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Plato's Educational Philosophy and the Dialogue Form

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Introduction

Paralleling the experience of many, as an Undergraduate I took a course surveying the ideas of western philosophy, the scope of which traversed from Plato to Heidegger, taking a summation and a few key readings from every significant philosopher along the way. Unfortunately, the whole semester was clouded by the first week on Plato. Though I had read nothing of the subsequent philosophers, I had already read a good deal of Plato. The Plato I encountered there was nothing like the Plato I had encountered years before; here was a Plato who spoke for himself, who formulated theories and commented on the nature of man and the world. Here was presented a dogmatic Plato directly in opposition to my immature experience of his writings. It wasn't until a few years later that I began to encounter scholars who expressed this same dissatisfaction with the difference between a surface reading of the Platonic dialogues and the doctrines, dogmas, and theories that have been found in them by later readers.

Many subjects within the Platonic corpus have been re-examined in recent times using a dialogue-centric approach, and through this work a fresh and vigorous new interpretation of Platonic philosophy has arisen. After first explicating and defending such an approach, this paper will first seek to derive Plato's understanding of the practice of philosophy and its relationship to the literary form he chose for his written works. In doing so, we will see that the dialogue form is inextricably linked to the Platonic view of philosophy. Finally, we will seek Plato's view on how the practice of philosophy may be communicated to others, and how he intended to educate others philosophically through the written word.

Chapter 1:

1.1 **A "Third Way" Analysis of the *Symposium***

The method or hermeneutic through which the Platonic dialogues should be read is the first task in any analysis of their content. Rather than beginning with an examination of the options with regard to their merits and faults, I believe it will be useful to offer up a case study of two Platonic dialogues and use their features as a method of defining the various approaches to reading and interpreting Plato. In this way, as little time as possible is wasted in defining the different positions since these case studies will also be directly relevant to the argument of later chapters.

The first dialogue to submit to this process is the *Symposium,* one of the most well-known dialogues, and yet one about which there is a great deal of uncertainty and difficulty in determining a solid reading. If one approaches it looking purely for Platonic philosophy, it poses quite a few challenges. The framework narrative is long and complex. The number of speakers and the proportion of the text given to their speeches is abnormally high for a Platonic dialogue, confusing the author's views in a web of misleading arguments. Furthermore, the traditional features of the dialogue are recessed or even absent to a large degree within the *Symposium*: instead of a Socratic *elenchus* driving the progress of ideas we instead have what seems to be a display of rhetoric. Perhaps of all the Platonic dialogues, the *Symposium* is the most threadbare of what might be termed Platonic philosophy.

A hermeneutic which reads the dialogues for a systematic understanding of Platonic philosophy, which we will henceforward call the "doctrinal" or "dogmatic" reading, must label as literary embellishment much that seems to take the center stage in the *Symposium.* The

introductory passages provide a convoluted fictional history of the transmission of the narrative. It begins with Apollodorus as narrator describing the event of being asked to give a recount of the speeches made at the titular symposium. He replies that he was not there, but that he heard an account from Aristodemus, who had been present. At various points, the style of narrative changes from the form of a drama to a narrated story and back again.

When the speeches begin, the subject moves as freely as a subject often does among high-spirited partygoers, though it is ostensibly all connected by the subject of Love. Furthermore, where the narrative is an encomium to Love, Socrates seems to shift the recipient of the encomium to beauty, while toward the end, Plato shifts it to Socrates himself.[1] Like the framing device, the business of these encomia offers little to those seeking Platonic doctrines. If Plato is seeking to expound the nature of Love and beauty, he leaves much nonsense unevaluated as the subject is continually driven forward. We don't see the rigorous subjection of all ideals to the evaluating reason of Socrates. If, on the other hand, we have an encomium to the virtues of Socrates himself, then the juxtaposition of his virtues with his use as a mouthpiece of Platonic dogma immediately prior is rather incongruous. The virtue and the philosophy would have to remain separate and unrelated or else Plato is praising a fictitious creation.

Another prevalent approach to reading Plato has similar issues with the *Symposium.* The "skeptical" approach is a non-doctrinal view of Plato's writings which maintains that no Platonic philosophy per se is contained within the dialogues, but that rather Plato is writing them to confront error and "debunk" the prevalent philosophies of his day. Under such a reading, there is no mouthpiece of Plato's ideas, but Socrates, or occasionally other characters, representing

[1] Taylor (1960), 25. Taylor notes the extreme confusion of subjects and literary form that often characterizes the Platonic dialogues and that is present so obviously in the *Symposium.*

Plato's critique of the ideas of others. The *Symposium*, however, contains very little actual debunking. Many ideas are put forward with Socrates present, but rather than utilize his custom of questioning directed toward exposing the faults in reasoning, Socrates is actually made fun of for this propensity, and refrains from it in all but a small section. (*Symposium* 194d-e, 199b-201c).

Since these two methods have difficulties with the *Symposium*, I propose to analyze it using a different approach, called by its proponents a "third way" to read the Platonic dialogues. This approach seeks to understand Platonic philosophy through the relationship between the literary form of the dialogues and their explicit content.[2] It is neither doctrinal, for it does not see the Platonic dialogues as merely a conveyance of Plato's beliefs about reality, nor is it skeptical, for it does not deny that Plato seeks to communicate something positive through his writings.

What tools, then, does the literary form of the *Symposium* give us for understanding its content? Firstly, the aforementioned framing device can do a couple of things. It allows Plato to use a historical event with historical characters while yet maintaining his distance from history. We understand that the maze of retellings through which the narrative has come must have altered it somewhat in the process. Under a hard skeptical reading, why should Plato fictionalize the ideas he will criticize at all? Why not accurately retell them and criticize them in the context in which they were propounded? More importantly, the narrative framework comments on the nature of dialogue itself, highlighting the transience of oral discourse. We will see the relevance of this element later.

[2] Cotton (2014) gives an excellent defense of the use of the dialogue form as a tool of interpreting Plato's meaning.

Passing through the speeches one by one, we could spend a great deal of time analyzing what is said in each[3]. Instead, a broad look at the patterns will suffice to show us the basic structure of this work. The typical elements of Platonic dialogue are relatively absent for much of the book. In their place we encounter a number of speeches on the subject of Love, acknowledging the prior speakers' contributions and building off them, but engaging very little in dialogue, much less, as noted above, in anything like Socratic questioning. But Socrates changes the pattern. When asked to speak himself, Socrates at first engages with the previous speaker, as his companions jokingly predicted, but then even when speaking on his own, he continues to use the dialogue form through his narration of conversations with Diotima. They can make Socrates give a speech, but they cannot prevent him from turning it into a dialogue. Thus, in the most basic form of the *Symposium,* we find a contrast between rhetoric and dialogue. In taking the literary form seriously, we have found a way of reading Socrates speech that will illumine Plato's intentions wonderfully.

There is a further literary device that can elucidate Plato's meaning. Understanding the extent to which Socrates behaves as the mouthpiece of Platonic philosophy is a difficult task for a purely doctrinal reading of Plato.[4] However, the form of the dialogue gives us a license to make an association between Socrates' words and Plato's ideas: Socrates, instead of giving a speech in his turn, actually recounts a dialogue. Beyond its use noted above, this explicitly connects Plato with Socrates: Socrates becomes an author within his speech just as Plato is the author of this dialogue. We are therefore justified in associating the ideas espoused within Socrates speech as connected with Plato's own philosophy. Yet unlike a doctrinal reading, this

[3] For an example of this approach, see Strauss (2001) which analyzes each speech in considerable depth.
[4] Kahn (1996), 36

does not relegate Socrates to a mere puppet, for through it, Socrates can be practicing philosophy exactly as he did historically, even if the words he says are not the words of the historical Socrates. In other words, if the focus of the dialogue is on the superiority of dialectic over rhetoric, the historical Socrates is being praised for his consistent choice of the superior means of seeking truth.

