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COLLOQUIAL STYLE AND ITS USE IN PLATO'S LATER WORKS¹

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It is a well-known fact that Plato uses so-called colloquial language to a greater extent in the dialogues of the first and middle periods, than in his late works. Indeed, it seems characteristic of the style of his late works that colloquial traits are absent. In his late works Plato prefers an abstract, heavy, twisted baroque prose that has been sometimes referred to as *ὄγκος* («heavy heaped-up bulk»). The difference between Platonic colloquial style and late Platonic *onkos* is easily noticed if one compares two typical passages such as the following, the first taken from the early *Laches*, the second from the late *Laws*:

1. *La.* 194 e—195 b

ΛΑ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν ὀρθῶς αὐτὸν ἐρωτᾶς, ὦ Σώκρατες, καὶ εἶπέτω γε τίνα φησὶν αὐτὴν εἶναι.

ΝΙ. Ταύτην ἔγωγε, ὦ Λάχης, τὴν τῶν δεινῶν καὶ θαρραλέων ἐπιστήμην
195 καὶ ἐν πολέμῳ καὶ ἐν τοῖς ἄλλοις ἅπασιν.

ΛΑ. Ὡς ἄτοπα λέγει, ὦ Σώκρατες.

ΣΩ. Πρὸς τί τοῦτ' εἶπες βλέπας, ὦ Λάχης;

ΛΑ. Πρὸς ὃ τι, χωρὶς δήπου σοφία ἐστὶν ἀνδρείας.

ΣΩ. Οὐκὼν φησὶ γε Νικίας.

ΛΑ. Οὐ μέντοι μὰ Δία ταῦτά τοι καὶ ληρεῖ.

ΣΩ. Οὐκοῦν διδάσκωμεν αὐτόν, ἀλλὰ μὴ λοιδορῶμεν.

ΝΙ. Οὐκ, ἀλλά μοι δοκεῖ, ὦ Σώκρατες, Λάχης ἐπιθυμεῖν καμὲ φανῆναι
b μηδὲν λέγοντα, ὅτι καὶ αὐτὸς ἄρτι τοιοῦτος ἐφάνη.

ΛΑ. Πάνυ μὲν οὖν, ὦ Νικία, καὶ πειράσομαι γε ἀποφῆναι. οὐδὲν γὰρ λέγεις· ἐπεὶ αὐτίκα ἐν ταῖς νόσοις οὐχ οἱ ἱατροὶ τὰ δεινὰ ἐπίστανται; ἢ οἱ ἀνδρεῖοι δοκοῦσί σοι ἐπίστασθαι; ἢ τοὺς ἱατροὺς σὺ ἀνδρείους καλεῖς;

ΝΙ. Οὐδ' ὅπωςτιοῦν.

¹ Paper read at the 5th International Congress of Classical Studies at Bonn, Sept. 2nd, 1969.

2. *Lg.* IX. 857 bc

ΚΛ. Πῶς δὴ λέγομεν, ᾧ ξένε, μηδὲν διαφέρειν τῷ κλέπτοντι μέγα ἢ σμικρὸν ὑφελομένῳ καὶ ἐξ ἱερῶν ἢ δσίων καὶ ὅσα ἄλλα ἐστὶ περὶ κλοπὴν πᾶσαν ἀνομοιότητα ἔχοντα, οἷς δεῖ ποικίλοις οὔσιν ἔπεσθαι τὸν νομοθέτην μηδὲν ὁμοίαις ζημίαις ζημιοῦντα;

ΑΘ. ᾿Αριστ᾽, ᾧ Κλεινία, σχεδὸν τί με ὥσπερ φερόμενον ἀντικρούσας ἀνήγειρας, ἐννενοηκότα δὲ καὶ πρότερον ὑπέμνησας, ὅτι τὰ περὶ τὴν τῶν νόμων θέσιν οὔδενι τρόπῳ πώποτε γέγονεν ὀρθῶς διαπεπονημένα, ὥς γε ἐν τῷ νῦν παραπεπτωκότι λέγειν.

