

HYPERBOREUS

STUDIA CLASSICA

ναυσι δ' οὔτε πεζὸς ἰὼν κεν εὔροις
ἔς Ἵπερβορέων ἀγῶνα θαυμαστὰν ὁδόν

(Pind. *Pyth.* 10. 29–30)

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A FEW NOTES ON ΤΟΥΤΟ AND ΤΟ ΤΟΙΟΥΤΟΝ
IN PLATO, *TIM.* 49 D 4 – E 7*

The reading of τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον in Plato's *Tim.* 49 d 4 – e 7 is discussed here. According to the standard interpretation of the passage (e.g. Taylor, Cornford, Gulley), Plato maintains that the elements air, water, earth and fire are in constant transformation, and therefore that τὸ τοιοῦτον is the only possible predication for them. Such judgment is expressed in the form: “do not say fire or water or earth or air is *this* but *something such-like*”. Hence, Plato is revising the theory of knowledge expounded in *Cratylus* and in *Theaetetus*. In *Cratylus* (439 c–d) and *Theaetetus* (152 d, 157 b, 182 c 1 – 183 b 5), it is argued that the sensible world is in continual flux, and it is impossible to determine any characteristic of it, or to apply the predication “such-like” or its negative form “not such-like” to it. *Timaeus* as well acknowledges that the visible world is in perpetual flux; but unlike in *Cratylus* or *Theaetetus*, in this dialogue it is asserted that the predication “something such-like” is the only correct way to describe the physical phenomena, that are in constant change.¹ Recently, the traditional reading of passage 49 d 4 – e 7 has been questioned by Zeyl, who follows Cherniss' interpretation closely. Zeyl argues that here Plato is not talking about the physical elements, or about the legitimacy of propositions such as “this is fire”. On the contrary, Plato is addressing the epistemological criteria for the use of the words “fire”, “air” etc.² So Plato appears to maintain that it

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¹ Cf. Gulley 1960, 53–56; Gill 1987, 35–36; 43–44; Fronterotta 2011, 45; 49; 56–58; 262–263.

² Cf. Zeyl 2000, lviii–lix. It is worth commenting that Zeyl originally read this passage according to the traditional reading of Taylor, Cornford and Gulley;

is impossible to call the fire “fire”, or the air “air”, because the physical elements are in constant transformation. It is my concern to examine at some length Zeyl’s understanding of this passage, and to clarify why we shall opt for the standard reading against Zeyl and Cherniss. My defense of the standard reading is based on arguments which have not been taken into consideration by previous scholarship, but that prove nonetheless to be crucial for a critical assessment of the passage in question.

Let us turn to the translation proposed by Zeyl. First to passage 49 d 4 – e 2:³

ἀεὶ δὲ καθορώμεν ἄλλοτε ἄλλη γιγνόμενον, ὡς πῦρ, μὴ τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐκάστοτε προσαγορεύειν πῦρ, μηδὲ ὕδωρ τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ, μηδὲ ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν ὡς τινα ἔχον βεβαιότητα, ὅσα δεικνύοντες τῷ ῥήματι τῷ τότε καὶ τοῦτο προσχρώμενοι δηλοῦν ἡγούμεθα τι.⁴

What we invariably observe becoming different at different times – fire, for example – to characterize [προσαγορεύειν] *not this* [τοῦτο], *but what on each occasion* [ἐκάστοτε] *is such* [τὸ τοιοῦτον], *as ‘fire’* [πῦρ] and to *call not this* [τοῦτο], *but what is ever* [ἀεὶ] *such* [τὸ τοιοῦτον], ‘water’ [ὑδωρ]. *And never to call it by any other term* [μηδὲ ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν] – as though it has some stability – *of all the terms we use which we think have a specific meaning* [δηλοῦν] when we point and use the expressions ‘that’ and ‘this’ ” (Greek and italics are mine)

Three points are problematic in this translation:

- the reading of τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον as the primary objects of προσαγορεύειν;
- the reading of ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν as predicate;
- the reading of δηλοῦν as “having a specific meaning”.

In regard to the predication of τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον, Zeyl’s interpretation entails a fallacy. In Greek, τοῦτο and τοιοῦτον generally refer to what precedes, i. e. they refer as predicates to a subject (cf. Smyth § 333 e, 1245). In our case, they refer to the preceding “ὁ καθορώμεν ...

cf. the translation of this passage in his 1975 paper (pp. 129–130, with commentary on p. 130 ff.).