The dialogue between Socrates and Diotima, understood through the lens of the structural contrasting of rhetoric and dialectic, fits perfectly within those expectations. We know from the Socratic questioning of Agathon that Love is neither beautiful nor ugly, but the idea of being neither one nor the other puzzles Socrates (*Symp.* 201a-202a). Diotima explains that Love can be neither beautiful nor ugly, but rather between the two in the same way that there is something between wisdom and ignorance, namely correct judgement (*Symp.* 202a). Love is that which goes between the mortal and the immortal, inspiring the process which produces immortality, but it is never the thing, or the possessor of the thing, desired. (*Symp.* 202d-204b). It is here that Diotima begins to engage with the very nature of philosophy and the purpose of dialogue in relationship to it. The analogy of those pregnant desiring to give birth transitions the debate from the ostensible subject of Love to the actual subject of philosophy:

> "Now, some people are pregnant in body, and for this reason turn more to women and pursue love in that way, providing themselves through childbirth with immortality and remembrance and happiness, as they think, for all time to come; while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely *are* those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue, which all poets beget, as well as all the craftsmen who are said to be creative. But by far the greatest and most beautiful

part of wisdom deals with the proper ordering of cities and households, and that is called moderation and justice." (*Symp.* 208e-209a)[5]

Within the analogy, to give birth is to produce immortality, both in the actual sense, as an explanation of the sexual impulse even in animals, and in reference to the practice of philosophy. The offspring one rears, though it is far from the perfection of beauty, yet cannot help but be a reflection of it (*Symp.* 211e-212a). Nor is the immortality to be found in a single generation of offspring, but in the continual and perpetual reproduction down the generations (*Symp.* 208e). Thus, to describe love (or correct judgement) as at rest is neither to place it in the realm of the mortal (ignorance) nor the immortal (wisdom). It is midway between the non-active and the active. Diotima's analogy redefines wisdom for Socrates. It is the process of achieving immortality or perceiving the universal beauty. The opposite of ignorance is not the state of being correct; that is merely a description of philosophy when it ceases its movement. The opposite of ignorance is to beget, and it is within the dialectic activity that knowledge of beauty is begotten by the soul.

Love is, within this analogy, the person of human philosopher. "ὥστε ἀναγκαῖον ἔρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι, φιλόσοφον δὲ ὄντα μεταξὺ εἶναι σοφοῦ καὶ ἀμαθοῦς"; "Therefore Love must be a philosopher, and, in so being, must be between the wise and the ignorant." (*Symp.* 204b) Existing somewhere between wisdom and ignorance and, upon ceasing the active process, settling at best on correct judgement, the philosopher travels the path between the mortal and immortal realms. At rest, he is a correct judge, as Love at rest is pregnant, but in the movement along his prescribed course, it is action that is the desired end, and thus movement itself. That

[5] All translations, unless cited with the Greek, are taken from Cooper (1997). This given with their Greek are translated by the author.

which man gives birth to is not the immortality he seeks (how can a mortal give birth to an immortal?) but it is the continual process of giving birth, generation after generation, the continuity of the creative endeavor, that attains the immortality. It is not the thing attained that ascends to the highest beauty, but the striving after what is not yet attained. The end of philosophy is not correct judgement, not excellently formulated doctrines set down in permanent writing for others to read. That is merely the start. When correct judgement comes under examination through the reasoning, rejecting, developing, and doubting of the dialogue, the philosopher moves as a messenger between the stuff of earth and the immortal. It is the dialogue form that can convey this urgent motion, that can take a snapshot of the process of philosophy, for the practice of philosophy is dialectic.

This contrast between correct judgement and philosophy is illustrated better in the narrative structure of the *Symposium* than any other Platonic dialogue. Socrates does not engage with those that state their judgement on the nature of Love. Only Agathon, whose speech makes the pretense of philosophy, is subjected to the analysis of Socratic questioning. His is the only speech that attempts to reason and examine, and thus his is the speech that must be addressed by Socrates. We find that the general form of the work is leading to the examination of philosophy executed within the discussion between Socrates and Diotima.

1.2 **A Critique of the Doctrinal and Skeptical Readings of Plato**

It has been established that a "third way" reading of the *Symposium*, one which integrates the literary form of the work into the interpretation of the content, gives us a remarkable understanding of the nature of philosophy according to Plato. Every statement used above as doctrinal was justified by what the form prepares us to expect, and thus there was neither misattribution of the statements of characters to Plato (or any ambiguity concerning such

decisions), nor a needless wholesale rejection of the idea that Plato is attempting to say something. The position of Plato with respect to the practice of philosophy which we have begun to examine is an important preliminary for this paper's aim of establishing the Platonic principle of education. Though a major critique of the other common approaches to reading Plato is outside the scope of this thesis, and since the usefulness of one reading in a specific case does not necessarily preclude the validity of others, it is worth paying a little attention to some of the shortcomings of the doctrinal and the skeptical readings of Plato in order to better defend subsequent reliance on the "third way" approach.

Gonzalez and Magrini offer different critiques of the assumptions of the doctrinal reading, both ultimately arguing that anachronistic views of the nature of philosophy predicate the approach. To Gonzalez, this reading of Plato stems from the Rationalist and Idealist philosophers' own understanding of philosophy and the readiness of subsequent readers to adopt their practice of the discipline. In Descartes and Kant, the practice of philosophy is systematic reasoning. When such systematizing is attributed post hoc to Plato the dogmas and theories for which he is known materialize.[6] To Magrini, the fallacy lies in the anachronistic attribution of Cartesian dualistic theory of truth to Plato, wherein truth is the "correspondence between idea and state of affairs".[7] To claim that Plato is laying out doctrine concerning truth, employing "skill" in corresponding his knowledge to reality, is to impose a view of truth only formulated much later. Even if we disregard or discount the anachronism, we have already seen within the *Symposium* a contradictory view on the practice of philosophy and its relationship to truth.

[6] Gonzalez (1995a), 4-8
[7] Magrini (2018), 6

Apart from these arguments, other have noted that hard doctrinal readings of Plato ignore a great deal of his writing that doesn't fit neatly into a dogmatic treatise. [8] The uncertainty and plausible deniability so intentionally cultivated in many of the dialogues, as highlighted in the *Symposium*, is only one such example. The entirety of the Socratic claim to know nothing and to be perpetually seeking wisdom,[9] as well as every branch of conversation that leads to little resolution as well as every idea expounded by Socrates only to be critiqued by him later, becomes mere literary adornment to the philosophical writing, and not part of the philosophy itself.[10] Perhaps most importantly, contradictions within the whole corpus, where Platonic "theories" are described differently, contradictory, or even seemingly criticized by Plato himself must all be accounted for in some way or another. This often involves the development of a chronology to Plato's thought, the results of which are incredibly dubious, not least because they often rest on the very arguments which necessitate their creation. [11]

As a final critique of the doctrinal approach, the reader will perhaps forgive a long quotation from Plato's Seventh Letter, due to its relevance.

> "Thus much at least, I can say about all writers, past or future, who say they know the things to which I devote myself, whether by hearing the teaching of me or of others, or by their own discoveries-that according to my view it is not possible for them to have any real skill in the matter. There neither is nor ever will be a treatise of mine on the subject. For it does not admit of exposition like other branches of knowledge; but after much

[8] For examples of commentaries on the *Symposium* from a doctrinal perspective, see Bury (1909), Vlastos (1981), Nehemas (2007), Schindler (2007), Sheffield (2012).
[9] "Most, if not all, of the characters traditionally chosen as the source of clear, unequivocal statements of Plato's 'doctrines' often disclaim their own knowledge and authority." Scott and Welton (2000), 148
[10] Arieti (1995), 119-20
[11] Howland (1991). Also Kahn (1996) 42-44 for an alternative view.

