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Protreptic and Medicine in Plato's Early Dialogues

Abstract: This article explores Plato's relation to medicine as documented in his early dialogues by taking into account the historical and cultural context of the fourth century BC. In Plato's time, medicine and philosophy often interfered and competed with each other for cognitive and moral authority in matters concerning human nature, health, and happiness. To increase philosophy's public recognition, Plato challenged medicine's claims of being the rightful arbiter of the best *modus vivendi* and argued for philosophy's moral and intellectual preeminence over all other *technai*. As I intend to show, Plato's rivalry with medicine is often supported by a protreptic rhetoric, which aims both to highlight medicine's limits and to illustrate philosophy's primacy in defining the conditions for a temperate, ordered, and happy life. Along with a critique of different approaches to bodily health and happiness taken by Hippocratic writers, Plato emphasizes the soul's invaluable superiority over the body and describes philosophy as a genuine medicine of the soul. The explicit references to therapeutic techniques and vocabulary also function as rhetorical devices to demonstrate the useful and necessary character of philosophy.

Keywords: Plato, protreptic, polemics, Hippocratic Corpus, ancient philosophy, ancient medicine

As recent scholarship has increasingly shown, medicine figures prominently in Plato's work. One can identify at least two ways in which Plato refers to the medical practice and literature of his time. First, medicine is referred to as a term of comparison for the philosophical activity, as a rival *technē* whose claims to cognitive and moral authority Plato seeks to debunk. Besides this polemical stance, Plato's engagement with medicine reveals another, complementary purpose. As I intend to show, the medical language and analogies frequently operate as powerful rhetorical devices by means of which Plato intends to secure philosophy's status as a legitimate discipline and promote it in the intellectual milieu of his time.

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Philosophy's competition with medicine and the protreptic intent manifest in the Platonic corpus can be better understood if we take into account the historical and cultural context of the fourth century BC, in which Plato lived and wrote his works. As Collins (2015, 4, n. 5) has stressed, after the Peloponnesian War, "philosophical protreptic had to contend with every possible formulation of and approach to 'the good life'—including new intellectual discourses like historiography and medicine". Various disciplines, such as philosophy, rhetoric, medicine, sophistry, poetry, etc., were often engaged in a mutual competition for cognitive and moral authority, each one claiming its preeminence over the others. Ancient protreptic literature shows compelling evidence of the reciprocal attacks carried out by the advocates of various competing *technai*. The authors of protreptic speeches not only praised and recommended a particular *technē*, a school of thought, or a certain way of life, but also criticized the rival sources of knowledge and downplayed other competing disciplines. As Kotzé (2004, 57) notes, in a protreptic, "apart from showing the audience that they are in need of help, the merits of the recommended way of life must be presented together with a refutation of the claims of rival groups that they represent the best *modus vivendi*." (Cf. Aune 1991, 91). Plato's own dialogues contain much evidence of such a rivalry with rhetoric, sophistry, medicine, poetry, and even pre-Socratic philosophy. In what follows, I will discuss Plato's engagement and rivalry with medicine, taking into analysis some of his early dialogues. Without being exhaustive, the discussion below will focus on some relevant passages in dialogues such as the *First Alcibiades*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, and the *Gorgias*, which reflect a primary, but important stage of Plato's engagement with and opposition to medicine.

Before delving into our analysis, it may be useful to take a brief look at the development of Greek medicine in the fifth and fourth century BC. As shown by Jaeger (1957, 55), in Plato's time, "the methods of medical procedure, like those of mathematics, became the object of widespread interest even among educated laymen." There is abundant literary evidence of the growing public interest in medical matters in the Athens of Plato's day. As Carrick (1995, 12) has rightly noted, "the average Athenian held in high regard the practical applications of the medical craft", since physicians were generally regarded as experts in matters relating to human health. As people considered health as one of the highest goods for human life, "physicians could wield considerable power and authority" (*ibidem*). The Hippocratic writers often discussed human nature, bodily and psychic health, and maintained that prescribing the conditions for the best way of living falls within the province of medicine itself. As the author of the *Regimen in Acute Diseases* states, the art of medicine "has great power to bring