³ Cf. Zeyl 2000, lvi–lvii.

⁴ The Greek follows the OCT text of Bury.

ὡς πῦρ” which is taken up by πῦρ in “μὴ προσαγορεύειν πῦρ τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον”: “in regard to what we see, fire for example, we shall not say ‘fire (primary object) is this’ but ‘fire is something such-like’ (secondary objects of πῦρ, i. e. predicates)”.⁵ Yet, in classical logic, the subject is clearly distinguished from the predicate of the form P (x), and their roles cannot be inverted, since they belong to distinct categories; constants (x, y, z) and predicates (P) belong to two different domains. Therefore, in the cited passage, τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον cannot be read as the subjects of the predication “this is fire”, “something such-like is fire”. In logical terms, τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον are predicates – the predication being represented by *being this* or *being something such-like*, which, in the case of fire as an element in constant change, should be understood as “*being something fiery*”. The occurrence of τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον in passage 50 a 5 – 50 b 5 supports this reading. Here Plato brings the example of figures made out of gold, and states that they can only be said τὸ τοιοῦτον, and not τούτο, as they are permanently changing matter.⁶ The advantage of the reading of τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον as predicates is that it provides something for the τό in τὸ τοιοῦτον to do. The article makes τοιοῦτον a substantive and this is meaningful: we must not say “fire is this”, i. e. as having the description as the permanent object, but “fire is something with such and such features”, for example “fire is something fiery”. The point here is that the sentences “fire is this”, “fire is something such-like” question what is being fire. The description of fire as something such-like, and not as this, inevitably implies a characterization of its ontological status – not as “this”, i. e. as something permanent, but as “something with such and such features”, i. e. as something temporary. This means that the ontological discussion of what is being fire implies the logical-epistemological discussion of the predication τούτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον for fire. The adverbs ἐκάστοτε (49 d 6) and ἀεί (49 d 7) bear evidence for this interpretation. They can refer to προσαγορεύειν (“we should not say on each occasion fire is this but fire is something such-like”; “we should not ever say water is this but water is something such-like”) or to πῦρ and ὕδωρ (“we should not say fire is this but fire is something such-like on each occasion”; “we should not say water is this but water is always something such-like”). The first translation, from a logical-epistemological point of view, emphasizes

⁵ For “τὸ τοιοῦτον” as predicate, cf. Zeyl 1975, 132: “It is needed to remind us of the fact that the expression is to refer to something, a subject which is temporarily qualified in a certain way (the ‘what’ in ‘what is such-and-such’)”.

⁶ On τὸ τοιοῦτον and τὰτὰ in passage 50 a 5 – b 5 as predicates, cf. Fronterotta 2011, *ad loc.*

that the predicate “this” never applies to the subjects fire and water, as they are temporary; the second translation emphasises the ontological status of fire and water as elements in perpetual change.

Based on these remarks, Zeyl’s translation (“to characterize not this, but what on each occasion is such, as ‘fire’ and to call not this, but what is ever such, ‘water’”) has to be rejected as invalid. I suggest, then, the following translation, according to which πῦρ and ὕδωρ are to be considered as the primary objects of the sentence dependent from προσαγορεύειν (i. e. as the subjects of the sentence itself), and τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον as predicates:⁷

In regard to that which we always see becoming different at different times, fire for example, we should not say on each occasion fire [πῦρ] is “this” [τοῦτο] but fire is “something such-like” [τὸ τοιοῦτον] nor should we ever say water [ὕδωρ] is “this” [τοῦτο] but water is “something such-like” [τὸ τοιοῦτον].