> converse about the matter itself and a life lived together, suddenly a light, as it were, is kindled in one soul by a flame that leaps to it from another, and thereafter sustains itself. Yet this much I know-that if the things were written or put into words, it would be done best by me, and that, if they were written badly, I should be the person most pained. Again, if they had appeared to me to admit adequately of writing and exposition, what task in life could I have performed nobler than this, to write what is of great service to mankind and to bring the nature of things into the light for all to see? But I do not think it a good thing for men that there should be a disquisition, as it is called, on this topic-except for some few, who are able with a little teaching to find it out for themselves. As for the rest, it would fill some of them quite illogically with a mistaken feeling of contempt, and others with lofty and vain-glorious expectations, as though they had learnt something high and mighty." (Plat. L. 7, 341b-342a)

This statement is coupled with a complicated argument explaining why it is that metaphysical doctrines cannot be explicated in writing. Assuming that this letter is genuine, it seemingly gives us a good reason to flee from doctrine summation of Plato's philosophy.

All these arguments are, of course, used by proponents of the skeptical approach, and it is certainly true that the "third way" methods of interpretation look much more like a soft skeptical reading than any sort of doctrinal reading.[12] However, there are problems inherent to the approach as well. Just as the doctrinal approach seemingly reaches back to Plato's own day, the skeptical reading was first utilized as far back as the later teachers at Plato's own Academy. As Diogenes Laertius notes, himself clearly a dogmatist, philosophical skepticism arose in the

[12] Consider the similarities of approach within Cotton (2014) to those described as "third way" proponents and how often she relies on their work in her citations.

Academy and claimed to be following in the footsteps of Plato, rescuing his writings from dogmatic interpretation through the formation of the New Academy. To these skeptics, Plato's dialogues are meant to have no dogmatic directive and are meant only to question and debunk claims to knowledge or truth. Accordingly, they argue that Plato himself practiced a sincere denial of knowledge. Where the doctrinal readers so sincerely disbelieve the Socratic claims to ignorance, the ancient skeptics made this his only philosophical doctrine. (Diogenes Laertius 3.1, Cicero, Academica 1.46, Cicero. de Oratore 3.18)[13]

Ancient skepticism is easily critiqued both logically and evidentially. A close reading of Plato reveals too much evidence of his belief in the search for truth for Skeptics' claims to be Plato's philosophical successors to have any merit.[14] Furthermore, the elenchus of the Socratic method is itself a form of truth and therefore doctrinal, albeit negatively. Modern skeptical readings of Plato emphasize this negative dogmatism. Rather than proposing and defending a general theory or systematic understanding of the world, Plato's method of philosophy is rather to weed out incorrect assumptions and ideas, rendering one's acquaintance with virtue or one's knowledge of the world a closer approximation of the truth. This fits with the general experience of reading Plato without philosophical predisposition. Those doctrines propounded as the theories of Plato seem, in an unbiased reading of the dialogues, more composed of inferences from negative statements than actual positive propositions. One senses that perhaps the *elenche* leave behind a silhouette of what may be true, and that the dogmatists have filled the empty space with their own construction. [15]

[13] For an in-depth description of the skeptical position, see Woodruff (1986).
[14] Magrini (2018), 8-10
[15] Cotton (2014), 24-6. See also Magrini (2018), 8-9 for the differentiation of skeptical readings that meld into the doctrinal.

As Gonzalez notes, the true issue with the consistent skeptical approach is the lack of practical application.[16] The dogmatist reading makes the dialogue form merely a stylistic choice, perhaps informed by societal expectations or the literary preferences of the author, while the skeptical reading elevates the dialectic *elenchus* to the only philosophical element, hollowing out the weight of Platonic discovery to merely a weeding of a patch of ground, but planting nothing new. Any hard skeptical reading of Plato seems either to find little elements of the doctrinal approach seeping in, or to fail to properly account for large portions of the text. [17]

To examine the dialogue form without the encroaching presuppositions of either dogmatism or skepticism rendering a foregone conclusion, the dialogues must be read in such a way as to allow their form and their content to have equal say in their interpretation. The form of the works, that is, the dialogue form, with all its intricacies, must influence our interpretation of the words of Socrates, or any of the other protagonists of the drama. At the same time, the plain meaning of words and the obvious direction of the argument should not be thrown out in favor of an overly non-doctrinal an approach . To paraphrase John Dewey, this represents a return to Plato unclouded by a predetermined reading.[18]

1.3 **The Dialogue form in *Theaetetus***

Having begun to develop an understanding of Plato's view of philosophy, a second case study, this time of the *Theaetetus*, will strengthen and deepen it in preparation for subsequent chapters, as well as support the "third way" approach with another example. The *Theaetetus* has

[16] Gonzalez (1995a), 13

[17] There are other elements of non-doctrinal approaches not covered here. For example, no mention is made of the esotericist argument. For a full discussion of this and other readings of the dialogues, see the introduction in Gonzalez (1998).

[18] Dewey (1930), 21

caused many doctrinal readers of Plato some trouble in accounting for a perceived inconsistency in Platonic epistemology, some acknowledging that there is an inconsistency, others looking for connections with other dialogues to fill the vacancy of any reference to the theory of forms. However, without a need to find Platonic doctrine, *Theaetetus* displays no inconsistency at all, and is perhaps the dialogue that best allows us to see the connection between the dialogue form and the philosophy of Plato.[19]

In *Theaetetus*, we have an obvious example of Socrates persistent avoidance of any doctrinal statements, which, since Socrates is the mouthpiece of nearly everything supposed to be Platonic doctrine, would imply that Plato too, if his intention is to espouse doctrine, must be at least pretending not to. At every turn of the argument, Socrates pursues his analogy of the philosopher as midwife such that even when we suspect, after a long instructional speech, that he has begun to produce his own "offspring", we find that he has hardly believed a word of it and is ready to abandon the line of thinking at once. (*Tht.* 150, 157b-d)

Indeed, the refutation of Protagoras' assertion is so drawn out where it might be otherwise so succinctly stated that the early parts of Theaetetus' conversation with Socrates seems but an exercise in debate rather than doctrinal propositions. But that is precisely what the nuanced non-doctrinal reader of Plato would expect. The important element of the dialogue is the "midwifery", it is the practice of philosophy as Socrates advocates: in the coupling through dialogue that results in the birth of the new idea, or rather, a specific idea condensed into a universal truth. If read purely for doctrine, the first half of *Theaetetus* becomes a rather impoverished treatise, with a great deal of dramatic fluff surrounding really quite a simple main

[19] Kramer (1976), 388

argument. But in the dialogue form, its purpose is not to record, in a convincing and systematic manner, a truth, but rather to be the search for truth. The young come to Socrates for wisdom, but as he claims, he gives them none but what they already have within them, and when they go away from him, that is, they cease the dialectic process, they lose the wisdom they have (*Tht.* 150d). This is the only section of the first half of *Theaetetus* where we are left in no doubt that Socrates is speaking of his own opinions. The only doctrine we find that he espouses is one eschewing doctrine in favor of a process, distilling the specific individual truths into the universal definition of truth, which, for him, is the dialectic process. This is the process which the Platonic dialogue reproduces. If it were doctrinal, it would be in violation of the essence of truth, thus the practice of philosophy for Plato must be dialectic.