The *Laches* passage is notably lively, and the colloquial style may appear to correspond to this liveliness. The passage from the *Laws*, again, though it is formally dialogue, exhibits an abstract, circumstantial and, in general, expansive style; the vocabulary is largely above the colloquial level, as a closer analysis would indicate.

The following passage from the *Timaeus* is another illustration of onkos style. Notice here the twists in the thought and, hence, in the sentence structure:

3. *Ti.* 48 c-e

νῦν δὲ οὖν τό γε παρ᾽ ἡμῶν ᾧδε ἔχέτω· τὴν μὲν περὶ ἀπάντων εἴτε ἀρχὴν εἴτε ἀρχὰς εἴτε ὅπη δοκεῖ τούτων πέρι τὸ νῦν οὐ ῥητέον, δι᾽ ἄλλο μὲν οὐδέν, διὰ δὲ τὸ χαλεπὸν εἶναι κατὰ τὸν παρόντα τρόπον τῆς διεξόδου δηλῶσαι τὰ δοκοῦντα, μήτ᾽ οὖν ὑμεῖς οἴεσθε δεῖν ἐμὲ λέγειν, οὔτ᾽ αὐτὸς αὖ πείθειν ἐμαυτὸν εἶην ἂν δυνατός, ὡς ὀρθῶς ἐγχειροῖμ᾽ ἂν τοσοῦτον ἐπιβαλλόμενος ἔργον· τὸ δὲ κατ᾽ ἀρχὰς ῥηθέν διαφυλάττων, τὴν τῶν εἰκότων λόγων δύναμιν, πειράσομαι μηδενὸς ἤττον εἰκότα, μᾶλλον δὲ καὶ ἔμπροσθεν ἀπ᾽ ἀρχῆς περὶ ἐκάστων καὶ ξυμπάντων λέγειν. θεὸν δὴ καὶ νῦν ἐπ᾽ ἀρχῇ τῶν λεγομένων σωτήρα ἐξ ἀτόπου καὶ ἀήθους διηγῆσεως πρὸς τὸ τῶν εἰκότων δόγμα διασώζειν ἡμᾶς ἐπικαλεσάμενοι πάλιν ἀρχώμεθα λέγειν.

Though it is easy to see a difference in style between the *Laches* passage (sample text 1) and the two other passages, it is reasonable to ask how we can know that the former reflects colloquial Attic, or indeed, how we can know in what (generic) 'style' it is written. This should be the place for a theoretical consideration of style and stylistic analysis, but I shall deal with theory very briefly. I shall not enter upon the question whether there is,

strictly speaking, such a thing as 'colloquial language' (*sermo familiaris* or *cotidianus*, 'Umgangssprache') in Wunderlich's, Bally's, Spitzer's and J. B. Hofmann's sense — i.e. colloquial language as a generic manner of speech. But at any rate there are such things as *colloquialisms*. The criterion of a colloquialism, I take it, is not 'affectiveness' or 'expressiveness' or 'banality' or 'ungrammaticality' or whatever general qualitative indications have been suggested. The only reliable heuristic criterion of a colloquialism — be it a form, a word or a phrase — is simply its habitual context: the criterion of a colloquialism is the fact that the phenomenon in question is preferred in contexts of informal speech (such as non-literary passages in Comedy, in Xenophon's Socratic works, and in Plato's early writings) and, on the other hand, avoided in formal contexts (such as high poetry or rhetoric or scientific prose or legal style). Some colloquialisms are for various reasons more striking than others, and some are preferably used in cultivated conversation, some in lower social strata ('vulgarisms', 'slang expressions', etc.). The distinctions are necessarily vague. But for the present purpose it is sufficient to state that if colloquialisms are somehow predominant in a piece of speech or writing, then this may be said to have a colloquial style. A checking of the habitual context of the words and expressions of the *Laches* passage will show that nearly everything in it is either distinctly colloquial (though without a vulgar flavour) or stylistically neutral (i.e. not markedly preferred in any genre of style).