health in all cases of sickness, preservation of health to those who are well, good condition to athletes in training, and in fact realization of each man's particular desire." (*Regimen*, IX, 3-6, transl. by Jones 1959, 71). There is no surprise, therefore, that several Hippocratic authors argue for medicine's preeminence over other *technai*, including philosophy. This is particularly evident in the treatise entitled *On Ancient Medicine*. In a key-passage, the Hippocratic author overtly criticizes the approaches made by various philosophers on themes such as "what man is and by what causes he is made" (ἄνθρωπος τί ἐστὶν καὶ δι' οἷας αἰτίας γίνεται), "knowledge of nature" (περὶ φύσιος γινῶναι), and other similar points (*De vet. med.*, 20, 1-17, ed. Jones 1957, 52-53; cf. Levin 2014, 79). However, establishing the conditions for a good and happy life (*eudaimonia*) was a topic that interested philosophers as well, and their statements often interfered with similar points made by Hippocratic writers. Therefore, in such a competitive intellectual milieu, "there is little reason to doubt that on some occasions, at least, philosophers and physicians competed for influence and authority before their public on moral matters relating to *the right way to live*." (Carrick, 1995, 12)

The contest (*agōn*) between the advocates of the two competing *technai* often resulted in a mutual critique between philosophers and medical men (cf. Dean-Jones 2003, 98). The *Hippocratic Corpus* occasionally echoes this critique, as it is evident in the already mentioned treatise *Regimen in Acute Diseases*. In chapter VIII, 4-5, the Hippocratic author complains that "the art [of medicine] as a whole has a very bad name among laymen, so that there is thought to be no art of medicine at all" (transl. by Jones 1959, 69).¹ Additional evidence of the attacks mounted against medicine is found in the Hippocratic treatise *On the Art*, which seems to have been written, mainly, as a reaction to hostility from outside.² As we shall see in the following, Plato figures prominently among the opponents and critics of medicine. Many of his dialogues contain a vivid and overtly attack directed against several points made by Hippocratic authors.

Although Plato's engagement with medicine has been the subject of much scholarly interest over the past few decades (Desclos 1992; Lidz 1995; Lombard 1999; Moes 2000; Craik 2001; García Novo 2005; Boudon-Millot 2005; Moes 2011; Campos 2016, etc.)³, little attention has been paid to the particular aspect of Plato's rivalry with and polemic against medicine (exceptions include Carrick 1995, 12-13, and Levin 2014). Yet, as I hope to show in the following, a close look at this particular issue can help us grasp not only a fresh view of Plato's relationship with medicine, but also a deep insight into the way he sought to define and promote philosophy in the intellectual milieu of his time. Dialogues such as the *First Alcibiades*,

Charmides, *Laches*, and the *Gorgias* show evidence that medicine was often the target of a critique conducted by Plato, who seems engaged in a contest (*agōn*) with the medical writers and practitioners of his time. Though much slighter when compared with the situation found in later dialogues such as the *Symposium* or *Republic*, Plato's rivalry with medicine in his early dialogues is still important and worth investigating, since any dialogue reflects, to a greater or lesser extent, important aspects of the historical and cultural context in which it was written.

Several passages in the dialogues under discussion here contain the explicit statement that medicine cannot acquire the status of the *technē* par excellence, as some of the Hippocratic writers firmly claimed. To establish philosophy's preeminence over medicine, Plato introduces a well-known philosophical topos, namely the soul-body distinction, stressing the former's invaluable superiority over the latter. What Plato insists on is that while medicine is primarily concerned with the body, philosophy privileges the soul, which must be regarded as the most important of all.