It is therefore unsurprising, moving to the latter half of the dialogue, that Protagoras' assertion, which stood so perfectly on its own, even expertly defended by Socrates himself, falls apart when it encounters other thinkers. An individual may be the measure of all things, but when he must defend this position to others, his argument precludes its own propagation (*Tht.* 170d). In order for man to be the measure of all things, he must never engage in dialogue with anyone else upon the subject of that truth. We see that again the literary form, in which Socrates creates a dialogue, melds with spoken content. Socrates is not only declaring the crucial fault of Protagoras' theory; he is doing the very thing which Protagoras' theory cannot account for.

It must not be forgotten that, in fact, Socrates is not in dialogue with Protagoras since Protagoras is dead. In order to engage with his ideas, he must do the next best thing, which is to author a dialogue between himself and the absent Protagoras, exactly as Plato is doing one level above. Just as is seen in the *Symposium*, the form Plato uses gives us the justification for identifying his voice with Socrates; when Socrates wishes to speak philosophically, he becomes

the author of a dialogue. This method brings a clarity to the rest of the work. When the dialogue moves toward more doctrinal assertions from Socrates, it is always accompanied by Socrates creating a dialogue for himself with the absent progenitors of the idea. When examining the ideas of the Heracliteans, he speaks for them (*Tht.* 180d-181a). He does the same with the opposite view of Parmenides (*Tht.* 184a). When he espouses his own idea about correct and incorrect knowledge in the form of the analogy of the wax block, he invents an interlocuter to offer a challenge, in answer to which he transforms the idea into the analogy of the aviary, disposing of that in its turn (*Tht.* 197d, 201d-202b). When he uses words like "I think" or "I believe", words which he takes a moment to comically deplore (196d), there is no guarantee that he will not contradict them with an invented interlocutory interjection later.

This invented dialogue in the place of an actual conversation with Protagoras might seem to pose a problem. What is the relationship of the synthetic dialogue to the practice of philosophy? Can one really replace interpersonal dialogue with a dialogue in which the examiner plays both sides? Certainly, Socrates plays both sides of many arguments within *Theaetetus.* Though we will examine this question in more depth later, we can at least note that Socrates recognizes this question and offers some explanation in the form of his definition of thought as:

> "a talk which the soul has with itself about the objects under its consideration. […] It seems to me that the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms, and denies. And when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or a sudden leap, when it affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel, we call this its judgement. So in my view, to judge is to make a statement, and a judgement is a statement which is not addressed to another person or spoken aloud, but silently addressed to oneself." (*Tht.* 180a-180d)

Chapter 2

2.1 **Plato and Athenian Education**

Having established through two case studies both an approach to reading the dialogues as well as a general sense of Plato's definition of the practice of philosophy, the task now is to examine the contemporary educational context in which he writes. His relationship to the norms or trends of his society will influence much how we are to understand his views. In considering this relationship, several difficulties are apparent. The educational revolution occurring in Athens at the time was the advent of the Sophists, paid teachers of skills useful to an Athenian gentleman. Though sophists or their teachings are present and even play major roles in many of the dialogues, nowhere in the dialogues do we find a systematic definition of Sophistry that holds true across all of Plato's writings.[20] Furthermore, though Diogenes Laertius preserves a record of many sophistic writings, there are few extant works from this group. Much can be derived from the encounters within Plato's dialogues, but any sophistic doctrines gleaned must be at least as uncertain as any supposition concerning the historic Socrates, possibly more so because of their clearly antagonistic role. Finally, the biographical sources for Plato himself are scant enough that it is even difficult to distinguish his own conflict with the Sophists from that of Socrates.

Therefore, rather than explicate a whole historical study on the educational practices of 5th century Athens, we will instead concern ourselves only with Plato's view of the contemporary educational landscape.[21] Understanding how he sees the practices of his society will allow us to

[20] McCoy (2007), 2-3

[21] For a historical overview on the education of Plato's contemporary Athens, see Marrou (1956)

understand how he sees himself in relationship to them and will aid in setting up for the next chapter, by the contrast between them, his own educational philosophy.

When does Plato engage with the educational norms of society? I argue that he does so through his engagements with the sophists. Through analysis of key sophistic encounters, we will see that Plato views the sophists as representative of the nature of society with respect to education. His contrast of the practice of philosophy with the Sophistic practice of teaching and rhetoric is not merely the combative encounters of two schools of thought, but rather, for Plato, is emblematic of the encounter of the philosopher with an unphilosophic society. As Socrates becomes the mouthpiece of the philosophy, the Sophists become the mouthpiece of society's attempts to learn without philosophy.[22] As before, the literary elements of the dialogue combine with the explicit content to show us this fact. A broad, though not exhaustive, survey of relevant encounters with the Sophists will support this thesis and leave us the requisite background for examining Plato's own philosophy of education in the final chapter.

2.2 ***Phaedrus***

This work is extremely useful in understanding the relationship between Plato and the Sophists since Socrates examines and critiques a piece of Sophistic writing and engages in thought concerning the nature of rhetoric, the skill most associated with both the Sophists and the landscape of contemporary Athenian education. In *Phaedrus*, much of the early *elenchus* is directed toward establishing the relationship between philosophy and rhetoric, or the philosopher

[22] Kamtekar (2019), 337-9, Scott (2000), 37 also makes a similar point, arguing that Plato is interested in contrasting Socrates with the essentially popularist teachings of the Sophists.

and the rhetorician. Therefore, this dialogue is obviously a useful starting point for Plato's view of the sophists.

We see outlined a very clear viewpoint that rhetoric is separate from philosophy and that philosophy sits above rhetoric as a prerequisite for excellence. In the course of the dialogue, Socrates engages in philosophic debate on the skills and elements necessary to rhetoric, and, in the process, attempts to get near to truths universally applicable to the whole art. "Well, then, we ought to examine the topic we proposed just now: When is a speech well written and delivered, and when is it not." (*Phdr.* 259e) "So, shall we look for instances of what we called the artful and the artless in the speech of Lysias you carried here and in our own speeches?" (*Phdr.* 262c)

In the analysis that follows, we find that to be truly excellent in rhetoric involves a philosophic nature that cannot be taught by a program of scattered principles. "It is their ignorance that makes them think they have discovered what rhetoric is when they have mastered only what it is necessary to learn as preliminaries. So they teach these preliminaries and imagine their pupils have received a full course in rhetoric, thinking the task of using each of them persuasively and putting them together into a whole speech is a minor matter, to be worked out by the pupils from their own resources." (*Phdr.* 269b-c)

The Sophists teach only principles and thus they cannot produce truly great rhetoric. For speech to ascend from the repetition of technique into a means of communicating truth, something more is required. "All the great arts require endless talk and ethereal speculation about nature: This seems to be what gives them their lofty point of view and universal applicability." (*Phdr.* 270a). The "endless talk and ethereal speculation" is the dialectic element necessary to the

practice of philosophy. Rhetoricians fail to achieve excellence when they have failed first to engage in dialogue. For Plato, the issue is not that rhetoric is a misleading practice, and thus that those skilled in it are misleading their pupils. Rather the issue is when a rhetorician is lacking the necessary dialectical background. But it is not merely the ability to engage in dialogue that the Sophists lack; they also lack that which philosophic dialogue produces, namely the differentiation that allows the knowledge of universal truth covering a multitude of specific cases; the ability to move from the specific to general. "In both cases we need to determine the nature of something—of the body in medicine, of the soul in rhetoric. Otherwise, all we'll have will be an empirical and artless practice." (*Phdr.* 270b) To put this in the language of the previous chapter, because the Sophists cannot engage in dialogue, they cannot ascend to the realms of immortal beauty.

Plato does not present the sophists as misguided proponents of rhetoric, offering skill in an inferior discipline. They are not philosophers of a rival school, proposing as true what Socrates believes is false. Rather, they are not philosophers at all, and thus cannot truly gain excellence in any skill, even rhetoric. They do not present false ideas of the human soul, and thus corrupt the youth. Rather, they fail to consider the soul at all, thus merely failing to adequately teach the youth. This distinction will become yet more apparent in other dialogues.

