

PLATO'S SOCRATES: DIALECTICAL METHOD AS *TECHNÉ*

ŞİRİN YILMAZ

BOĞAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2010

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Thesis submitted to the
Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts
in
Philosophy

by

Şirin Yılmaz

Boğaziçi University

2010

Thesis Abstract

Şirin Yılmaz, “Plato’s Socrates: Dialectical Method as *Techné*”

This thesis aims to investigate how Plato in his dialogues through the Socratic character treats the method of dialectic as being some kind of *techné*. On the grounds of Plato’s dialogues, the inquiry begins by enumerating the defining features of *techné* which define it as such. Truth, rationality, dealing with a definite subject matter, being useful as well as teachable are among those defining elements of *techné*. The definition of *techné* we find in the Platonic dialogues is recognized through the criticism directed to the figures which claim to possess *techné* and play quite an important role in education practiced at that time. For the criticism raised against the sophists, we will refer to the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, and for the criticism raised against the poets, we will refer to the *Ion*, *Republic* and *Symposium*. Besides, the criticism provided for written texts as a form of education in the *Phaedrus* will also be mentioned. This criticism is also quite important because of the way in which it highlights the meaning and superiority of the dialectical method. After the presentations of those criticisms, by appealing to the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus* and *Sophists*, we will try to demonstrate how Plato through Socrates approaches the method of dialectic as a *techné* which is learnable and teachable.

Tez Özeti

Şirin Yılmaz, “Platon’un Sokrates’i: *Techné* Olarak Diyalektik Metod”

Bu tez Platon’un diyaloglarında, Sokrates üzerinden nasıl diyalektik metodu bir çeşit *techné* olarak işlediğini incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. Bu araştırma, Plato’nun diyaloglarına dayanarak, *techné*’yi *techné* yapan özellikleri sıralayarak başlamaktadır. Hakikat, rasyonellik, belli bir konu ile uğraşma, hem faydalı hem de öğretilebilir olma *techné*’yi tanımlayan özellikler arasındadır. Platon’un diyaloglarında bulduğumuz *techné* tanımı, o dönemde uygulanan eğitimde oldukça önemli rol oynayan ve *techné* sahibi olduklarını iddia eden sofistlere ve şairlere yöneltilen eleştiriler aracılığıyla farkedilmektedir. Sofistlere yöneltilen eleştiri için *Protagoras* ve *Gorgias*’a, şairlere yöneltilen eleştiriler için de *Ion*, *Devlet* ve *Symposion*’a değineceğiz. Bunun yanında, Platon’nun *Phaidros*’ta bir eğitim formu olarak yazılı metinlere yönelttiği eleştiriye de değinilecektir. Bu eleştiri diyalektik metodun anlam ve üstünlüğünü öne çıkarıcı nitelikte olduğundan dolayı da oldukça önemlidir. Bu eleştirilerden sonra *Parmenides*, *Theaitetus* ve *Sofist* diyaloglarına değinerek, Platon’un Sokrates üzerinden diyalektik metodu nasıl öğrenilebilir ve öğretilebilir bir *techné* olarak ele aldığını göstermeye çalışacağız.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I owe the existence of this MA thesis to many years of study in philosophy, during which my intellectual and philosophical flourishing has been fostered with many inspiring figures.

I would like to begin by expressing my deepest gratitude to Stephen Voss, my supervisor, mentor, friend and one of the biggest sources of inspiration in my life. My journey in the study of philosophy has been beautified, enriched and marked by his presence in such a way that without him I cannot imagine myself as who I am now and who I am becoming. To feel his enduring support, encouragement and his belief in me, during some of the hardest moments in my life and in the process of writing this thesis, has always kept my enthusiasm alive. In all those years, I learned so much from him about how to approach philosophical texts and engage in philosophical thinking that now my philosophical attitude and dedication within me remains as a treasure inherited from him.

I am also very grateful to Chryssi Sidiropoulou, with whom I began to study Greek philosophy as an undergraduate. My love for the study of this period was greatly nurtured by her during those early years. Her invaluable comments also played an important role in completing the final version of this work. While trying to interpret the ancient texts properly in their original language, I also benefited greatly from her knowledge of ancient Greek which in return contributed considerably to the content of this thesis.