Against this reading, one might object that τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον cannot be taken predicatively for at least three reasons. First, the Greek reads “τὸ τοιοῦτον” and not “τοιοῦτον”. Second, the relative pronoun in ὁ καθορώμεν ἄλλοτε ἄλλῃ γινόμενον (49 d 4–5) is taken up by τοῦτο and, therefore, τοῦτο is not a predicate. Finally, if τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον are the predicates of fire (πῦρ) in 49 d 5, than πῦρ in 49 d 6 is redundant.⁸ Yet, in Greek the article τό with the predicate noun “τοιοῦτον” is possible (cf. LSJ) and can be read as the predicate of the subjects πῦρ and ὕδωρ (although a predicate noun has usually no article, a predicate can occasionally be used with an article; cf. Smyth § 1152). Moreover, as Mohr pointed out, τὸ τοιοῦτον answers the question ποῖον; in 49 d 1 and, in this sense, has to be read as the predicate of πῦρ and ὕδωρ: “The claim that the phenomena are τοιοῦτον (“of a certain sort”) answers the question ποῖον; (“of what sort?”) (49 d 1). Τοιοῦτον is simply the demonstrative pronoun correlative with the interrogative ποῖον”.⁹

⁷ Cf. Taylor 1928; Rivaud 1956; Bury 1966; Reale 2003; Fronterotta 2011 – each *ad loc.*; Gullely 1960, 53; Cherry 1968, 5–6; Gill 1987, 34.

⁸ Cf. Cherniss 1954, 116: “That τοῦτο ἄλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐκάστοτε and τοῦτο ἄλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ are primary objects of προσαγορεύειν (i. e. subjects of the statement itself) and πῦρ and ὕδωρ are secondary objects (i. e. predicates) is shown by the use of τὸ τοιοῦτον rather than τοιοῦτον and by the fact that ὁ καθορώμεν ... γινόμενον, which in fact is what men commonly call ‘fire’, ‘water’, etc., is taken up by τοῦτο [...] In fact, if τοῦτο were predicative, the πῦρ in D 6 would be worse than redundant”. On πῦρ in d 6 as redundant, cf. Mills 1968, 154 who closely follows Cherniss.

⁹ Cf. Mohr 1980, 141 n. 7 (as in Smith § 340).

Further, it is certainly true that ὃ in 49 d 4 is taken up by τοῦτο. This, however, does not imply that τοῦτο, as the relative ὃ, is a primary object of προσαγορεύειν and, accordingly, that πῦρ and ὕδωρ are predicates. As we have seen, τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον refer to what precedes; therefore, by close reading, they refer to “ὃ ... ὡς πῦρ”. Thus, ὃ is the primary object of προσαγορεύειν, and it is nearer defined as “ὡς πῦρ”, which is taken up by the second occurrence of “πῦρ” to which τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον refer as predicates:

ὃ [primary object] καθορώμεν ... ὡς πῦρ ↔ μὴ τοῦτο [secondary object, i. e. predicate] προσαγορεύειν πῦρ [primary object].

Thus, it seems reasonable (at least for grammatical reasons) to opt for the following translation of lines 49 d 5–6:

ἀεὶ δὲ καθορώμεν ἄλλοτε ἄλλη γιγνόμενον, ὡς πῦρ, μὴ τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον ἐκάστοτε προσαγορεύειν πῦρ

In regard to that which we always see becoming different at different times, fire for example, we should not say on each occasion fire [πῦρ, primary object] is “this” [τοῦτο, secondary object] but fire is “something such-like” [τὸ τοιοῦτον, secondary object].

Finally, a reading of τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον as predicates does not make πῦρ in 49 d 6 redundant. The question whether or not πῦρ in 49 d 6 is redundant depends on how we render the Greek “προσαγορεύειν”. If we translate “προσαγορεύειν” as “to call”, πῦρ in 49 d 6 is indeed a superfluous repetition, which burdens the whole passage. Of course, as has long been recognized by Cornford, in this case it is better to remove it, and translate:¹⁰

In regard with that which we see always becoming different at different times, fire for example [πῦρ], we should not call [προσαγορεύειν] it on each occasion [πῦρ excised] “this” [τοῦτο] but “something such-like” [τὸ τοιοῦτον].

Yet, if we translate “προσαγορεύειν” as “to say”, then πῦρ in 49 d 6 is not a repetition.¹¹ Quite the contrary, this second occurrence of

¹⁰ Cf. Cornford 1937, 179 n. 1.

¹¹ The construction of προσαγορεύειν and infinitive (with προσαγορεύειν in the meaning of “to say”) is common in Plato; cf. LSJ and Montanari, each *ad loc.* Accordingly, I differ from Cherry 1968, 6 who argues that there are no parallels for such a construction with προσαγορεύειν.