For comparison I quote from the *Euthydemus* another example of vivid colloquial style:

4. *Euthd.* 287 bc

Εἶτ', ἔφη, ὦ Σώκратες, ὁ Διονυσόδωρος ὑπολαβὼν, οὕτως εἶ Κρόνος, ὥστε ἂ τὸ πρῶτον εἶπομεν νῦν ἀναμιμνήσκει, καὶ εἶ τι πέρυσιν εἶπον, νῦν ἀναμνησθήσει, τοῖς δ' ἐν τῷ παρόντι λεγομένοις οὐχ ἕξεις ὅ τι χρῆ; Καὶ γάρ, ἔφην ἐγώ, χαλεποὶ εἶσι πάνυ, εἰκότως· παρὰ σοφῶν γὰρ λέγονται· ἐπεὶ καὶ τούτῳ τῷ τελευταίῳ παγγάλεπον χρῆσασθαι ἔστιν, ὧ λέγεις. τὸ γὰρ οὐκ ἔχω ὅ τι χρῶμαι τί ποτε λέγεις, ὦ Διονυσόδωρε; ἢ δῆλον ὅτι ὡς οὐκ ἔχω ἐξελέγξαι αὐτόν; ἐπεὶ εἶπέ, τί σοι ἄλλο νοεῖ τοῦτο τὸ ῥῆμα, τὸ οὐκ ἔχω ὅ τι χρῆσομαι τοῖς λόγοις; Ἄλλ' ὁ σὺ λέγεις, ἔφη, τούτῳ τοι πάνυ χαλεπὸν χρῆσθαι· ἐπεὶ ἀποκρίναι. Πρὶν σὲ ἀποκρίνασθαι, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, ὦ Διονυσόδωρε; Οὐκ ἀποκρίνει, ἔφη. Ἦ καὶ δίκαιον; Δίκαιον μέντοι, ἔφη. Κατὰ τίνα λόγον; ἦν δ' ἐγώ . . .

This passage includes a 'vulgarism', to judge from parallels in Comedy: *οὕτως εἶ Κρόνος* »are you so stoneage . . .?» Plato of course very seldom employs vulgarisms, and when he does, they always have a special point: the present case is meant to characterize the speaker, Dionysodoros.

I hope I have made it sufficiently clear what I mean by colloquial style and how it can be traced in Plato's writings. In my book on Plato's styles (1967) I have given a tentative survey of the distribution and function of colloquial sections in Plato's works of the early and middle periods. It seems that colloquial style has, generally speaking, three functions in these works: First, it is used as a basic style from which various passages with higher style stand out, either as parody or with more serious intentions. Colloquial Attic represents the mimetic play, the *παιδιά*, which constitutes the basis of all or most of these dialogues, and it contributes to their realistic setting. Secondly, in vivid passages the colloquial style often becomes clustered, condensed, as it were. It can be seen that the variation between mimetically more lively and less lively sections, between colloquial style condensed and colloquial style rarified (or evaporating into other styles), creates a compositional rhythm or pulse in the dialogues, which corresponds to their formal structure: an opening conversation is often vividly colloquial, the conclusion is sometimes so, and inside the work there can be found several colloquial interludes. And thirdly, colloquialisms are often used for character portraiture, in the first place of Socrates, occasionally of others.

A study of the function of style — the interrelation of 'Gehalt' und 'Gestalt' (Kakridis) — naturally contributes to interpretation. Very much remains to be done regarding Plato's colloquialisms from this point of view. I should like to concentrate here on two special questions that have received almost no attention so far: What happened to the colloquial style in Plato's late works? And if there are colloquialisms in the late works, have they any notable bearing on the interpretation of Plato?

It will be useful to start with some works where Plato's late style, the *onkos*, makes its first appearance. Of the works which in various ways point forward to the late period, the *Republic*, Books II—X, and the *Phaedrus* are best suited for our purpose. Here we can observe how the *onkos* style grows up and forces colloquial style out of its way.