2.3 ***The Republic***

Following upon *Phaedrus,* the Republic gives us more explicit references to the Sophists and their relationship to philosophy. After describing the characteristics of the ideal city, the questions turn to the practicability of such a proposal. Rather than explain how each element might be brought about, Socrates proposes that the changes to the present systems necessary to bring about the ideal city are the only elements requisite for establishing practicability. To put it

another way, if the described city is the ideal, then it must be that to simply remove all bad elements of actual cities would have the effect of turning them into the ideal (*Rep.* 473). The philosopher king is the ideal, and anything that runs counter to philosophy in the rulers is therefore bad. As in Phaedrus, the expertise of governing a city, just like the expertise of rhetoric or writing, exists only as a product of philosophy.

It is within this context that again Socrates deals explicitly with the Sophists and their methods. They are not the deluders of the city; they are merely the blind (*Rep.* 484). In the analogy of the incapable seamen vying for the captaincy, we find that the dangerous corrupters of society are not the Sophists who profess to teach, but those who desire merely implements of skill rather than true knowledge of the thing itself and love for its beauty. The Sophists arise from the dangerous proclivities of society; they are not the originators of those dangers.

> "Not one of those paid private teachers, whom the people call sophists and consider to be their rivals in craft, teaches anything other than the convictions that the majority express when they are gathered together. Indeed, these are precisely what the sophists call wisdom. It's as if someone were learning the moods and appetites of a huge, strong beast that he's rearing—how to approach and handle it, when it is most difficult to deal with or most gentle and what makes it so, what sounds it utters in either condition, and what sounds soothe or anger it. " (*Rep.* 493a-b)

Thus, again, we see the sophist not as the rival philosopher, leading the Athenian youth in an opposite direction from Socrates, but rather the spirit of the unphilosophic public personified.

The philosopher is the one who discerns the difference between things and, crucially for Plato's Socrates, moves between the specific cases to the general, or the many to the few, while the unphilosophic public does not. Consequently, the public, when they employ teachers to impart skills, do so only with the goal of efficiency and the sophists are the result. As we saw in *Phaedrus*, they are concerned with the elements of learning that allow one to succeed in the society to which they belong. [23]

This lends a new reading of the earlier interactions with the sophist Thrasymachus. Much analysis has been done of the philosophy of Thrasymachus and its representation in *The Republic* and, considering the above statements on the Sophists, the best representation of his philosophy may be summed up in George Hourani's words: "The relevant characteristic of Thrasymachus' argument here is that is it entirely empirical".[24] When the source of his views is examined, we find that it is not from philosophical differentiation and definition, but from empirical observation. His claims have not been tested by reasoning, and he grows angry at the insistence that they need to be. Rather, the truth in them derives from their relation to his observation of the world.[25] This empirical method of truth-seeking blends with his argument and connects us to Socrates' later discussions on the Sophists; they are reliant on the views and practices of society to inform their opinions.[26] They are more like social scientists who study public values and modify their teachings in accordance with what they find. Since they merely teach what society

[23] It is important to note that skill in itself is not necessarily unphilosophic according to Plato, but that skill without some philosophic love of beauty is merely an "image". See Sheffield (2001) for an analysis of this distinction through the analogy of psychic pregnancy.
[24] Hourani (1976), 117
[25] Barney (2017): "Thrasymachus represents the essentially negative, cynical, and debunking side of the immoralist stance, grounded in empirical observations of the ways of the world."
[26] Smith (2000), 114 also note the essentially evidentiary arguments of Thrasymachus.

values, they must be close empirical observers of society, which, for all his faults as a philosopher, Thrasymachus is.

2.4 ***The Apology:***

The dialogue with Meletus makes the same argument concerning education and the sophists as we have found in the *Republic* and *Phaedrus.*

> "Tell me, my good sir, who improves our young men?—The laws. That is not what I am asking, but what person who has knowledge of the laws to begin with?—These jurymen, Socrates.
>
> How do you mean, Meletus? Are these able to educate the young and improve them?—Certainly.
>
> All of them, or some but not others?—All of them.
>
> Very good, by Hera. You mention a great abundance of benefactors. But what about the audience? Do they improve the young or not?—They do, too.
>
> What about the members of Council?—The Councillors, also.
>
> But, Meletus, what about the assembly? Do members of the assembly corrupt the young, or do they all improve them?—They improve them.
>
> All the Athenians, it seems, make the young into fine good men, except me, and I alone corrupt them. Is that what you mean?—That is most definitely what I mean." (*Ap.* 24c-25a)

Though Socrates ridicules this conclusion of Meletus as absurd, yet he goes on to acknowledge that he indeed might be considered in opposition to the citizens of Athens when he says:

> "Be sure, men of Athens, that if I had long ago attempted to take part in politics, I should have died long ago, and benefited neither you nor myself. Do not be angry with me for speaking the truth; no man will survive who genuinely opposes you or any other crowd and prevents the occurrence of many unjust and illegal happenings in the city. A man who really fights for justice must lead a private, not a public, life if he is to survive for even a short time." (*Ap.* 31d-32a)

Socrates is notably not seeking to characterize himself as doing the same thing as others in the city. He recognizes that perhaps those in opposition have at least this point: that his practices differ from those of society. However, as he maintains both in the *Apology* and *Republic,* it is the practice of philosophy that differentiates him.

2.5 ***Protagoras***

On their way to visit the Sophist Protagoras, Socrates says to his companion Hippocrates "And watch, or the Sophist might deceive us in advertising what he sells, the way merchants who market food for the body do. In general, those who market provisions don't know what is good or bad for the body—they just recommend everything they sell—nor do those who buy (unless one happens to be a trainer or doctor)." (*Prot.* 313c-d). Using a rather different analogy from those seen above, Socrates presents the Sophists as slimy salesmen or marketers, attempting to represent themselves and their productions in whatever guise is most appealing. The Sophist does not examine those teachings they propound in order to find out if they are good or not; they have no idea what it really is that they sell. When Protagoras embarks upon the subject of the formation of the good citizen, it comes as no surprise that when Socrates attempts to engage him in dialogue to examine his claims and get at the truth, Protagoras becomes uninterested. "I could

see he was uncomfortable with his previous answers and that he would no longer be willing to go on answering in a dialectical discussion, so I considered my work with him to be finished, and I said so: 'You know, Protagoras, I'm not exactly pleased myself that our session has not gone the way you think it should. But if you are ever willing to hold a discussion in such a way that I can follow, I will participate in it with you.' " (*Prot.* 335b) The others present must then contrive a way to allow Socrates, who claims to be unable to make long speeches, and Protagoras, who is unwilling to engage in dialogues, to have a conversation.