I am deeply thankful to Suna Ertuğrul for being such an inspiring figure for me. My aspiration and determination to take part in academia has been strengthened very much through her stimulating, vigorous, exceptional lectures and personality. Her encouragement and understanding were simply uplifting at all times.

I feel very lucky for being a student of Pınar Canevi during my graduate studies. Her courses profoundly opened my philosophical horizon. Once I came to realize how akin our philosophical devotion, questions and concerns were, I become even more attentive to her lectures and her unequalled course on Plato's dialogues did all that was necessary for me to formulate the question of this thesis. I also thank Zeynep Davran, who has influenced me both intellectually and personally to a great extent during my undergraduate as well as graduate years. I am indebted to my other professors at the Department of Philosophy as well, particularly Murat Baç, İlhan İnan, Yıldız Silier, Karanfil Soyhun, Berna Kılınç and Gürol Irzık. I feel that during my studies I was also very lucky to become a student of and friends with two wonderful and inspiring English teachers in Boğaziçi University, Gül Akkoç and Meltem Gürle, and I thank them too.

I also want to express my thankfulness to my professor James Muir, with whom my study of ancient philosophy has acquired direction during my time at the University of Winnipeg. This period in general constituted a unique challenge which at the end significantly transformed me in many important ways, and in particular contributed immensely to my knowledge and understanding of ancient philosophy with two wonderful seminars, *Plato&Before* and *Aristotle&After*.

I also owe so much to my friends, who inspired me in their own ways and supported me in many aspects of life. I especially want to thank Hande Kesgin, İlkey Tan, Rahmi Akman and Ben Baader for being always with me to remind me of the value of my goals and give me hope and joy when I needed them the most.

I am deeply thankful to Dađlar Tanrıkulu, who has become an irreplaceable companion for me. His unique support, affection and friendship has been a true blessing throughout some very difficult and good times we both shared. I also thank him for carefully reading my thesis and helping me with the editing procedure. I also want to thank our little dog friend, Karamel, who was always our source of cheer at the end of long library hours.

Lastly, there are two very important people in my life to whom I owe immeasurable thankfulness, my mother Ayten and father Hüseyin. Without their love, encouragement, support, patience and the endless faith they placed in me, I would not have been following the path on which I am now. With love, I am dedicating this thesis to them.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION	1
CHAPTER II: THE QUESTION OF <i>TECHNÉ</i>	7
CHAPTER III: CRITIQUE OF THREE FORMS OF EDUCATION: RHETORIC, POETRY AND WRITTEN SPEECH	11
Criticizing the Sophists: <i>Protagoras</i> and <i>Gorgias</i>	11
Criticizing the Poets: <i>Ion</i> , <i>Republic</i> and <i>Symposium</i>	16
Criticizing Written Speech: <i>Phaedrus</i> and the <i>Seventh Letter</i>	32
CHAPTER IV: DEPICTION OF DIALECTIC AS A <i>TECHNÉ</i> AND AS A WAY OF ACHIEVING A VIRTUOUS LIFE	36
The <i>Parmenides</i> : Parmenides Educating Young Socrates in the Practice of Dialectic	36
The <i>Theaetetus</i> : Socrates' Claim to Possess a <i>Techné</i>	41
The <i>Sophist</i> : Dialectic as a Source of Purification	45
CHAPTER V: DIALECTIC AS A <i>TECHNÉ</i>	49
CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION	56
BIBLIOGRAPHY	59

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

[T]he art of speech displayed by one who has gone chasing after beliefs, instead of knowing the truth, will be a comical sort of art, in fact no art at all.

—*Phaedrus* 262c

The teachability of *areté* is one of the most widely discussed topics in the Platonic scholarship. However, although the discussion in the dialogues seems to be more on the teachability of virtue, Plato appears to construct a rather subtle structure which through the Socratic character depicts the method of dialectic as a *techné*, and thus teachable. The dialectical practice is presented as one of the ways through which the acquisition of virtue is realized. Thus, when one acquires the knowledge of what dialectic is and how it is practiced, the possibility of achieving virtue is opened up on the condition that there is a constant application of the dialectical method. This idea is presented and discussed through the Socratic figure.¹ In Plato's Socrates, we first find the necessary and the most important element for the teachability of the lifelong practice of dialectic: desire. Since it is the practice of dialectic which opens up the possibility of becoming virtuous, desire is also a necessary element for the acquisition of virtue because the sustainability of the lifelong practice of dialectic depends on desire which is persistently present. Desire is one necessity for the possibility of attaining virtue, but the possibility of attaining moral truths and transformation in the self is strengthened only if there are teachers who are erudite and excellent dialecticians. Thus, the teachability of virtue becomes possible only if