πῦρ is part of the clause (with implied infinitive εἶναι) dependent from προσαγορεύειν, which entails the predication P (x), i. e. fire is “this”, fire is “something such-like”:

μη̄ προσαγορεύειν → τοῦτο ἀλλὰ τὸ τοιοῦτον πῦρ

We should not say → fire is “this” but fire is “such-like”

I will now consider the second and third problematic points in Zeyl’s translation of passage 49 d 4 – e 2, namely the rendering of ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν and δηλοῦν in 49 d 7 – e 2. First, nothing prevents us from taking ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν in 49 d 7 as a) the primary object of the sentence dependent from an implied προσαγορεύειν (i. e. as the subject of the sentence itself), and b) as referring to an implied τοῦτο (i.e. to a predicate): μηδὲ [προσαγορεύειν] ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν [τοῦτο]. Second, as Gulley lucidly pointed out, ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν may imply the visible world, i. e. the four elements, to which the predicates τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον refer to.¹² Finally, in Platonic Greek, the verb δηλοῦν (49 e 2) is a synonym for δεικνύναι, and therefore it does not mean, in the first instance, “to have a specific meaning” (Zeyl), but “to show, to indicate”.¹³ Accordingly, passage 49 d 7 – e 2 reads:

Nor <should we say> [προσαγορεύειν as supplement] that anything else [ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν, i. e. the elements] is <“this”> [τοῦτο as supplement], as if it had some permanence, among the things [i. e. the elements of the visible world] that we think we are indicating as something [ὅσα ... δηλοῦν ἡγοῦμεθα τι], when we point to them and we use the expressions “this” and “that”.

It is worth commenting that this reading of passage 49 d 7 – e 2 is coherent with the previous reading of passage 49 d 5–7: as in lines 49 d 5–7, in what immediately follows (i. e. 49 d 7 – e 2), Plato is discussing whether or not we should apply the predicate τοῦτο to the physical elements.

¹² Cf. Gulley 1960, 58: “ἄλλο μηδὲν (τούτων), which means any other of the things such as fire or water – the example already given – which are said (in C 7 – D 1) never to present the same appearance. Thus the sentence D 4 – E 2 is saying that the terms ‘this’ and ‘that’ should not be applied to γιγνόμενα”. For ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν as the primary subject of an implied τοῦτο, cf. Taylor 1928, *ad loc.*: “Nor yet must we use the expression ‘this’”; Gulley 1960, 53: “nor anything else ‘this’”; Gill 1987, 34: “Nor anything else [‘this’]”. For ἄλλο ποτὲ μηδὲν as primary subject, cf. Cornford 1937, *ad loc.*: “Nor must we speak of anything else as having some permanence”.

¹³ Cf. Des Places 1970, *ad loc.*

In defense of Zeyl’s translation of these lines (“And never to call it by any other term – as though it has some stability – of all the terms we use which we think have a specific meaning when we point and use the expressions ‘that’ and ‘this’ ”), it could be said, following Cherniss’ analysis:

a) that what the clause “ὅσα ... ἡγούμεθά τι” refers to are not the phenomena, but the predicates “fire”, “water” etc.;

b) that, accordingly, the clause “ὅσα ... ἡγούμεθά τι” is not concerned with whether or not we should apply the determiners “this” or “that” to the phenomena, but whether we should put terms like “water” and “fire” in relation to the phenomena we see and we point to when we use the phrase “this is fire”, “this is water”.¹⁴

Yet, there are good reasons for referring the clause “ὅσα ... ἡγούμεθά τι” to the phenomena. First, as Gulley has extensively shown, the phrase “τῷ ῥήματι τῷ τόδε καὶ τοῦτο προσχρόμενοι” parallels the phrase “τῷ τε τοῦτο καὶ τῷ τόδε προσχρόμενους ὀνόματι” in 50 a 1–2, where “this” and “that” have to be applied to the phenomena. Indeed, immediately after 50 a 1–2, Plato says “but that which is of any quality (τὸ δὲ ὅποιοινοῦν τι), we should not call that any of these” (50 a 2–4), i. e. we should not apply the predicates “this” and “that” to the visible world.¹⁵ Second, it is hard to conceive Plato to be concerned with term “fire” being applied to the natural phenomenon of fire, because that would represent simply a case of discussing a tautology: in formal logic, “fire” applies to fire, regardless of whether fire is in constant change or not. So it is more plausible to assume that Plato is concerned with a case of predication, namely the predication of “this” and “that” applied to natural elements in perpetual change. Accordingly, in the sentence “fire is this” the predication is represented