2.6 ***Gorgias***

The *Gorgias* contains one of the finest proofs of the association in Plato's mind between the Sophists and the public. He notes the connection between oratory and the Sophists through the analogy of the improvement of the body:

> "What cosmetics is to gymnastics, sophistry is to legislation, and what pastry baking is to medicine, oratory is to justice. However, as I was saying, although these activities are naturally distinct in this way, yet because they are so close, Sophists and orators tend to be mixed together as people who work in the same area and concern themselves with the same things."(*Grg. 465c)*

Beyond simply describing verbally what the Sophists are and are not, the narrative of the dialogue is structured to make that point, allowing us to connect Plato's own ideas to those put in the mouth of Socrates. Socrates must again be the midwife to his own ideas and become a writer of dialogue. In this case, it is because the sophists are incapable of asking the right sort of questions, so Socrates must suggest what questions he be asked. They can make speeches and

declarations, but never do they question with the intention of seeking to know.[27] This is not literary embellishment but making a point central to the argument; the Sophist orators are not merely choosing oratory instead of dialectic. Even when they desire to engage in dialectic, and Socrates desires to have his own ideas "delivered", they are incapable of engaging. Socrates must deliver himself of his own ideas, and this is done through playing both sides of the dialogue. "I praised you because I thought you were well educated in the practice of oratory. But I also thought that you had neglected the practice of discussion." (*Grg.* 471)

The "arguments" brought by the Sophists are deficient not because of their logical inconsistency, as was the case with Theaetetus, who was yet praised repeatedly by Socrates. Rather, they are deficient because they appeal not to reason, but to the testimony of the mass of society. In arguing that justice is one thing or another, they cannot engage with the dialogue, but can only say that all reasonable people agree that justice is such-and-such and are even incredulous that Socrates should dissent from the public opinion when he claims not to desire the life of the unjust tyrant. Socrates uncovers the problem with this mode of refutation, noting "as far as truth is concerned, for it might happen sometimes that an individual is brought down by the false testimony of many reputable people" (*Grg.* 471e-472a). The dialectic form and the dogmatic statements here combine to hit exactly the point Plato is aiming at. This is the essential difference between the Sophist and the philosopher, put here in Gorgias much more forcefully

[27] For more evidence of this, see *Gorgias* 463 and 466. The questions they ask need to be modified by Socrates to even follow upon the conversation properly. In *Gorgias* 467, they are simply unable to continue the discussion by asking questions.

than in the above passages: the Sophist or the rhetorician has an ability, or a "knack", but it is not the ability to discover the truth. [28]

2.7 **The Contrast with Platonic Philosophy**

These passages do more than simply reveal the nature, according to Plato, of sophistry and oratory. Like the *Theaetetus* and *Symposium*, they set in relief the practice which can drive the truth-seeker towards wisdom. The dialectic process is, without exception, the only method of acquiring the truth presented within Plato's corpus.[29] Plato presents the sophists as being either unable or unwilling to engage in the dialectic process, and so they have no place as philosophers within Plato's understanding of philosophy. Such being Plato's view of education as it is practiced in his society, we have seen his negative view; what education should not be. The positive, on the other hand, is where we must turn next. In light of this failure within education, how should the people be educated?

[28] To determine Plato's exact understanding of the Sophists, one might expect that the *Sophist*, the main subject of which is the difference between the philosopher and the Sophist, would be the greatest help. However, as McCoy notes in her commentary on the dialogue, "despite the Stranger's own sense of clarity about his definition of the Sophist, Plato's own voice in the dialogue is more difficult to discern" since the character of Socrates is virtually silent throughout the whole dialogue, resulting in much ambiguity in the reading of this dialogue. We will therefore pass it over in this analysis in the interest of brevity.

[29] Kahn (1996), 292. "The task of philosophy, then, is to lead us to knowledge of the good. But, according to Plato, genuine enlightenment in this domain can come only from an intellectual grasp of fundamental realities, and this in turn requires an arduous training. The training and the method of approach is what Plato calls dialectic."

Chapter Three

3.1 **Three Doctrinal Readings of Plato's Educational Philosophy**

When pursuing an understanding of Plato's philosophy of education, the difference between a doctrinal reading and a non-doctrinal reading of Plato must be stark. Large sections of the *Republic*, among the most dogmatic speeches of Socrates in the whole platonic corpus, lay out principles of education for the ideal city. A doctrinal reading would seek to find Plato's understanding of the development of children, perhaps incorporating a theory of cognitive development, as Kieran Egan does, that assigns to humanity four stages of thought.[30] Each stage progresses further toward reasoned thought, from unquestioning acceptance of appearances to beliefs determined by societal influence to unexamined original thought (where we may place the Sophists) and ending in philosophy that can properly criticize and examine its own thoughts.[31] Following upon this cognitive model, the analyst can deduce how the educational practices proposed by Plato are designed with such a model in mind. It must clearly be Plato's goal for education to bring as many citizens as possible to the fourth stage of cognition. Upon that assumption, the choices made concerning the raising of children in the *Republic*, for example, can be understood as bringing them through the various stages while mitigating any danger of their being trapped in a lower stage, hence the careful scrutiny of the implications of poetry or any other influence. Such a method of deriving a philosophy of education from the dialogues is not very common and has all the difficulties of hard-doctrinal readings of Plato examined in the first chapter, namely that it is difficult to keep such a reading from the influence

[30] Egan (1981), & (1983), 31-50

[31] Egan (1981), 125; The stages of this cognitive model are an interpretation of the segments of the "Divided line" analogy.

of anachronistic views of the nature of philosophy and that the context of the doctrines within the dialogue is largely discounted.[32]

It is possible to forego the developmental models altogether and seek to describe the practice of Plato's ideal education without the imposition of psychological structures. The resulting practical philosophy of education is often very close to the prior sort, but, of course, does not make the systematic psychological claims. This is perhaps the most common approach, especially historically. Richard Nettleship, in *The Theory of Education in the Republic of Plato*, after defining Plato's understanding of education as the nurture of the soul, sums up his thesis in the following terms: "Such being Plato's general conception of the nature of education we may expect that any system of education which he propounds will be a system for providing proper nurture to the growing soul or for adjusting its surroundings to its higher needs. It is also clear that the particular character of the system for attaining these ends must be determined by the conception of the human nature which has to be fed and the needs to which its circumstances have to be adjusted."[33] This method requires far less reading into the text than those which look for developmental theories, yet still neglects any explanation or incorporation of the dialogue form.

Within this method, there is much variation. Looking at the descriptions of the ideal educational system for the citizens of the ideal city created in the *Republic*, one finds the passages notoriously difficult to interpret. Some take Plato's description of education within his ideal city as a true and systematic educational philosophy, while others would see in it some

[32] It is not within the scope of this paper to offer further critique of these ideas except to note that the Egan's argument is susceptible to Magrini's criticism noted in ch. 1, and to state that nowhere in the argument is there any analysis of the context in which these stages are presented in the dialogue, nor is there any hermeneutic for the *Republic* offered that explains the approach.

[33] Nettleship (1906), 8

analogy or allegory. [34] The most common modern understanding notes that the theoretical construction of the city is an analogy, built to allow the discovery of the origin and nature of Justice. The important point is that through the removal of any injustice in the city, we see the essential characteristics of Justice: its orderliness and its being led by philosophy. [35] But even within that framework, it is difficult to draw the line between the education of the soul and the education of the constituent parts of the city. Where does the analogy begin and end? Some particular cases are easy to define. For example, it is hard to see the revision and censorship of poetry and drama as anything but comically overstated, or perhaps even tongue in cheek. Yet other cases are much more difficult, such as the importance of rulers being able to know the good, and the subjects that philosopher-kings should be trained in.

More cautiously and less dogmatically, one might proceed as Mintz does and derive the educational theories of Plato from his Socrates' practice of education. Socrates uses metaphor and analogy to explain his role as teacher, as we have already seen several times, and he engages in debate with sophists to expose their insufficient grasp of the truth and then to help them build up a new understanding that better fits with reality. Essentially, the most cautious appraisal of Plato's philosophy of education finds, in Plato's dialogues, the invention of the Socratic method as the primary tool of instruction. [36] Others utilizing this method go deeper into the subtleties of

[34] One might take the education of the citizens as a literal proposition of the ideal form of state-imposed education, as Bosanquet (1908) does. Similarly, Barrow (1976) takes a somewhat unquestioning approach to the impositions on education given in the *Republic,* reviewing them as Plato's ideas about education. Kamtekar (2019), while a little more cautious, still reports the educational program as essentially doctrinal. Strauss (1957) and Bloom (1968), on the other hand, both take the descriptions of the ideal city not as a program for excellence in education, but as having some other purpose for the participants in the dialogue and the reader.