¹ There is a great deal of discussion about which Socrates in the dialogues overlaps with the historical Socrates, but here I choose to focus on the Socratic figure as a whole and consider different dialogues together in order to demonstrate what Plato has to convey about true education, which, for Plato, is philosophical education.

there are particular kinds of students and teachers. But, what kind of students and teachers are needed? I believe that with his Socratic character in the dialogues, Plato attempts to define them both.

However, this attempt necessarily encompasses an overview of the nature of different pedagogical practices. Plato's concern for education, which he takes over from Socrates, leads him to discuss what is wrong with the established traditional forms of education and teachers. Throughout this discussion, the notion of *techné* is particularly emphasized, and lacking a *techné* is demonstrated as an indication of being disqualified as an educator. The dialectical method is presented as some kind of *techné*, and with this aspect, it also qualifies as a form of educational method. Before we begin to figure out those aspects that identify dialectical practice as *techné*, we need to present Plato's thought on the notion of *techné* in general. In order to establish the definition of *techné*, in the second chapter we will make use of different points made regarding the notion of *techné* in the Platonic dialogues. By reflecting on the definition of *techné*, in the second chapter, not only will it become possible to see why other forms of education are unable to suffice as *technai*, but also later, in the fifth chapter, we will be able to reason why and how dialectical practice counts as *techné*.

In the third chapter I will present Plato's critique of three different forms of education: rhetoric, poetry and written speech. There are two main classes of teachers which receive to harsh criticism for taking part in education without possession of a *techné*: sophists and poets. Plato's new model of education finds its definition through the criticism directed against them. In the Platonic dialogues, the persistent struggle with the sophists as well as with the poets has its root in Plato's responsibility to truth. The function of truth is so fundamental for ethical and

political matters that Plato recognizes truth as one of the most essential aspects of what is going to be called *techné*. For Plato, if something is a *techné*, then it definitely needs to relate to truth. Poets can sometimes reflect the truth, but even when they are able to do so, they express it through inspiration, and their claims lack a rational account. Sophists, on the other hand, have the ability to develop sophisticated arguments, but instead of aiming at truth, they chase after presenting certain beliefs as true through their use of rhetoric, oratory and eristic. Furthermore, they also take it as their profession to teach this to the young as a method of persuasion. As a result of their negligence of truth, compared to the poets, the criticism raised against the sophists has much more depth and significance. The education of the sophists lacks truth as a motivational force, and thus their teachings elude it completely.

Before I proceed to show how Plato, through Socrates, presents the method of dialectic as teachable, I will also take into account the *Phaedrus* in the third chapter in order to discuss the limits of written speech as a means of education. In addition to the consideration of written speech, in the *Phaedrus*, the components of dialectical practice are developed further. Truth as a condition of speech is emphasized in the *Phaedrus* as well, but another very important aspect of dialectical experience is that there must be agreement on the terms used so that there can be a true dialogical experience. This dialogue is very important for taking into account written speech and explaining why it is inferior to living speech—a dialogue in dialectical form. It is not possible for written speech to address particular people, while in a dialogue, two parties who know about each other know how to address a certain issue to a soul with a particular nature. In a living dialogue, there is also a chance that each party can clarify to each other what they mean by particular terms,

while whatever is said in written speech remains impotent if there arises a need for clarification.

After presenting the definition of *techné* and the critiques against other forms of education, in the third chapter, I will demonstrate a connection between three late dialogues, namely, the *Theaetetus*, the *Sophist* and the *Parmenides*. This connection is instrumental in conceiving the dialectical practice as a kind of *techné*² which has the possibility of being learned and being taught. I take the *Parmenides* as a key dialogue because of its depiction of Socrates as a young boy getting educated by Parmenides in the practice of the dialectical method. This depiction becomes even more important when Socrates is found referring to his meeting with Parmenides in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Sophist*. These dialogues also provide some other reasons to regard dialectic as teachable and as a means to attain virtue. The significant aspect of the *Theaetetus* for our discussion comes from its portrayal of Socrates as a possessor of a *techné*, which is the dialectical practice. This implies that dialectic as a *techné* has the possibility of being taught. The salient aspect of the *Sophist* for the current discussion is the way in which it introduces dialectic as a source for the purification of the soul. That is to say, dialectic is presented as a means to becoming virtuous.

