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THE WORD χρυσοχοεῖν IN THE *REPUBLIC* OF PLATO

THE passage containing this verb is in *Resp.* v. 450 B: χρυσοχοήσοντας οἷι τοῖσδε νῦν ἐνθάδε ἀφίχθαι, ἀλλ' οὐ λόγων ἀκουσομένους; The situation is dramatic. Socrates, to his own mind, has just finished a discussion of the one part of his ideal state, and is intending to go on to the other. Polemarchus, however, seizes him by the cloak and at the same time whispers to Adeimantus. Then Adeimantus tells Socrates that they will hold him by force, until he explains further some words of his that have aroused their interest, and finally Thrasymachus adds that they are unanimous in this decision. Socrates replies that they know not what a swarm of explanations they are stirring up. 'Seeing this swarm,' says he, 'I let it pass, that it might not bother us greatly.' Then Thrasymachus replies: '*But do you think these persons have come here for gold-hunting (χρυσοχοήσοντας), and not to hear explanations?*'

Plato, Xenophon and Aristophanes each use the word but once, and it is rare elsewhere. This fact has therefore given rise to more explanations of the meaning of the term 'gold-hunting' than would have been necessary had the word been in common use. Its meaning in Plato is evidently figurative. There is no real gold in sight.

The lexicographers, Suidas and Harpocration, under the word, χρυσοχοεῖν, quote from a speech of Dinarchus as follows: πάλιν παρ' Αἰσχίνην ἀποφοιτήσας παρὰ τοῦτω δῆλον ὅτι χρυσοχοεῖν ἐμάνθανεν, ἀλλ' οὐ τὸ προκείμενον αὐτῷ πράττειν ἢ πάσχειν. Both then add that this proverbial expression (παροιμία) is used by Plato. Besides this, they both tell the same story as regards the origin of it.—The Athenians once upon a time went out to attack some warlike ants that guarded gold-dust on Hymettus. As they returned from a bootless expedition, they laughingly said to one another: Σὺ δὲ ῥου χρυσοχοήσῃς; ὅπερ δηλοῖ, σὺ δὲ ῥου ψῆγμα πολὺν συλλέξας καὶ χρυσοχοήσας πλουτήσῃς;—The meaning of the word χρυσοχοεῖν in this latter passage is evidently 'to be rich by gathering gold' in a literal sense. This can, however, not be its use in Plato.

Modern commentators have taken various paths in arriving at its meaning. Some idea of the variety of interpretations may be gained from the following phrases: 'to be greatly disappointed,' 'on a fool's errand,' 'to find the philosopher's stone,' 'to find an Eldorado,' 'to idle away their time,' 'to do

anything rather than the matter in hand'; or by more direct transfer of the word: 'to find gold,' 'to refine gold,' 'to dig gold,' 'on a gold-hunting errand.'

It might be thought that, in using such a peculiar word, Plato had some special purpose which could be discovered by a careful reading of the context. Some pages in front of 450 B Socrates, following a hint derived from the mythological Golden Age (*Resp.* 547 A, *Hes. Op. et Dies* 108), has been discovering gold in the character of his citizens. 'Searching for this gold,' he declares, 'will be our chief duty in selecting a ruler for the city,'—τὸν αἰεὶ ἐν τε παισὶ καὶ νεανίσκοις καὶ ἐν ἀνδράσι βασανιζόμενον καὶ ἀκήρατον ἐκβαίνοντα καταστατέον ἄρχοντα τῆς πόλεως (413 E). This metaphor, by which noble character is regarded as containing gold, is touched upon elsewhere in the Republic at 415 A-C, 416 E, 468 E, 503 A, 537 B, 547 A. The frequency of its occurrence shows easily the importance of this notion in the eyes of Plato. Aristotle mentions ὁ παρὰ τοῦ θεοῦ χρυσός as one of the characteristic features of the Republic (*Pol.* ii. 5, 1264 b H 12).

It might also be thought that Thrasymachus would be especially impressed with this. Where he first takes part in the dialogue (336 E) Socrates describes their hunt for the definition of justice as a search for a gold coin. But this figure, by which gold is found in the soul of the just man, has been last touched upon at 416 E, some thirty-five pages before the present remark of Thrasymachus. This would seem to make it too remote for him to allude to it. His quick, impulsive nature usually takes fire at once. If he is true to his character as portrayed in the first book of the Republic, he could not wait so long before making a reply.

Although he is a man of forcible expressions, he is not now in a mood to sneer at Socrates. Translators are in error when they make him here take a ferocious or scornful attitude. Regarded as a wild beast (θηρίον) at 336 B, his manner had become quite cooled at 354 A (πρᾶος ἐγένον). This mollified attitude as regards Socrates is mentioned again at 358 B, before the present passage and at 498 C after it. Consequently this frame of mind may be considered as permanent for Thrasymachus throughout this part of the dialogue where the gold-hunting is spoken of. Aristophanes uses the verb χρυσοχοεῖν (*Plut.* 164) of a maker of jewelry. This sense of the word would naturally lead to a figurative meaning of 'work at trifles' or 'work for mere show.' Neither of these as we have seen would suit the context in Plato or the mood of Thrasymachus. When the word is used by Xenophon (*Oec.* 18, 19) it means the art of testing money to find whether it is counterfeit or not. This meaning has the advantage of coming from a contemporary author. Besides this in *Resp.* 413 E Socrates had emphasized the need of thus testing in a figurative sense the quality of the gold in the souls of his rulers (βασανιζοντας πολὺ μᾶλλον ἢ χρυσὸν ἐν πυρὶ). But a figurative meaning of this sort carries with it the same objection that was urged before; namely, that it is too far away for Thrasymachus to seize upon it. Moreover, 'testing'

forms no proper contrast to the phrase, 'hearing explanations,' that follows it in 450 B.

The lexicographers often have some underlying truth in a statement which, from being wrongly placed, or in part omitted, has become scarcely intelligible. Perhaps their story about the ants may give some clew to the right meaning, though as it stands it has little point.

Chief among ant stories of antiquity is that told by Herodotus (iii. 102). These ants dwelt about the sources of the Indus and guarded gold-dust in a desert valley. They were of a size between a shepherd-dog and a fox, but like Greek ants in appearance and in subterranean habits. The adventurer in search of gold-dust entered their district in the hottest part of the day with three camels. He filled his saddle-bags quickly with the precious sand, mounted his swiftest camel, and fled. The ants pursued and, as they gained on him, he cast loose first one camel and then another. While the ants paused to devour these camels, he made good his escape on the third. The same story is told by Strabo (after Megasthenes) with little variation. In his story, instead of live camels, pieces of meat were used to delay the ants. Strabo adds that Nearchus, Alexander's admiral, had seen the spotted skins of these animals brought into the Macedonian camp. The same story of these Indian ants is also referred to by Pliny, *H.N.* xi. 31 (36); Arrian, *Ind.* 15; Dio Chrys.; *Or.* 35, p. 436; Pomp. Mela, iii. 62 and Aelian, *H.A.* iii. 4 with unimportant changes. This story must have been widely known to account for its frequent repetition. It differs from the account of the lexicographers by describing so carefully the rapid retreat of the gold-seekers.

If now this feature of the story is applied to the words of Thrasy-machus, it will be seen to fit the circumstances very closely. Socrates wishes to pass along to another subject, to avoid a 'swarm' as he says; but Thrasy-machus replies: 'do you think these persons have come here, *like gold-hunters, for the purpose of leaving in haste?*'

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