Soul's preeminence to the body is a leading theme in Plato's early dialogues. In the *Crito*, 48A, for instance, the soul is defined as "that part in us which is concerned with right and wrong", and is considered to be more important (τιμιώτερον) than the body. A similar point is made in the *Gorgias*, 465C-D, where the soul is said to be in command of the body (ἡ ψυχὴ τῷ σώματι ἐπεστάται).⁴ The motif is further developed in the *First Alcibiades*, where the soul is told to be the user and the ruler (ἄρχουσα, 130A) of the body.⁵ Following Socrates' line of argument in the same dialogue, man turns out to be nothing else than soul (μηδὲν ἄλλο τὸν ἄνθρωπον συμβαίνειν ἢ ψυχὴν—*ibidem*, 130C). From a cognitive perspective, such an argument concludes that "anyone who gets to know something belonging to the body knows the things that are his, but not himself" (*ibidem*, 131A). Now, since the art of medicine is concerned with the body, "no physician, in so far as he is a physician, knows himself" (οὐδεὶς ἄρα τῶν ἰατρῶν ἑαυτὸν γινώσκει, καθ' ὅσον ἰατρός) (*ibidem*). The same goes true for farmers and craftsmen generally (γεωργοὶ καὶ οἱ ἄλλοι δημιουργοί), who are far from knowing themselves. These people, Socrates argues, "do not even know their own things, but only things still more remote than their own things, in respect of the arts which they follow" (κατὰ γε τὰς τέχνας ἅς ἔχουσιν) (*ibidem*). Now, if knowing oneself is temperance (σωφροσύνη), "none of these people is temperate in respect of his art" (οὐδεὶς τούτων σώφρων κατὰ τὴν τέχνην) (131B). This is why "these arts are held to be sordid, and no acquirements for a good man" (βάνανσοι αὐταὶ αἱ τέχναι δοκοῦσιν εἶναι καὶ οὐκ ἀνδρός

ἀγαθοῦ μαθήματα) (*ibidem*). The passage under discussion concludes with Socrates' statement that anyone willing to rule over the others must first learn how to rule over himself, by taking care of his soul and looking to that (ψυχῆς ἐπιμελητέον καὶ εἰς τοῦτο βλεπτέον) (132C).

In the passages above, Plato stages an *agōn* between philosophy—which is alluded by terms such as “temperance” (σωφροσύνη) and “care for the soul”—and the other *technai*, especially medicine. The soul-body split and the motif of “know thyself” (γινῶναι ἑαυτόν—129A; 130E) provide good grounds for arguing in favor of philosophy's preeminence over medicine. Plato's polemical stance here is evident. As we have seen, he overtly denied medicine's cognitive authority in matters concerning the soul and ranged it among the “sordid *technai*”.

That the *ergon* of medicine is only bodily health, while philosophy is a soul-focused *technē*, is also argued in the *Laches*. Nicias, a character in that dialogue, disapproves of Laches' opinion concerning the abilities of the practitioners of the medical art because he [i.e. Laches] falsely “thinks that the physician's knowledge of illness extends beyond the nature of health and disease. But in fact the physician knows no more than this.” (*Laches*, 195C, transl. by Jowett 1961, 139).⁶ The critique expressed here may be paralleled with the point made in the *Charmides*, 164C, where Socrates advocates the idea that “sometimes, the doctor may have done what is helpful or harmful without knowing the effect of his own action” (ὁ ἰατρὸς οὐ γινώσκει ἑαυτόν ὡς ἔπραξεν) (transl. by Lamb 1927, 47). While in the *First Alcibiades* Plato denied medicine's cognitive authority in the sphere of the soul, in the *Charmides* he seems to move even further, questioning the physician's cognitive abilities also in matters pertaining to bodily health. Physicians simply maintain that health is always better than sickness, but, regarded from a philosophical standpoint, this cannot be true. On the contrary, health itself can sometimes be more dreadful than sickness, and thus, for many people, it is better “never get up from a sickbed” (*Laches*, 195C). That the bodily health is not always the highest good is also maintained in the *Charmides*, 174B, where Plato makes Socrates say that “only the science of the good and evil (περὶ τὸ ἀγαθόν τε καὶ κακόν) makes men act rightly and be happy”. The argument is further developed in the *Gorgias*, where Socrates argues that a sound bodily condition can sometimes be detrimental to or destructive of the well-being of the soul, defined as an orderly state governed by justice (δικαιοσύνη) and self-control (σωφροσύνη) (*Gorgias* 504D).