In the *Republic*, after the introductory scenes of the 2nd book, colloquial Attic does not function as the basic style nor has it any obvious function of character drawing left. There still occur clusters of colloquialisms, but they

seem to have chiefly a *structural* function. Colloquial or semi-colloquial interludes offer retardation, relaxation, relief, as indeed they often do in the earlier dialogues; but it is interesting to note (and this is less manifest in the earlier dialogues) that from the latter part of the 2nd book of the *Republic* onwards such interludes seem to come as a rule immediately before sections of particular importance. Colloquial style is becoming a contrast style for relief.

This contrasting and, hence, underlining function of colloquial style can be observed for instance in Book IV, tracing the true nature of justice (*R. IV.* 432 b-e); at the end of Book VI, introducing the similes of the Line and the Cave (*R. VI.* 509 c); and in Book X, introducing the concluding section on the immortality of the soul (*R. X.* 608 cd). It is possible that a closer study of the retarding and structuring function of colloquial style could give some clues to what Plato himself though particularly important in this gigantic work.

Similarly in the *Phaedrus*, after the extensive playful introduction, the chief function left for colloquial style seems to be retardation and contrast. There is an illustrative example in the centre of the work, at the peripeteia where Socrates refers to his inner voice, the daimonion, which causes a radical change of approach:

5. *Phdr.* 242 b-d

ΣΩ. Ἡνίκ' ἐμελλον, ὠγαθέ, τὸν ποταμὸν διαβαίνειν, τὸ δαιμόνιον τε
 c καὶ τὸ εἰωθὸς σημεῖόν μοι γίγνεσθαι ἐγένετο — ἀεὶ δέ με ἐπίσχει ὃ ἂν
 μέλλω πράττειν — καὶ τινα φωνήν ἔδοξα αὐτόθεν ἀκοῦσαι, ἣ με οὐκ ἔᾶ
 ἀπιέναι πρὶν ἂν ἀφοσιώσωμαι, ὡς δὴ τι ἡμαρτηκότα εἰς τὸ θεῖον. εἰμὶ δὴ
 οὖν μάντις μὲν, οὐ πάνν δὲ σπουδαῖος, ἀλλ' ὥσπερ οἱ τὰ γράμματα φαῦλοι,
 ὅσον μὲν ἐμαυτῷ μόνον ἱκανός· σαφῶς οὖν ἤδη μανθάνω τὸ ἀμάρτημα.
 ὡς δὴ τοι, ὦ ἑταῖρε, μαντικόν γέ τι καὶ ἡ ψυχὴ· ἐμὲ γὰρ ἔθραξε μὲν τι καὶ
 πάλαι λέγοντα τὸν λόγον, καὶ πῶς ἐδυσσωπούμην κατ' Ἰβυκον, μὴ τι παρὰ
 θεοῖς

d ἀμβλακῶν τιμὰν πρὸς ἀνθρώπων ἀμείψω·
 νῦν δ' ἥσθημαι τὸ ἀμάρτημα.

ΦΑΙ. Λέγεις δὲ δὴ τί;

ΣΩ. Δεινόν, ὦ Φαῖδρε, δεινὸν λόγον αὐτός τε ἐκόμισας ἐμὲ τε ἠνάγκασας
 εἰπεῖν.

ΦΑΙ. Πῶς δὴ;

ΣΩ. Εὐνήθη καὶ ὑπό τι ἀσεβῆ· οὗ τίς ἂν εἴη δεινότερος;

The style of this passage has notably few literary traits for being from the *Phaedrus*. It characterizes of course Socrates the εἴρων, but this is certainly not its only function. The contrast to the surrounding sections is evident, indeed magnificent, if it is remembered that what has preceded is the awkward first speech of Socrates, and what follows immediately after this rather down-to-earth interlude is the palinodic speech about the cosmic flight of the soul, with a display of high styles that lend some of their colour to the rest of the work.

Having discovered that Plato towards the end of his middle period tended to use colloquial style chiefly as a structural contrast style, we may turn to the late works.