¹⁴ Cf. Cherniss 1954, 117–118: “The clause, ὅσα ... ἡγούμεθά τι, does not mean itself ‘phenomena’; it means simply ‘X, where X is what we mean to designate as something when by using the deictic pronoun we say «this is X»’. [...] For the point is not that you should not designate a phenomenon ‘this’ or ‘that’ [...] but that you should not call the phenomenon anything (like ‘fire’ and ‘water’, the examples already given) that is designated in such statements as ‘this is X’”. Similarly, cf. Lee 1967, 15–19. According to Cherniss’ interpretation, we can sum up the whole passage 49 d 4 – e 2 with: “do not say ‘fire’ or ‘water’ is τοῦτο (i. e. the physical elements we see and point to) but τὸ τοιοῦτον (i. e. the physical elements we see and point to)”. As I have shown at p. 128–129, this reading is not possible from a logical point of view, because τοῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον are predicates – the predication being represented by *being this* or *being something such-like*. On these two different readings, cf. the thoughtful suggestions of Zeyl 1975, 131–134. Zeyl, however, is not concerned with the logical structure of these sentences.

¹⁵ Cf. Gulley 1960, 59–62.

by *being this* or *being something such-like*, namely, in the case of fire as an element in constant change, by *being fiery*. Finally, in passage 49 e 2–4 (φεύγει γὰρ ... ἐνδείκνυται φάσις), “this” and “that” can hardly be taken as primary objects:

φεύγει γὰρ οὐχ ὑπομένον τὴν τοῦ τότε καὶ τοῦτο καὶ τὴν τῶδε καὶ πᾶσαν ὄση μόνιμα ὡς ὄντα αὐτὰ ἐνδείκνυται φάσις.

Thus, these objects slip away and do not receive the appellation “that”, “this”, “in this way” or any other, which indicate them as stable.

Indeed, if “this” and “that” were the primary objects here, this clause would indicate that the predicates “this” and “that” could not be applied to “this” and “that”, which obviously does not make any sense. Moreover, it is plausible that the sentence “φεύγει γὰρ ... ἐνδείκνυται φάσις” represents an explanation of the previous sentence “ὄσα ... ἡγούμεθά τι”: the Greek reads “φεύγει γὰρ”.

Let us turn now to passage 49 e 4-7 and to the problems inherent in Zeyl’s translation:

ἀλλὰ ταῦτα μὲν ἕκαστα μὴ λέγειν, τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ περιφερόμενον ὁμοιον ἐκάστου πέρι καὶ συμπάντων οὕτω καλεῖν, καὶ δὴ καὶ πῶρ τὸ διὰ παντὸς τοιοῦτον, καὶ ἅπαν ὅσονπερ ἂν ἐχη γένεσιν.

It is in fact safest *not to call* [λέγειν] *them* (i.e., *the fire and water we see*) [ταῦτα] *these several things* (i.e., ‘fire’, ‘water’, etc.) [ἕκαστα]. Rather, *what – coming around like what it was again and again in each and every case – is such* [τὸ τοιοῦτον], *is the thing to call* [καλεῖν] *that way* (sc. ‘fire’ or ‘water’) [οὕτω]. So *what is altogether such* [τὸ διὰ παντὸς τοιοῦτον] *it is safest to call* [καλεῖν] ‘fire’ [πῶρ], and so with everything that has becoming”. (Greek and italics are mine.)

Zeyl takes ταῦτα in 49 e 4 as the primary object of λέγειν and ἕκαστα as predicate of ταῦτα, thereby translating ἕκαστα with “these several things”.¹⁶ The translation of ἕκαστα is irreprehensible: the neutral plural of ἕκαστος means in Greek “these several things”.¹⁷ However, it is difficult to see how “this” (ταῦτα) might possibly be several things

¹⁶ For this grammatical construction, cf. also the translation of Cherniss 1954, 114: “But <it is the safest> not to speak of these as several distinct” and Cherniss 1977, 119; Rivaud 1956, *ad loc.*: “Non, il ne faut jamais les désigner comme des objets isolés”.

¹⁷ Similarly, cf. Cherry 1968, 7.