Thus, while the authors of the *Hippocratic Corpus* maintained that health is the greatest good for men's life, Platonic dialogues such as the *Laches*, *Charmides*, and the *Gorgias* restrain this view, arguing that health can be

counted among the highest *agatha* only for those whose soul is in a good condition. Plato further echoes this Hippocratic statement in the *Gorgias*, 452A-B, where a fictitious and unnamed character argues that medicine deals with men's greatest good (περὶ τὸ μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις), namely health (ὑγίεια). Interestingly enough, the statement made by the unnamed (Hippocratic) character, that "there is no other greater good for men than health" (*ibidem*), will be overtly refuted by Plato towards the end of the same dialogue. Since psychic welfare is much more important than the welfare of the body, "being unjust, licentious, cowardly, and ignorant is more painful than being poor and sick" (*Gorgias*, 477D, transl. by Lamb 1925, 365). Arguing that "injustice, licentiousness, and in general, vice of soul, are the greatest evils" (*ibidem*, 477E, transl. by Lamb 1925, 365), Socrates will show to his interlocutors "how much more wretched than lack of health in the body it is to dwell with a soul that is not healthy, but corrupt, unjust, and unholy" (*ibidem*, 479B, transl. by Lamb 1925, 371).⁷ As Levin (2014, 102) notes, the conclusion of the argument is that "restoring an individual to health can work against justice", when man's soul is incurable.⁸ As we have seen, while the physician regarded the health of the body as the *summum bonum* for everyone, and claimed that medicine should be ranked at the pinnacle of the hierarchy of different *technai*, Plato repeatedly denies the medical men's ability to grasp the truth regarding the human nature. In Plato's view, the philosopher alone is able to handle correctly the relationship between the soul and the body and to prescribe right rules of conduct for his fellow-citizens.⁹ As the *First Alcibiades* and the *Gorgias* suggest, the true happiness (*eudaimonia*), which encompasses bodily health as well, depends on self-knowledge and *sōphrosynē* (self-control), which are not in the command of the physician. For Plato, what is most important is to take care of and heal the soul, a task that overcomes the cognitive ability of the Hippocratic physician. Therefore, Plato concludes, medicine should address only the body, since ensuring a good condition of the soul falls in the province of philosophy.¹⁰

The passages discussed so far show much evidence of Plato's intent to promote philosophy at the expense of medicine and other *technai*. In my opinion, Plato's critique of medicine is part of a wider rhetorical strategy intended to persuade the audience of the value and importance of philosophy, by placing special weight on *sōphrosynē* and by revealing the deficiencies in the writings of the Hippocratic authors. There can be little doubt that this positive and negative rhetoric was designed to fulfil, mainly, a proreptic purpose.

It is now time to turn to those passages in Plato's early dialogues in which the rhetorical use of medical concepts and analogies embodies, once

again, a protreptic purpose.¹¹ In addressing this issue, it may be useful to remind that the medical imagery is a topos largely attested in ancient protreptic literature. In order to understand more accurately the importance of this topos in works of protreptic intent we should keep in mind that the author of a protreptic often “assume(s) that if the hearer can be brought to real self-knowledge, i.e. knowledge of the sickness of his soul, this should be enough to motivate him to change.” (Kotzé 2004, 57)¹² Therefore, a philosophical protreptic reveals the inner contradictions in the addressees’ feelings and behaviour, and encourage them to undertake a conversion to a certain school of philosophy and, implicitly, to a way of life (*cf.* Malherbe, 1986, 122). Rhetorical topoi such as the “sickness of the soul”, “*therapeia*”, “*philosophus medicus*” and other similar concepts were frequently used by ancient authors to strengthen protreptic purposes. As Carrick (1995, 11) has noted, “philosophers associated with the ancient Academy were especially eager to coax the public into believing that they ought to care about the health and state of their invisible soul as diligently and thoughtfully as they already cared about the health of their visible body.” However, this was not a phenomenon limited to one particular school (e.g. the Academy), since the therapeutic function of philosophy is a topos largely attested in ancient sources, Greek and Latin as well. In the late third century AD, for example, Porphyry still deals with this topos in his letter *ad Marcellam*, 31, where he quotes this famous statement from Epicurus: “Empty are the words of that philosopher who offers therapy for no human suffering. For just as there is no use in medical expertise if it does not give therapy for bodily diseases, so too there is no use in philosophy if it does not expel the suffering of the soul.” (Transl. by Long and Sedley 1987, 155)¹³

