corrigan & Corrigan 2004, p. 197).

642 Thought is polyphonic and dialogic. It is never about who wins the confrontation
 643 (within the soul) but about how many voices are really taken seriously, examined,
 644 and finally never completely rejected, because the voices never merge into a final,
 645 definitive single perspective. In polyphonic dialogue, the voices “interanimate each
 646 other” in their opposition and interaction, and the dialogue is always preserved in its
 647 open-endedness and indeterminacy (Bakhtin, 1981, pp. 353–4). Thinking is there-
 648 fore an inconclusive process, always-in-the-making. Thinking is not a self-asserting

⁴³See, for the notion of character and the relationship between character and “voice,” Blondell (2002) and Corrigan and Corrigan (2004).

⁴⁴Blondell (2002) argues convincingly that one of Plato’s major concerns throughout the dialogues is the interplay between multiplicity and unity, individuality, and objectivity. However, I don’t think, as Blondell does, that Plato is looking to compel unity and objectivity to transcend multiplicity and individuality, but rather to integrate the two conflictual aspects into philosophical dialogue.

and private-authentic process but a way of constantly revisiting, revising, and better founding the ethical life of the community. Thought as dialogue represents the very dynamic of the shared life-word, the “*stream of meaning* flowing among and through and between us” (Bohm, 1996, pp. 6–7).

Plato’s understanding of selfhood is therefore not only polyphonic but equally *koinonic* in that it conveys a form of togetherness or “communion” that doesn’t invalidate individuality (as a source of disharmony and conflict) but brings it into a responsive relationship. We have become accustomed to the idea that the culture of Ancient Greece with its sense of community and selfhood, in strong contrast with our own individualistic and subjective outlook, is impersonal and objective in nature. In other words, the individual is defined by the degree of participation in the shared life and in the shared practices and that objective knowledge is conceived as a sort of subjective-and-intersubjective-free single block of truth waiting to be discovered.⁴⁵

But *koinonia* is something more than fellowship or communion through participation. There is no real tension between individuality and community in the modern sense. However, this doesn’t mean, as Gill thinks, that for the Greeks community resembles a *shared-I* instead of the sum of all individuals (Gill, 1996, pp. 348–49). Understanding it in this manner, we still fail to discard the notion of a “unitary center of consciousness.” Because in this case, it will be the community as a whole that reflects, as a Cartesian *ego* but at a higher scale, on the best possible human life. I rather prefer to illustrate the conflict inherent in the Greek community as one between different *micro-koinoniai*. Let us remember that for Plato *koinonia* does not exclusively constitute human condition but also *logos* and reality as such.⁴⁶ It is a sort of attuned coming-together of different and often contrary elements. And by attunement, I do not mean homogenization but the bringing into “dialogue” of different elements.

Therefore, *micro-koinonia* stands for a polyphonic unity. The Greek’s home or family and friends represent different *micro-koinoniai*; the life of the community is constituted by *micro-koinoniai*: the agora, the theater, and the symposium. But most importantly for Plato is that the individual soul is in itself a *micro-koinonia*. And, consequently, every Platonic dialogue can be seen as being one. It is likely that the notion of an ideal community in the sense of a perfectly harmonized whole that reflects on different issues and concerns with itself is something the Greeks knew nothing about. The community as a whole is only the “conversation” between (or the coming together in a responsive relationship of) different microcommunities. And every microcommunity in turn is dialogic in nature. Thus, maybe the “place”

⁴⁵Cf. Ch. Gill (1996) and Gill and McCabe (1996). Certainly, Gill stresses the idea that objective knowledge depends on participation in certain types of shared activities, and it can only occur in concrete and specific dialectic encounters. Nevertheless, objective knowledge still looks, in his view, like something already given and waiting to be discovered, and the participative aspect of the search of knowledge is still defined in contrast with the modern view that truth is attainable by the individual through isolated reflection.

⁴⁶See the discussion in the *Sophist* (250–253) about the five kinds and the example of music and speech as forms of *koinoniai*. And see also *Parmenides*, 127–136.

686 of objective knowledge could be found in the very dynamic of *koinonic* polyphony,
 687 as something that is always in the making and open-ended, and not either existing
 688 somewhere beyond the individuals and beyond this world, already made waiting to
 689 be discovered or intersubjectively created.

690 4.5 Conclusion

691 Understanding Plato's dialogic thought on the model of the "*koinonic* polyphony"
 692 allows us to elude the specific modern tension between subjective and anti-subjective
 693 ways of explaining conscious thought and selfhood. Given that today all "objective"
 694 attempts must always distance themselves from and situate themselves in opposi-
 695 tion to the inherent and prevailing "subjective-individualist" view, it will be more
 696 appropriate to qualify it as anti-subjective and non-individualist. Saying that thought
 697 is, for Plato, polyphonic and "communal" frees us from supposing a set of dualist
 698 oppositions: internal/external, subjective/objective, self-centered/other-centered,
 699 and self-conscious/unselfconscious.

700 I would characterize Plato's thinking with an ancient saying of uncertain origin
 701 (most probably to be attributed to Arius Didymus): "Plato is a man of many voices
 702 (*polyphonos*), not of many beliefs (*polydoxos*)."⁴⁷ The saying should not be under-
 703 stood as meaning that Plato had only one *unitary doctrine* and many ways of pre-
 704 senting it; but as claiming that for Plato objective knowledge or truth resides in
 705 *polyphony*, in the multiplicity of voices in dialogue and not in the many beliefs in
 706 which the dialogue ends. *Doxa* is always limited and provisional and therefore less
 707 pertinent than the many indomitable and perennial voices that constitute thinking.
 708 On the other hand, *doxa* represents the moment when doubt ends. It thereby repre-
 709 sents only *one* way that something can be said and understood. While the voices
 710 preserve doubt, they are dynamic because the same voice can say different things in
 711 a different context, and the many voices can say different things in the same context.
 712 This doesn't, however, mean that polyphony is the way the philosopher proofreads
 713 the multiplicity of *logoi*. Polyphony does not guarantee truth, but it does guarantee
 714 the indiscriminate exploration of *logoi*, and therefore "investigating the truth of
 715 things by means of words." And this may be the only (partial) truth human beings
 716 have access to.

717 The διάλογος ἐντὸς is, therefore, a type of "thinking-together" that does not
 718 exclude the fact of *being someone* physically, psychologically, and ethically dis-
 719 tinct, but it may exclude the idea of *conceiving* oneself as *having* a private and inef-
 720 fable (true) self or an inner private life. Plato's idea of selfhood doesn't propose a
 721 fundamentally "private" entity, but a psychophysical *distinct* entity constituted by
 722 polyphony. And the community doesn't represent the sum of all individuals or a
 723 "shared—"I" but the "conversation" between multiple and different microcommu-
 724 nities. Instead of replacing the notion of subjective unity by that of duality, or the

⁴⁷ Cited by Stobaeus 2.55.5-7.

notion of autonomy by that of participation, we should take into account the polyphony that constitutes altogether *us* and *them*. And it is exactly this aspect that certain current research in cognitive sciences approaches ignoring Greek thought.

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728 [AU9](#)

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