[35] This common interpretation is succinctly put in Shorey (1971), 32-3, as well as in other papers from the volume Vlastos (1971).

[36] Mintz (2018)

the Socratic teaching method, yet the approach is somewhat impoverished.[37] Incorporating the narrative elements of the Socratic dialogues is a step in the right direction toward a wholistic reading of the work, but the difficulty lies in establishing the connection between what Plato is doing in the written work and what Socrates is doing in the narrative. Socrates indeed represents an element of the ideal teacher, set up by Plato to illustrate his philosophy of education, but incorporating other literary elements of the dialogues will introduce a better understanding of Plato's philosophy of education.

3.2 **Plato's Goal for Education.**

The first step towards a "third way" understanding of Plato's educational philosophy must be to describe the type of person that good education creates. Following upon the analysis carried out in the previous two chapters, it is not difficult to outline the endpoint or goal of education in the mind of Plato. In highlighting how the Sophists have failed to teach, we find, in the elements that are missing, the key to Plato's own view. The crucial element of learning is the ability to engage in examined and examining thought. Never, in any of the criticism of the Sophists, nor in the praise of promising young men like Theaetetus, is censure directed at those who are incorrect in their understanding of the truth. The failure or success of the student lies not in what they assert, for Socrates himself, as we have seen, frequently changes what he asserts and modifies his views throughout the dialogues, but rather in their disposition toward the pursuit of truth.[38] Theaetetus espouses a sophist claim to truth, but he is disposed towards examining it, and is thus considered to be a student of philosophy. Thrasymachus may be

[37] This method of deriving Plato's philosophy of education from the practice of Socrates is also used by Scott (2000), emphasizing very different elements from Mintz.

[38] Kahn (1996), xv: "Plato's conception of philosophical education is not to replace false doctrines with true ones but to change radically the moral and intellectual orientation of the learner, who, like the prisoners in the cave, must be converted - turned around - in order to see the light."

espousing merely a cynical yet hardly incorrect view of the world,[39] but he is not, at first, disposed to undergo examination, but rather desires to teach. In *Gorgias,* one of the most confrontational dialogues between Socrates and the Sophists, they are lambasted, not for being wrong, but for claiming to know. This is why the chapters of the *Republic* that specifically outline programs for education may be doubted to contain Plato's true views on the subject: they are in conflict with the main thrusts of the narrative and literary structure of the majority of the dialogues. Whatever Plato is doing with them, he is not setting forth a series of truths about humanity, for at all other points in his writings, he seems to be emphasizing the importance, not of truths, but of disposition towards truth.

As we have seen in the first chapter, that particular disposition towards truth, namely, a willingness to engage in the dialectic process, is philosophy itself. Therefore, properly understood, Plato's educational goal is the production of philosophers. Yet the definition runs still deeper, for the other element we have seen making up the dialogues is differentiation: the process of separating unlikes from each other and moving from the elements of a specific thing to general elements true of the whole class. Everywhere that Plato writes in the dialogue form, the primary building process of truth, whether through positive assertions or through negative "debunking", is this process of differentiation. Examined as a truth-statement about reality, it is called the Theory of Forms. As we have seen, it is more supportable to equate this striving after forms with the philosophic-dialectic process, for it is never divorced from this context.

Thus, the educated person is one who engages in dialogue with the goal of coming closer to the truth, and in so doing sharply contrasts ideas to the point where they can distill universals

[39] See the Ch.2, notes 5-6 for references to Thrasymachus.

from the particulars. This is the primary description of the philosopher that we can derive from the explicit and the implicit elements of Plato's dialogues, if we approach each with the full integration of the content with the form. The final and most significant question of this paper now materializes: if this is the goal of education, how does Plato accomplish this? Or, to relate it to the examination of Protagoras' statement concerning knowledge, how can Plato teach that nothing can be taught? How can one communicate to others the true statement that statements of truth are the wrong focus?

This question can be made a little more concrete. In Plato's corpus, we have a system of philosophy predicated upon interpersonal dialogue, and yet the corpus is written. The author, while praising dialectic, is, in doing so, actually engaging in solitary thought. The reader, too, is in the same bind as the author, for they are reading and interpreting the material in solitude. Taking it for granted that Plato is not merely a thoughtless hypocrite, lauding exactly what he fails to do or lead others to do, or even a purveyor of unanswerable paradoxes, the root question becomes "How does Plato believe he can write in such a way as to create the dialectic process within a single person?".

3.3 **Writing and Thought**

It is possible to connect the practice of thought with the practice of writing within the Platonic corpus. Neither are ever explicitly set forth as an important feature of philosophy, yet both are exemplified without much explanation. Plato is the writer whose philosophy seems to preclude the usefulness of writing, while Socrates is the thinker whose philosophy precludes individual thought. Perpetually, Socrates discounts the idea that he has any wisdom or knowledge on any subject by himself. We saw within the *Symposium* that even when called upon to speak for himself and give his own account, he does not root it in abstract thought, but rather

in a past dialogue. Yet at the same time, prior to the main events of the *Symposium,* Socrates is reported to go off on his own and silently think. Alcibiades also recounts similar behavior in his speech at the end (*Symp.* 220c-e). This is akin to the paradox of Plato, the author who speaks against writing; Socrates, the denier of wisdom within himself, as if in preparation for a display of his wisdom, finds it useful to think alone.

Beyond this circumstantial likeness, the description of thought given by Socrates encountered in the previous chapter gives us another similarity. Thought is a discourse for Socrates just as writing is a dialogue for Plato. The importance of this should not be underestimated. It seems that when we answer the question concerning how Plato writes to educate, it will be linked to the question concerning how Socrates thinks to understand. Thinking and writing, considered together, allow us to fully understand the nature of the Platonic view of education and acquiring wisdom. [40]

Apart from the passage in *Theaetetus,* there is another psychological analysis of the elements of thought that is useful for understanding its character. In the *Phaedrus,* Socrates expounds the analogy of the chariot, where those seeking truth must guide their horses toward the realm of the gods. Some have wayward and difficult to manage horses and constantly dip in and out of the realms where truth may be seen. Crucially, this seems to represent an awareness on the part of Plato of the distinction between the subconscious and the conscious, or the carnal *id* which the conscious philosophical guide must overcome in order to properly seek truth (*Tht.*

[40] It is important to distinguish between the types of thought here. I am not referring to the generated representations of objects in the mind. That, for Plato, is the result of the process of thinking to which I am referring. When I speak here of thought, I am referring to the analytic or forensic process that produces the association of ideas with objects. For an excellent analysis of this element of thought, and its derivation from the type under consideration here, see Woolf (2013)

246a-257a). We have, therefore, from the mouth of Socrates, a dual nature in the internal process of seeking the truth. [41]

3.4 **Socrates' Daimonion**

But there is another element that, like the Freudian super-ego, is attributed by Socrates to a completely external force. The Daimonian, which speaks to him as guide, is a mysterious element and much has been written theorizing on its nature and Socrates' beliefs about it.[42] However, we need not concern ourselves with what the Daimonion was to the historical Socrates, but rather consider how Plato uses the concept within his work.

First, it must be noted that Plato's account differs from that of Xenophon with respect to the Daimonion, implying that it is not likely to be merely an unimportant artifact of the historical Socrates. For Xenophon, the daimonion is a guide towards both negative and affirmative action. (Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 1.1.1–5). However, in Plato's account, it specifically is only a negative prompting. It is the critical voice that keeps Socrates specifically from wrongdoing. "It is a voice, and whenever it speaks it turns me away from something I am about to do, but it never encourages me to do anything." (*Ap.* 31d).