If we turn now to the Platonic corpus, we see that the medical language and imagery is so closely mixed with philosophical questions that one can rightly assess, with Moes (2000, 46), that, on various occasions, “Plato models philosophy on the practice of medicine”. Quite often in his early dialogues, Plato conceives of philosophy as a therapy and portrays Socrates as a skilful *medicus*, able to diagnose and treat the maladies of the soul. Already in the *Apology* (29D–30B) Socrates’ discourse focused on the care of the soul¹⁴, and the *Laches*, 185E, overtly raises the question about someone “proficient in treatment of the soul” (τεχνικός περὶ ψυχῆς θεραπείαν).¹⁵ Also illustrative are some passages in the *Charmides*, where Socrates plays the role of a doctor (ιατρός, 155B), pretending to know a cure for Charmides’ headache (τι κεφαλῆς φάρμακον, 155B). As we are told at 157A, “if the head and body are to be well”, one “must begin by curing (θεραπεύειν) the soul—that is the first and essential thing” (transl. by Jowett 1961, 103). This “cure of the soul”, Socrates continues, “has to be effected by the use of

certain charms, and these charms are fair words, and by them temperance (σωφροσύνη) is implanted in the soul, and where temperance comes and stays, there health (ὑγίεια) is speedily imparted, not only to the head, but to the whole body.” (Transl. by Jowett 1961, 103)

Plato’s emphasis on the soul’s superiority over the body and his insistence on the importance of having the former in a good condition have already paved the way for a protreptic discussion by which readers and auditors are encouraged to take care of themselves by adopting a philosophically informed world-view. Since ignorance (ἀμαθία) is reckoned to be responsible for the evil condition of the soul (as we learn from *Gorgias* 477B), education plays an important role in preserving the well-being of the soul. Instruction (*paideia*), which is at the core of any philosophical protreptic, functions as a *pharmakon* for the diseases (νοσήματα) that can assail the soul. This idea is advocated by Socrates in the *Hippias Minor*, 372E-373A, where he says to his interlocutor: “I hope that you will be good to me, and not refuse to heal me, for you will do me a much greater benefit if you cure my soul of ignorance than you would if you were to cure my body of disease.” (Transl. by Jowett 1961, 210)¹⁶

In many passages of his early dialogues, Plato repeatedly insists on the importance of preserving or restoring the health of the soul. As we have seen, in the *Gorgias*, 479B-C, Socrates openly criticizes those who are unaware “how much more wretched than lack of health in the body it is to dwell with a soul that is not healthy, but corrupt, unjust, and unholy” (ὄσω ἀθλιώτερόν ἐστι μὴ ὑγιοῦς σώματος μὴ ὑγιῆ ψυχῆ συνοικεῖν, ἀλλὰ σαθρᾶ καὶ ἀδίκω καὶ ἀνοσίῳ) (transl. by Lamb 1925, 371). This is why one who has committed an injustice “must go of his own freewill where he may soonest pay the penalty, to the judge as if to his doctor (παρὰ τὸν δικαστήν, ὥσπερ παρὰ τὸν ἰατρόν), with the earnest intent that the disease of his injustice shall not become chronic and cause a deep incurable ulcer in his soul.” (*ibidem*, 480A-B, transl. by Lamb 1925, 375). The same point is maintained at 480C, where Socrates argues that “instead of concealing the iniquity, [one ought] to bring it to light in order that he may pay the penalty and be made healthy (ἵνα δῶ δίκην καὶ ὑγιῆς γένηται).” The unjust man ought “to compel both himself and his neighbors not to cover away, but to submit with closed eyes and good courage, as it were, to the cutting and burning of the surgeon, in pursuit of what is good and fair, without counting the pain.” (Transl. by Lamb 1925, 375, modified).¹⁷ As one can notice, here again the welfare of the soul is described by making appeal to various medical terms, such as ἰατρός, ὑγιῆς, νόσημα, ἀνίατος, τέμνειν, κάειν, ἀλγεινός, etc.