I will decipher Socrates' claim in the *Theaetetus* to possess a *techné* through a consideration of early and middle Platonic dialogues. In the *Theaetetus*, after Socrates mentions that he is the son of a woman whose profession is midwifery, he confesses that he has the same *techné* when he asks young Theaetetus "Have you

² This paper attempts only at introducing a particular approach in reading the Platonic dialogues which intends to display Plato's Socrates as a figure, who having learned how to practice the dialectical method, is the possessor of some kind of *techné*. With this aim, I focus on the aspects which connect the *Theaetetus*, *Sophist* and the *Parmenides* to one another together with a focus on what I found as relevant and significant in the rest of the dialogues for demonstrating the method of dialectic as a *techné* and teachable.

also been told that I practice the same art? (ἄρα καὶ ὅτι ἐπιτηδεύω τὴν αὐτὴν τέχνην ἀκίκοας;)”³ It is in the early dialogues where we find Socrates practicing the method of dialectic in his search for universal definitions. In some of the middle dialogues, namely the *Phaedrus*, *Protagoras*, and *Gorgias*, Socrates questions sophists about the kind of *techné* they claim to possess. In those dialogues Socrates also provides an elaborate description of the necessary features of a true dialogue, the practice of which is certainly presented as a *techné*. Upholding a rational account and a concern for truth are represented as the defining components of a *techné*. Socrates harshly criticizes the education provided by the sophists as being removed from the pursuit of truth. This education makes use of rhetoric, which is devoid of a rational account by which one surpasses a state of belief. For these reasons, Socrates refuses to call their practice *techné*.

In all these dialogues, Socrates attacks the sophists who, without possessing a *techné*, claim to be educators of the youth. Then, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates goes on to define his own way of engaging in intellectual conversation with the youth as *techné*. When this claim in the *Theaetetus* is connected with Plato’s portrayal of Socrates in the early dialogues and in the middle dialogues, this whole structure reveals how Plato delicately works towards presenting Socrates as possessing a *techné*, which appears to be composed of the knowledge of what the defining features of dialectic are and how it is practiced. However, every *techné* also has a product of its own. Then, what does dialectic offer to one who possesses and practices it?

³ Plato, *Theaetetus* 149a4 in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Cairns, Princeton University Press, 1961. From the beginning to the end of this thesis, all references to Plato’s dialogues belong to *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, but while I was working on the Platonic dialogues, I also consulted all the Plato sources mentioned in the bibliography.

It seems that the *Sophist* provides an answer to this, which can similarly be found in the other dialogues. It is the possibility of recognizing false beliefs and freeing oneself from holding onto them. This is called the purification of the soul, and is achieved through dialectic. I will take into account the *Sophist* with an aim to explicate this idea of dialectic as a purification of the soul. In the *Sophist*, the method of dialectic is also presented as one of the methods of education, and it is said to be superior to the old method of education, which is admonition. The depiction of dialectic as a method of education implies that it must be promising its subjects both moral and intellectual improvement. One of the most significant achievements of this method is its power to generate refutation. Refutation leads to moderation, as a result of which one becomes aware of the limits of one's knowledge.⁴ This awareness is presented as the fundamental aim of dialectic, which at the end enables the experience of transformation in the self. Moreover, the achievement of virtuous life is a collective achievement since the practice of dialectic necessitates the presence of the other. In a living dialogue, through a mutual care for truth and understanding, there begins a great opportunity for experiencing a change in one's beliefs, which leads to a change in actions, and thus to the transformation in one's self.

⁴ *Sophist* 230d1.