It is true in general terms that Platonic onkos colours all these works. And we can see from sample text 2 that a piece of onkos dialogue need not include any obvious colloquialisms. But this is not always so. By closer examination we can detect a fair amount of colloquialisms in Plato's late works. The great majority, it is true, consists of isolated words and expressions which are on the whole more common in the earlier dialogues and in other evidently colloquial contexts and which probably have been adopted in the late works as mechanized dialogue idioms. As such they do not give a distinct colloquial flavour to their onkos context — I am referring to occasional instances of *ναί*, *σφόδρα*, *ἄττα*, deictic *-ί*, *που*, *τάχ'* ἄν ἴσως, and the like, and various combinations of particles, and some idiomatic formulae. The question whether such apparent colloquialisms received a different flavour or became 'neutralized' in the course of the 4th century, after having been more distinctly colloquial in the early classical age (this is what happened e.g. to the verb *λαλέω*), is a difficult separate problem which I cannot discuss here.

Some apparent colloquialisms, however, look rather more unmechanized, sometimes even striking. Such instances have probably to be regarded as conscious or unconscious lapses into the usage of spoken Attic, such as an occasional *παπαί* (*Lg.* IV. 704 c), or *ἀντίκα* meaning »for instance« (V. 727 a). But whether these words and expressions are classed as real colloquialisms or not, it is essential to note that they are, on the whole, quite isolated.

Yet sometimes they occur in clusters. It is true that they never actually predominate over the onkos or otherwise literary context so as to create a real colloquial style. But the clusters give a certain colloquial flavour to the exposition. These passages of 'condensed' colloquialisms in Plato's late works certainly do not serve the purpose of character portraiture: all characters in

these works are non-individual mouth-pieces for different approaches above the mimetic level. Nor do such passages really emphasize the external compositional rhythm, the alternation between conversation on one hand and elenchos or monologue on the other (besides, this rhythm is largely blurred in the late works). But the colloquializing passages seem to have some kind of relief function for the internal structure of the exposition. They appear to introduce sections of eminent importance.

This can be seen, for instance, in the *Philebus*. Apart from the introduction, there occur some passages where the tone of the discussion becomes livelier and which have a slight concentration of colloquialisms. This is obvious at three points in particular: just before the main theme is entered upon (23 b), and when a new and better approach to pleasure and pain is introduced (27 e—31 a), and just before the final contrasting of the views of Philebos and Socrates (58 e—60 a).

Is it that Plato gets excited when he approaches points of fundamental importance? Or is he getting careless when he envisages the end of an argument that has turned out to be unsatisfactory? Or is this just a reminiscence of his earlier practice of vivid interludes? I should think that the second and third explanations are more relevant than the first one. The colloquializing passages finish an old argument rather than open a new one (though of course in Plato old and new arguments are usually somewhat interwoven). But to us such passages at the same time indicate that something fresh is to follow. At any rate it would seem that we have here an instrument for detecting what Plato himself wanted to emphasize — a very modest instrument, to be sure, and certainly not an infallible one, but a support for other considerations of his intentions.

The structural contrast function of colloquializing passages can also be seen in the *Sophistes* and the *Politicus*. In the monologues of *Timaeus*, *Critias* and the *7th Letter* I have found no obvious traces of it (though there are isolated colloquialisms), but it should be remembered that these works do not lend themselves to the adoption of a practice developed in the dialogues.

Now, what about the *Laws*? Can the study of the distribution of colloquialisms throw any light on the structure of this seemingly chaotic mass of material and thoughts?

First, it can be stated that there occur slight fluctuations in the frequency of colloquialisms in the *Laws*. It is natural that most of the extensive monologues (especially in the 5th book with its 'prooimion' and the 8th and 9th

books with their specimens of laws) have a very low frequency of colloquialisms. The frequency is on the whole higher in the three introductory books, in the 7th book (which is concerned with education), in the 10th book (on theology), and in the 12th book (in particular in the section dealing with the Nocturnal Council, 960 b—966 b). As a general reason for this I suggest that these sections include a greater variety of approaches, and matters that invited irony and play. The question may be worth further study.