It is important to note how the vocabulary of therapy and disease helps Plato in advancing his protreptic purpose. In order to emphasize philosophy's importance and primacy over other *technai*, Plato explicitly states that true *eudaimonia* is not attainable without the study and practice of philosophy. Temperance (σωφροσύνη) and self-mastering (ἐγκράτεια) are among the *erga* of philosophy (see *Gorgias* 491D-E), and without these virtues, there can be no true *eudaimonia* at all.

To reinforce the protreptic purpose of the *Gorgias*, Plato introduces, towards the end of the dialogue, the myth of the judgment in the life beyond, which emphasizes, once again, the importance of the care of the soul.¹⁸ What seems to be most important from the perspective of the judgment to come is to have the soul pure and free from any wickedness (πονηρία). It is exactly what Socrates strives for, as he shows himself preoccupied with preparing his soul to go to that judgment as healthy as possible (ὑγιεστάτην τὴν ψυχὴν, 526D). As we have already seen, preparing the soul to be in a good condition, healthy, and free from vice is a task that only philosophy can achieve. This is exactly why, from a teleological point of view, the life of philosophy turns to be far more valuable than any other way of life. According to Socrates' narrative, it is the virtuous soul of the philosopher, not that of the politician, nor that of a physician, who will fare well in the life beyond (526C). Arriving in the Isles of the Blest is not allowed to anyone but those who have lived "a holy life in company with truth", i.e., the philosophers (*ibidem*). The *exemplum* of the privileged condition of the philosopher's soul in the life beyond functions as an implicit protreptic to the philosophical life, which is in direct opposition to the life of the politician and that of the rhetorician.¹⁹ It is not by chance that Callicles' apotreptic from philosophy (484C-486D) is replaced at the end of the dialogue by an explicit protreptic to philosophy, articulated by Socrates himself (526D-end). The use of the verbs παρακαλέω, ἀκολουθέω and πείθω, the explicit references to an eternal *eudaimonia* (εὐδαιμονήσεις καὶ ζῶν καὶ τελευτήσας, 527C), as well as the topos of the hearer's choice of "the best way of life" (527E), transform the whole passage into a direct utterance of Plato's protreptic purpose.

In the light of the discussion above, we can assess more accurately Plato's view on the status of different *technai* in the *Gorgias*. Although 521D has introduced Socrates qua *homo politicus*—"I think I am one of the few, not to say the only one, in Athens who attempts the true art of politics" (transl. by Lamb 1925, 515, slightly modified)—, the *politikē technē* which Socrates refers to is not so fundamentally different from the practice of philosophy as described in other early dialogues. In my view, *pace* Campos (2016, 231), the true political art described in the *Gorgias* as Socrates' field of expertise, is

in many respects similar to the philosophy exposed in the *Apology* or in the *First Alcibiades*, where Socrates explicitly defines his activity as a “therapeia” or “care of the soul”. Politics in the *Gorgias* can thus be assimilated to a kind of philosophy, whose influence now revolves not only around each particular man (as in the *Apology*), but envisages the cure of the city as a whole (θεραπεία τῆς πόλεως, 521a). I also diverge from Levin (2014, 55), who maintains that the knowledge concerning the welfare of the soul belongs exclusively to the art of politics (*politikē technē*). Although at 464B the art that has to do with the soul is called “politics”, by the end of the dialogue it tends to closely identify with philosophy. As we have seen, while the discussion initially concentrates on rhetoric and politics, it gradually moves towards emphasizing philosophy’s role in achieving the health and the well-being of the soul.²⁰

