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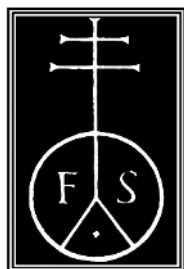
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SOMMARIO

ESPERIMENTI MENTALI

LUCA PITTELOUD, <i>Les expériences de pensée chez Platon</i>	11
CHRISTELLE VEILLARD, <i>Conflits de devoirs et expériences de pensée: apport des controverses et des couleurs dans l'élaboration de l'éthique et de la politique stoïcienne</i>	31
MÁTÉ VERES, <i>Conceivability and Expert Inference: Two Hellenistic Perspectives</i>	49
ALEXANDRA MICHALEWSKI, <i>Comment connaître les principes? Enjeux éthiques, épistémologiques et cosmologiques en Enn. III.7 (45) et v.1 (10)</i>	65
ISABELLE KOCH, <i>Exegese et imagination: Augustin témoin des objections des philosophes contre la résurrection des corps</i>	79

DISCUSSIONI E RICERCHE

CHRISTOPH HORN, <i>Der Weise (sophos) bei Sokrates und Platon</i>	97
ARIBERTO ACERBI, <i>Il coraggio intellettuale nel Teeteto di Platone. Un modello di etica della ricerca</i>	111
CARLO DELLE DONNE, <i>Ἡπόρει δὲ καὶ Πλάτων. Una nota sul Platone di Aspasio</i>	139
ANDREA BEGHINI, <i>Sulla lettura del Fedone nella 'quarta Accademia' (con alcune riflessioni sulla composizione dell'Assioco pseudoplatonico)</i>	151
STEFANO MASO, <i>Romanum otium: la prospettiva pubblica della ricerca interiore secondo Cicerone e Seneca</i>	173
Norme redazionali della Casa editrice	191

LES EXPÉRIENCES DE PENSÉE CHEZ PLATON

LUCA PITTELOUD

ABSTRACT · *Plato's Thought Experiments* · In this contribution, we would like to look at the presence of thought experiments in Plato, as well as their relationship to image production in general and myths in particular. To this end, and to circumscribe a very broad field of investigation, we will suggest some answers to the following questions: (i) What is a philosophical thought experiment? Since the debate on this subject is still very lively today, it will be useful to present a brief description of the issues and difficulties surrounding the notion of thought experiment in the history of philosophy; (ii) Is it possible to identify a common pattern that would indicate the presence of thought experiments in ancient philosophy?; (iii) Are there Platonic thought experiments? After having answered to the first two questions, it will be possible to introduce three criteria that should be satisfied in order to characterize a narrative based on the use of the imagination as a thought experiment. By applying these criteria to two Platonic pieces of fiction, we will first come up with an analysis of the most well-known Platonic thought experience, Gyges' ring, and then relativize the identification of the image of the Cave with such a category; (iv) Is it possible to associate the notion of thought experiment with some Platonic myths? Without entering into a specific analysis, we will suggest, by way of conclusion, that some Platonic myths could also constitute thought experiments. This contribution will seek to offer a basis for what might be a more general study of thought experiments in Plato's philosophy.

KEYWORDS · Thought Experiments, Plato, Imagination, Gyges' Ring, Myth.

I. LES EXPÉRIENCES DE PENSÉE EN PHILOSOPHIE

DEPUIS Galilée, l'usage des expériences de pensée s'est largement imposé en sciences comme une manière de résoudre un problème en se servant de l'imagination dans des circonstances dans lesquelles le recours à l'expérimentation empirique n'est pas réalisable. En philosophie, l'emploi de l'imagination est tout aussi répandu pour enquêter sur la nature des choses. Néanmoins, il existe de nombreuses techniques qui utilisent l'imagination et qui ne sont pas, en tous cas explicitement, appelées des expériences de pensée, telles que, par exemple, la métaphore, l'allégorie, l'analogie et le mythe. Une expérience de pensée est un outil conceptuel qui implique d'imaginer une situation contrefactuelle afin de résoudre une aporie philosophique particulière (qu'elle soit métaphysique, politique, éthique, etc.).¹ Concernant l'appel à l'imagination dans le contexte de l'histoire des sciences, Ernst Mach propose cette définition des expériences de pensée:

En dehors de l'expérimentation physique, l'homme arrivé à un développement intellectuel avancé recourt souvent à l'expérimentation mentale. Ceux qui font des projets, ceux qui bâtis-

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¹ Pour une étude complète de la notion d'expérience de pensée en histoire de la philosophie, voir IERODIAKONOU and ROUX 2014). L'introduction de cet ouvrage examine quels sont les critères nécessaires pour définir une expérience de pensée; cette définition préalable est proposée en p. 4: «Thought experiments are counterfactual, they involve a concrete scénario and they have a well-delimited cognitive intention».