(ἕκαστα), i. e. the terms ‘fire’, ‘water’, etc. It is, for instance, much easier to suppose that these several things (ἕκαστα) are the elements (water, fire etc.) as fire is not water, water is not fire etc. Moreover, as Mills has pointed out, the usage of an unaccompanied ἕκαστα as predicative is quite uncommon in Greek.¹⁸ Furthermore, in 49 e 6, nothing prevents us from reading πῦρ as a subject of a subordinate clause dependent from an implied λέγειν, and τὸ τοιοῦτον as apposition of πῦρ. Thus, as in line 49 d 6, πῦρ can be read here as the subject of the predication P (x). Finally, as Cornford and Taylor have lucidly pointed out, οὕτω in line 49 d 6 resumes the previous “τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ περιφερόμενον ὅμοιον”; the expression “ἕκάστου πέρι καὶ συμπάντων” has to be taken with καλεῖν.¹⁹ It means that we can read “τὸ δὲ τοιοῦτον ἀεὶ περιφερόμενον ὅμοιον” as the description of the phenomena. Accordingly, I suggest the following translation:

We should not say [λέγειν] that each of them [ἕκαστα] is “this” [ταῦτα], but that which is something such-like [τὸ τοιοῦτον] and always recurring alike [ἀεὶ περιφερόμενον ὅμοιον], this is the description we should use [οὕτω καλεῖν] in the case of each and all of them [ἕκάστου πέρι καὶ συμπάντων]; in particular, therefore, <we should say> [λέγειν as supplement] that fire [πῦρ] is that which is always something such-like [τὸ διὰ παντὸς τοιοῦτον] and thus it is so for everything that has generation.

Again, the problem is not so much to determine the criteria of truth, according to which it is correct to call “fire” the fire, but to clarify why it is impossible to say “this is fire” and we can actually just say “fire is something such-like”. As it is argued in this passage, fire is always something such-like [τὸ διὰ παντὸς τοιοῦτον] and never this, because its qualities are indeed recurrent [ἀεὶ περιφερόμενον ὅμοιον], but nonetheless not permanent.

It seems important to opt for the standard reading of passage 49 d 4 – e 7, because, as I shall argue, it is consistent with Plato’s argumentations in *Tim.* 48. In passage 48 c 2 – 48 e 1, the axioms for an ontological debate on the origin of the universe seem indisputable; yet Timaeus invites his audience to think again (48 e 1: ἐπικαλεσάμενοι πάλιν ἀρχώμεθα λέγειν; 48 b 3: περὶ τούτων πάλιν ἀρκτέον ἀπ’ ἀρχῆς). Plato is well aware that even results achieved through a philosophical reasoning will have to be rejected at some point, if the underlying methodology proves inadequate. As it is well known, such procedure constitutes

¹⁸ Cf. Mills 1968, 155, n. 17.

¹⁹ Cf. Taylor 1928 and Cornford 1937 – each *ad loc.*

a critical moment in Socrates' maieutics, at least in the aporetic writings. Nevertheless, there is something unusual in this passage: the need to resume the philosophical argument from the beginning and to set it on new epistemological criteria is induced by the inability to discuss the beginning or the beginnings of all things correctly (48 c 3: τὴν μὲν περὶ ὁπάντων εἶτε ἀρχὴν εἶτε ἀρχάς). Thus, by virtue of an almost parallel movement, the object of the discussion (the origin of all things) marks the starting point of the discussion itself. Now, what went wrong in the argumentation? The mistake was precisely in the inception of the inquiry itself, namely to have postulated the four elements (air, water, earth and fire) as the origin of the universe. This way to proceed made it possible to explain the cyclical transformation of the physical elements (49 b 7 – c 7), but not the assumptions for their generation (48 b 5 – c 2). The error is a basic ontological mistake: to inscribe the elements' ontological status to the eidetic category of the immanent (49 e 7 – 50 a 4). As Mills similarly maintains, Plato explains this mistake in semantic terms: if air, water, earth and fire are in constant transformation, “τὸ τοιοῦτον” is the only possible predication for the elements, whereas “τοῦτο” is the only possible predication for the cause of the generation and the transformation of the four elements (49 a 7 – 50 a 4), namely χώρα.²⁰