As the discussion above has shown, Plato’s early dialogues contain elements of an *agōn* between philosophy and medicine for cognitive and moral authority in matters concerning human nature, health, and happiness (*eudaimonia*). Against the claims to intellectual preeminence made by the authors of the Hippocratic Corpus, Plato’s early dialogues aimed to show the readers how greatly philosophy surpasses the art of medicine when psychic welfare is concerned. For Plato, human happiness cannot be granted by the physician’s art alone since his activity revolves only or mostly around the body. By emphasizing the soul’s invaluable superiority over the body, Plato implicitly urged his audience to embrace philosophy, which is constantly described as the activity most worthy of pursuit. In arguing for the usefulness and the necessary character of philosophy, Plato made frequent appeal to medical imagery and analogies, nearly all of which are designed to fulfill or sustain a protreptic purpose.

Notes

¹ *Regimen*, VIII, 4-5: διαβολήν γε ἔχει ὅλη ἡ τέχνη πρὸς τῶν δημοτέων μεγάλην, ὡς μὴ δοκεῖν ὅλως ἰητρικὴν εἶναι (ed. Jones 1959).

² See the translation and commentary by Mann 2012.

³ Previous studies on the same issue include those by Kucharski 1939, Schuhl 1960, and Joly 1961.

⁴ Cf. *ibidem*, 512A.

⁵ All translations from the *First Alcibiades* are taken from Lamb 1927. I will not embark here on the discussion of the controversial issue of the dialogue’s authenticity. I agree with Lamb (1927, 97), Motte (1961), Denyer (2001, 14-26), and Lachance (2012, 132) in asserting the authenticity of the *First Alcibiades*. As far as its chronology is concerned, most scholars have argued for an early dating of this dialogue (e.g. Lamb 1927, 97; Motte 1961, 32). I thus diverge from Denyer (2001, 11-12), according to whom Plato would have written the dialogue “at some time in the early 350s”, when he was about seventy. For a more lengthy discussion on the chronology of Plato’s dialogues, see Brandwood 1990.

⁶ Cf. Aristotle, *Protrepticus* fr. 46 Düring, where we are told that the physicians and experts in physical training “use their skill only on the health and the strength of the body” (τῆς τοῦ σώματος ἀρετῆς εἰσι δημιουργοὶ μόνον). (Transl. by Düring 1961, 67, slightly modified).

⁷ The same point is made by Plutarch, *Animine an corporis affectiones sint peiores*, 501E.

⁸ Cf. Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, fr. 2 and 4 Düring.

⁹ Again, one can find a parallel in Aristotle's *Protrepticus*, fr. 9 Düring. In fr. 39, Aristotle also depicts the philosopher as the right “standard” (κανών) or “landmark” of what is good (ὄρος ἀκριβέστερος τῶν ἀγαθῶν). For more on this, see Mihai 2016, 94.

¹⁰ As Levin (2014, 66) rightly emphasizes, “to subordinate medicine is of course not to deny its merit altogether.” What Plato contends for is that medicine correctly assess its own limitations and acknowledge that it takes instruments for a thorough knowledge and understanding of the soul itself. (*ibidem*)

¹¹ The protreptic purpose of Plato's early dialogues has been discussed at some length in modern scholarship. Slings (1999, 73) considers the *First Alcibiades* to be “the only protreptic text from the pre-Christian era which has been preserved un mutilated” and provides a long list of various “protreptic situations” in Plato's dialogues (*ibidem*, 76). To Jordan (1986, 314), both the *First Alcibiades* and the *Gorgias* have a protreptic intent. Cf. Collins (2015, 98).

