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METABOLE AND REVOLUTION
THE MYTH OF THE PLATONIC STATESMAN AND
THE MODERN CONCEPT OF REVOLUTION

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The philosophical concept of revolution refers to a change in the way of thinking. The way of thinking is the manner in which thinking conceives itself and its relation to reality. Since the "Kopernikanische Revolution" of Immanuel Kant it has been customary, especially in Germany, to relate "Revolutionen der Denkart" (revolutions in the way of thinking) to this philosophical concept of revolution, which preceded the political and social revolution of 1789. Plato's way of thinking is understood in this context as the first of three or four revolutions in the previous history of philosophy. The especial significance for the theme of this paper lies in the fact that Plato's "revolution" is acknowledged as a "formal-logical" one (as opposed to the "transcendental", "conceptual" and finally the "logic of unconsciousness"), and hence merely conceptually inefficacious, similar to the way in which Kant undertook to unmask Plato and to delimit the bounds of thinking in his Kritik der reinen Vernunft. So Plato as a philosophical analyst of political conditions has been neglected in favour of the thinker of the "idea".

The historical concept of revolution has gained its fundamental meaning through the processes, effects, descriptions and theories that followed the French Revolution of 1789. Essentially there are three aspects which determine this historical concept of revolution: the change of legitimation, the violent execution of this change, and people as the bearers of
the new legitimation and executors of this violence. Clearly this concept of revolution divides history into the pre-history of revolution and revolutionary history. For good reasons a differentiated consideration of classical antiquity cannot discover the comprehensive character of revolution despite all the insurrections, revolts, and subversions of the fifth and early fourth century before Christ.

Plato explicitly objects to violent changes of political and social conditions (cf. Ep. VII 331 c-d, Lq. IX 856 b-c). But the Myth of the Statesman deals with a radical change of cosmic dimensions and with its catastrophic effects. The "greatest metabole" in the Republic too, at least for the one who is directly concerned, the one who makes the philosophical ascent, is connected with a kind of force: he has to tear himself away from the chains of doxa, the 'social construction of reality', and has to suffer the pains of this process of dis-solution and of his transitory blinding by the light of truth. But the relation of this example with political conditions is not immediately obvious.

In addition not only the relation of the modern concept of revolution with Metabole as a 'concept' is dubious, but the Metabole in our context appears in a myth. Certainly it is a philosophical myth, that has a logical and didactic aim: it has to help correct - by mingling in a joke - a fault of division in the quest for the (true) statesman and the (true) politike techne. But this myth remains a story, that takes in and carries on tradition. (The historical in myth or mythology, however, is a problem I will not deal with in this paper.) In opposition to myth it is an essential aspect of 'revolution' to understand