To conclude: I have defended the standard reading of *Tim.* 49 d 4 – e 7 against Cherniss and Zeyl. First, it is hard to see why Plato would discuss a trivial case of tautology: “fire” applies to fire. The issue engaged by Plato is a rather complex one. Debating the predication of “τοῦτο” and “τὸ τοιοῦτον” in relation to the elements, Plato raises a semantic concern: can we apply demonstrative determiners to elements in endless transformation? Semantically, the question emerges of how to define what terms like “τοῦτο” and “τὸ τοιοῦτον” might refer to. This is why the sentences “fire is this” or “fire is something such-like” poses the question: what is being fire, and therefore, to what refers “τοῦτο” or “τὸ τοιοῦτον”? In this sense, the cited passage discusses the status of the terms “τοῦτο” and “τὸ τοιοῦτον”, and specifically what in contemporary philosophy is defined as the problem of the contextual meaning of the determiners such as “this”. Second, reading passage 49 d 4 – e7 as a discussion about the predication of “τοῦτο” and “τὸ τοιοῦτον” to the elements allows us to read these lines in close relation to *Tim.* 48, and the urge expressed here to start again the enquiry into the origin of all things. As the sentence “fire is this” questions what is being fire, and marks the beginning of the philosophical enquiry into the origin of all things, our passage seems to show that the

²⁰ Cf. Mills 1968, 158–159.

object of the discussion (the origin of all things) is at the same time the beginning of the discussion itself. Plato's argument against the case "this is fire" does not pursue the purely formal purpose of identifying the object of the discussion (origin of the universe) with the beginning of the discussion itself. Rather, the Platonic text seems to urge the reader to be aware of the possibility that the question "what is the origin of the universe?" already implies a knowledge of what being an element of the universe actually means (being water, fire, air, earth).

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The reading of τὸῦτο and τὸ τοιοῦτον in Plato's *Tim.* 49 d 4 – e 7 is discussed here. According to the standard interpretation of the passage (e. g. Taylor, Cornford, Gulley), Plato maintains that the elements air, water, earth and fire are in constant transformation, and therefore that “something such-like” (τὸ τοιοῦτον) is the only possible predication for them. Such judgment is expressed in the form: “do not say fire or water or earth or air is *this* but *something such-like*”. Recently, the traditional reading of passage 49 d 4 – e 7 has been questioned by Zeyl, who follows Cherniss' interpretation closely. Zeyl argues that here Plato is not talking about the physical elements, or about the legitimacy of propositions such as “this is fire”. On the contrary, Plato is addressing the epistemological criteria for the use of the words “fire”, “air” etc. So Plato appears to maintain that it is impossible to call the fire “fire”, or the air “air”, because the physical elements are in constant transformation. It is my concern to examine at some length Zeyl's understanding of this passage, and to clarify why we shall opt for the standard reading against Zeyl and Cherniss. My defense of the standard reading is based on logical arguments which have not been taken into consideration by previous scholarship, but that prove nonetheless to be crucial for a critical assessment of the passage in question.

В статье обсуждается интерпретация τὸῦτο и τὸ τοιοῦτον в *Тимее* Платона (49 d 4 – e 7). Согласно стандартной интерпретации отрывка (см. Taylor, Cornford, Gulley), Платон утверждает, что элементы – воздух, вода, земля и огонь – находятся в процессе постоянной трансформации и, следовательно, “такой” является единственным допустимым описанием для них. Этот вывод представлен в форме: “не говори ‘огонь, вода, земля или воздух есть это’, но ‘есть нечто, обладающее таким свойством’”. Недавно традиционное прочтение отрывка 49 d 4 – e 7 было оспорено Зейлем (Zeyl), который следует интерпретации Чернисса (Cherniss). Зейл утверждает, что Платон в данном случае говорит не о физических элементах и не о возможности таких утверждений, как “это огонь”. Напротив, Платон рассматривает эпистемологические критерии для использования слов “огонь”, “воздух” и т. д. Таким образом, Платон, согласно Зейлу, утверждает, что невозможно назвать огонь “огнем”, или воздух “воздухом”, поскольку основные элементы находятся в постоянной трансформации. В статье подробно обсуждается толкование Зейла и доказывается, почему классическую интерпретацию нужно предпочесть пониманию Чернисса и Зейла. Ключевыми для защиты стандартного прочтения являются ранее не приводившиеся в аналогичных работах логические аргументы.