¹² For more on the interconnections between ancient protreptic rhetoric and medicine, see Jordan (1986, 316-317), Slings (1995, 179-180), Van der Meeren (2002, 598-599; 610-611), and Kotzé (2004, 63). For a further discussion on ancient philosophy as medicine, see Pigeaud (1981), Voelke (1993), Sellars (2018, 183-198), and Mihai (2018, 258-270).

¹³ The same topos is found in Cicero, *Tusculanae disputationes* III, 6 (*est profecto animi medicina, philosophia*); *Academica posteriora* I, 11; Sextus Empiricus, *Pyrrhoneion Hypotyposeon* III, 280-281. The analogy between medicine and philosophy is also found in a famous passage from Philo of Larissa (quoted by Stobaeus, ed. Wachsmuth & Hense, 1884, II, 39-40), in which the philosopher's activity is compared with that of a physician. The passage has been much discussed in recent scholarship and many scholars retain the analogy between medicine and philosophy to be a distinctive feature of the protreptic genre (e.g. Jordan 1986, 316-317; Kotzé 2004, 56; 63; Collins 2015, 243).

¹⁴ Note the use of the verbs ἐπιμελέομαι and φροντίζω, which occur several times in the *Apology*.

¹⁵ Cf. *Charmides*, 157b: τὴν ψυχὴν ... θεραπευθῆναι. See also *Protagoras* 313E: τις ... περὶ τὴν ψυχὴν ... ἰατρικός, and 340E: εἰμί τις γελοῖος ἰατρός (Socrates' reference to himself).

¹⁶ *Hipp. Minor*, 372E-372A: μὴ φθονήσης ἰάσασθαι τὴν ψυχὴν μου· πολὺ γὰρ τοι μείζον με ἀγαθὸν ἐργάση ἀμαθίας παύσας τὴν ψυχὴν ἢ νόσου τὸ σῶμα. In the *First Alcibiades*, learning also functions as an antidote against the harmful influence of the Athenian people. At 132B, we have Socrates urging the young Alcibiades with these words: “Exercise yourself first, my wonderful friend, in learning what you ought to know before entering on politics; you must wait till you have learnt, in order that you may be armed with an antidote (ἴν' ἀλεξιφάρμακα ἔχω) and so come to no harm.” (Transl. by Lamb 1927, 207).

¹⁷ Similarly, Epictetus, *Dissertationes*, III, 23, 30, compares the school of the philosopher with a surgery: Ἰατρειὸν ἐστίν, ἄνδρες, τὸ τοῦ φιλοσόφου σχολεῖον· οὐ δεῖ ἡσθέντας ἐξελεθεῖν, ἀλλ' ἀλγήσαντας. See also Seneca, *Ep.* 75, 5-6; 108, 4.

¹⁸ The protreptic function of the myth is discussed in ancient handbooks of rhetoric. A scholia to Aethonius explicitly insists on this rhetorical function: Τὸν μῦθον προδήλως τοῦ συμβουλευτικῶν κατὰ ῥητορικὴν φαμέν εἰδῶν· ἡ γὰρ προτρέπομεν ἐπὶ τι, ἢ ἀποτρέπομεν ἀπὸ τίνος τὸν ἀκροατὴν διὰ τοῦ μύθου. (Walz 1835, 568, 9-12).

¹⁹ Levin (2014, 25) is right to assess that in the *Gorgias*, “antithetical models of *eudaimonia* are at stake”.

²⁰ Particularly telling is the discussion at 507C-D, where Plato introduces the well-known protreptic topos of the universal human desire for happiness. In that passage, Socrates asserts that “anyone who desires to be happy must pursue and practice temperance” (σωφροσύνη), which is not the *ergon* of politics, but of philosophy itself. Cf. *Charmides* 175E-176A; *Euthydemus* 278E-279A. See also Aristotle, *Protrepticus* fr. 94 Düring; Cicero, *Hortensius* fr. 58 Grilli; Seneca, *De beata vita* 1, 1.

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