But in addition to this general fluctuation, there occur fairly marked *clusters* of colloquialisms at some nine or ten points, most of them in Books I—IV. If these passages are taken as structural indicators, they direct our attention to some ideas which may be regarded as fundamental in the first five books of the *Laws*, and which perhaps, if emphasized, give some glimpses of an internal progressive order of thoughts. The interpretation that I am going to suggest is by no means revolutionary: it follows partly Friedländer, partly some others, but it puts the emphasis somewhat differently. The following ideas become underlined by colloquializing passages: the superiority of *σωφροσύνη* and *νοῦς* over mere bravery (there is a crisis with playful colloquialisms at I. 629 b); the irrelevance of common opinions (coll. at II. 658 a-e); the necessity of engaging all forces of the community in a harmonic appreciation of what is right (the three choruses, introduced at II. 664 d—665 b); the development of city states culminating in the Dorian state (coll. at III. 680 cd); the failure of the Dorian state (coll. at III. 686 c-e); the failure of all human institutions and the superiority of theocracy (coll. at IV. 712 de, sample text 6); and finally, the importance of persuading people to obey the laws (coll. at IV. 722 c-e). The development of the last two points, theocracy and persuasion, may be said to correspond to the visionary central sections of Plato's earlier works. It is therefore interesting to note that one of the most manifest clusters of colloquialisms, perhaps the most obvious one in the whole of the *Laws*, is that which occurs immediately before the Kronos myth and the famous speech on the majesty of divine law. Part of the passage runs as follows:

6. Lg. IV. 712 de

ME. Καὶ μὴν ξυνηοῶν γε, ᾧ ξένε, τὴν ἐν Λακεδαίμονι πολιτείαν οὐκ ἔχω σοι φράζειν οὕτως, ἥντινα προσαγορεύειν αὐτὴν δεῖ. καὶ γὰρ τυραννίδι δοκεῖ μοι προσεοικέναι· τὸ γὰρ τῶν ἐφόρων θαυμαστὸν ὡς τυραννικὸν ἐν αὐτῇ γέγονε. καὶ τις ἐνίοτέ μοι φαίνεται πασῶν τῶν πόλεων δημοκρατουμένη μάλιστ' εἰοικέναι. τὸ δ' αὖ μὴ φάναι ἀριστοκρατίαν αὐτὴν εἶναι παντάπασιν

e ἄτοπον· καὶ μὴν δὴ βασιλεία γε διὰ βίου τ' ἐστὶν ἐν αὐτῇ καὶ ἀρχαιοτάτη πασῶν καὶ πρὸς πάντων ἀνθρώπων καὶ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν λεγομένη. ἐγὼ δὲ οὕτω νῦν ἐξαίρνης ἂν ἐρωτηθεὶς ὄντως, ὅπερ εἶπον, οὐκ ἔχω διορισάμενος εἰπεῖν, τίς τούτων ἐστὶ τῶν πολιτειῶν.

Notice here the aporetic embarrassment of Megillos. The colloquialisms reflect this, e.g. καὶ μὴν . . . γε (and soon afterwards καὶ μὴν δὴ . . . γε), probably οὐκ ἔχω with infinitive (resumed at the end of the passage), καὶ γάρ, θαυμαστόν ὥς, καί τις, ἄτοπον (at least when emphasized as here; παντάπασιν ἄτοπον may be something like Engl. coll. «extraordinary»), indefinite οὕτως twice — along with literary and intellectual traits. The last sentence is typical: «Well, being asked now suddenly like this, really, as I said, I can't say exactly which of these governments Sparta has.» Also the repetition of the commonplace verb εἶπον may be a colloquialism. From this down-to-earth aporia Plato then rises to myth and vision. The technique reminds of the *Phaedrus*, though it is less dynamic.

But after the 5th book of the *Laws* there are few traces left of the structural contrast function of colloquialisms. Apart from the general fluctuation to which I have referred, the vanishing pulse of contrasting can still be heard at two or three points. At any rate it has little significance in the later books. I do not believe its disappearance can be used as an argument for spuriousness or extensive revision: all through his literary career Plato tended to elaborate the first halves of his works more than the latter halves.

It may have become clear that I do not doubt the Platonic authorship of the *Laws*. The stylistic pulse, however feeble it is, rather indicates authenticity.