Furthermore, Socrates notes that he is not the only one to possess this divine sign but considers it to be a feature of the philosopher. It represents the separation of the philosopher from the "madness of the multitude" (*Rep.* 496c). Perhaps most prevalently, it guides his actual

[41] Simon (1973) makes the connection between the allegory of the chariot and the work of Freud.
[42] Gottlieb (1999), 17 states connects the Daimonion to the conscience, though he doesn't explore the idea deeply. Reeve (2000), 32-3 gives an excellent summary of the state of scholarship on the subject, arguing that the Diamonion represents an element of the dialectic process.

practice of philosophy by helping him discern whom he should engage in dialogue (*Theages* 129e, *Alcibiades I* 105e-106a, *Euthydemus* 272e-273a, *Theaetetus* 151A).

Within the account of Socrates, therefore, there is a tripartite nature to thought. There are the unconscious impulses, the reasoned thought that can master them, and the transcendent voice that speaks with the voice of another and which criticizes even the reasoned thought, guiding Socrates toward the proper exercise of the dialectic. This critic, the Daimonion, would be explained by Freud as Socrates' encounter with the super-ego, though Freud himself did not directly engage with Plato's philosophy. To Freud, the super-ego is nearly always a negative impulse, just as it is for Plato's Socrates. Furthermore, it is characterized by Plato as coming from the realm of the gods or the ideals, and thus conforms to the Freudian super-ego's representation of the ideal self. [43]

3.5 **Plato's Daimonion**

But the most important aspect of the Freudian super-ego for understanding the Platonic dialogues is its nature as the internalization of the ideal father figure.[44] Plato believes that the search for truth can only be done through the dialectic process, yet one aspect of the dialectic process is the discourse with the daimonion. Socrates' spiritual voice becomes for Plato the voice of Socrates. The process of writing is no longer a dead exercise of mere bookkeeping, but an active discourse within the soul in which the reasoned thought (Freudian ego) converses with the external critic internalized within the character of the ideal teacher (Freudian super-ego). Hence, the character Socrates is so frequently the critic and so rarely dogmatic. As we have seen, almost

[43] Freud (1933) for his description of the super-ego, in particular, 58-60.
[44] Ibid, 64-5

the only thing that Socrates ever consistently teaches is the dialectic pursuit of truth and the driving towards the ideal that is the second function of the Socratic daimonion noted above.

The presence of this daimonion separates the philosophers from the rest of the public. The sophists, in their representation of the societal relationship to philosophy, have a combative relationship with Socrates. He can become the midwife to the ideas of the philosopher, such as Theaetetus or Plato himself, but if the Sophists engage directly with him, they are at odds. Just as the Sophists do not have the ability to engage in the process of internal (or even external) dialectic critique, so the public is also mistrustful of this guiding spirit. The daimonion is cited as one of the main arguments in the prosecutors' charge of Socrates misleading the youth (*Euthyp.* 3b).

3.6 **The Educative Daimonion**

This analysis of the mechanics of thought appears, upon inspection, to be completely transferrable to the practice of writing. Returning to the *Phaedrus*, Socrates describes the dialectic process in similar terms to his analogy in the *Symposium*, wherein the dialogue produces a kind of immortality, this time in the form of the sowing of seeds which in their turn bear yet more. (*Symp.* 276e-277a). The difference here is the discussion is now contrasting the dialogue with the written word, rather than the practice of rhetoric. It is here that Socrates explicitly compares writing to thought:

> SOCRATES: Now tell me, can we discern another kind of discourse, a legitimate brother of this one? Can we say how it comes about, and how it is by nature better and more capable?
>
> PHAEDRUS: Which one is that? How do you think it comes about?

> SOCRATES: It is a discourse that is written down, with knowledge, in the soul of the listener; it can defend itself, and it knows for whom it should speak and for whom it should remain silent.(*Phdr.* 276a)

We therefore see that, while writing is an impoverished, mute, dead thing (*Phdr.* 275a-e), it has a twin in thought that can pursue dialectic inquiry. But this is not where Socrates concludes, but goes on to show, in the analogy of the farmer planting words, that indeed writing when it is done properly, gives rise to thought within the author. Though writing is at best an aid to memory, yet when one fully utilizes this aspect, it becomes an inspirer of thought, which we have already seen to be capable of philosophy.

Since philosophic writing may be compared with philosophic thought, then in both cases the reconciliation between the interpersonal dialectic pursuit of truth and the private personal pursuit of truth is this transcendental voice that makes a dialogue out of words on a page or solitary thoughts. This provides the key for the teaching of philosophy through writing. Plato, in his private pursuit of the truth, can consciously use the critical voice of Socrates to provide a pseudo-external directive force to his ideas. If he desires to teach others philosophy through writing, which itself will be a private pursuit of truth within the reader, then he must provide the reader with their own daimonion capable of embedding itself within their experience of thought and becoming a living critic within them. The words of Socrates on the page can be the "dead" thing that merely records, but the form in which it is preserved can be used to train the psychological entity.

This is why it is crucial that Socrates be the ideal form of the philosopher. While, for Plato and his readers, the diamonionic force can be another man, for Socrates it is a being directly from the realm of the gods. Where, for the reader, it is necessary that such a force be

formed and developed in the pattern of the ideal, for Socrates, being the representation of the ideal itself, the force has been with him since childhood. In reading most of the dialogues of Plato, one is perpetually embedded within a interaction between the ideal and the real, in the midst of which, the reader is necessarily integrating this ideal into his daimonion, sharpening the skills of their inner dialogue and providing, rather than a record of discovered truth, a form of the ideal disposition towards truth, towards which they can orient themselves.

In this way Plato overcomes the limits of writing to teach dialectic philosophy. The educative nature of the dialogues is their ideal-shaping relationship to the philosophic endeavor. They are meant to engender in the reader a better capability for internal dialectic through the strengthening of the ideal critic. The dialogue form, then, perfectly matches the Platonic understanding of the nature of philosophy and its practice and enables Plato to teach this practice even through the medium of the written word.

Conclusion:

From the first analysis of the *Symposium* and *Theaetetus*, we came to understand a number of principles that guided the inquiry of the subsequent chapters. First, that careful attention to the dialogue form provided a clear sense of the direction of the philosophical content as well as a better understanding of the relationship between Plato, the author, and Socrates, the character. Second, that, for Plato, philosophic inquiry was not primarily concerned with constructing a set of principles or truths about reality, but was rather chiefly interested in the pursuit or movement toward truth, the which was done through the dialectic process. Third, that Socrates the character played the role of the "midwife", allowing ideas and wisdom to be brought forth not of himself, but through engagement in dialogue with others.

In the second chapter, we placed these discoveries in the context of the struggle between the Sophists and Platonic philosophy. We saw that the Sophists did not represent rival philosophies to either Plato or Socrates, but rather Plato's own engagement with the unphilosophical public represented by the Sophists. In determining the difference between the Sophists and Plato, of special note was the reluctance and even the inability on the part of the Sophists to engage in dialogue. This served to further demonstrate the core Platonic reliance on the dialogue as the key element of philosophic inquiry. We also noted the relationship between rhetoric and dialectic, and the failure of rhetoric without the prerequisite dialectic.

In the final chapter, after noting the issues with doctrinal treatments of Plato's educational philosophy, we sought to understand how a fundamentally dialectic-based philosophy could be taught through the written word. The connection between thought and writing was explicated, introducing the psychological idea of the critiquing spirit which allows a

dialogue to take place within a single person. This was connected to the Socratic Daimonion, a concept which Plato uses as the critiquing ideal. In the end, we showed how Plato uses Socrates as his own Daimonion, not simply for his own thought and writing, but as a way of inspiring in the reader their own private dialogue.

Thus, in reliance upon the work of numerous scholars, and following an approach which may truly be described as a return "back to Plato", the dialogue form was shown to be integral to Plato's intention of propagating the desire and pursuit of wisdom in his readers.

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