CHAPTER II: THE QUESTION OF *TECHNÉ*

The discussion on the question of *techné* has a prominent presence in the Platonic dialogues. It is no surprise that the appearance of this term is observed simultaneously with the appearance of the term “method.” It is in some of the earlier dialogues, like the *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis* and *Euthyphro*, where Plato’s Socrates is present with his use of the method of ‘question and answer’ as he engages in a dialogue with his interlocutors in order to figure out the definitions of moderation, courage, friendship and piety. In those dialogues, Socrates simply applies the method of inquiry, but he does not communicate anything about the method itself.⁵ In some of the later dialogues, like *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Phaedrus* and *Symposium*, Socrates begins to mention the necessary components of the method of inquiry as he is simultaneously carrying out the inquiry of the particular subject matters of the dialogues.

Gregory Vlastos states that both in the middle and late dialogues Plato’s Socrates repeatedly refers to the “method” (μέθοδος) and points out that Socrates is never observed using this word in the early dialogues. He also asserts that this word μέθοδος, which is often used in middle and late dialogues, is a new word created by Plato in his middle period.⁶ This is one of the recognizable changes in the dialogues: that there emerges a focus directed to defining the method of investigation. As I stated, the discussion of the notion of *techné* is closely linked to the discussion of the

⁵ This is also suggested by Gregory Vlastos in the beginning of his article “The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All.” Vlastos claims that in the early dialogues Socrates’ inquiries display a pattern of investigation, which is left unexplained. He does not include the *Lysis*, but I think as a dialogue of definition, it belongs to a group of dialogues in which the method is used but is not explained.

⁶ Gregory Vlastos, *Socratic Studies* (Cambridge; New York, NY, USA: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 1-2.

method of dialectic, and this method acquires its classification as a *techné* partly in connection with the emphasis put on what *techné* is and is not.

Through the criticism raised against the sophists and poets, the dialogues gradually make it possible to realize that Plato is aiming to formulate a certain definition for the notion of *techné*. One of the most important defining features of *techné* is that it relates to truth. The practices of both sophists and poets lack the element of truth and whatever they claim to teach remains outside the scope of *techné*. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates says that “the speech displayed by one who has gone chasing after beliefs, instead of knowing the truth, will be a comical sort of art, in fact no art at all.”⁷ This is a continuous theme, and it is stated in the *Gorgias* as well. Because, as it is discussed further in the following chapter, rhetoric deals with beliefs and leads to persuasion in the absence of truth, in the *Gorgias* Socrates asserts that he does not consider rhetoric as a *techné*.⁸ Plato’s understanding of art, *techné*, requires that if something is to be called *techné*, it has to engage with truth or work towards the truth of the thing with which it deals.

Another defining feature of *techné* has to do with utility. In book VII of the *Republic*, Socrates claims that “...the arts have for their object the opinions and desires of men or are wholly concerned with generation and composition or with the service and tendance of the things that grow and are put together...”⁹ In book I of the *Republic*, Socrates defines *techné* as “free from all harm and mixture of evil, and is right so long as each art is precisely and entirely that which it is.”¹⁰ Socrates claims that each art is differentiated from all the other arts because of its unique function

⁷ *Phaedrus* 262c1-3.

⁸ *Gorgias* 262b.

⁹ *Republic* 533b3-6.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 342b4-6.

and that they have to exercise their own function since the utility of the art is maintained as long as a particular kind of art is only concerned with its own object or subject matter.¹¹

Another defining feature of *techné* is that it has to have a definite subject matter. When the sophists and poets become subject to Socrates' questioning of their *techné*, one of the criticisms made against them is that although they claim to possess a certain kind of art, they are unable to specify a particular subject matter belonging to their art. The poets are criticized for speaking on almost everything without expertise, and as a result are denied as holders of *techné*. Rhetoric, the practice of the sophists, similarly is criticized for not having a definite scope. In the *Gorgias*, Socrates asks Gorgias what the scope of rhetoric is, but Gorgias is unable to give a proper answer except the claim that all the arts are "concerned with manual crafts and similar activities, whereas rhetoric deals with no such manual product but all its activity and all that it accomplishes is through the medium of words," which only provides an incomplete definition of rhetoric.¹² Later, Gorgias provides the further definition that rhetoric is a creator of persuasion,¹³ and at last, it is stated that it is concerned with right and wrong, and practiced at law courts and some other gatherings.¹⁴ However, since rightness and wrongness can be about more than one subject matter, rhetoric still appears to be without a scope of its own and this is one of the reasons why it is not considered as a *techné*. This is how, through the critical

¹¹ Ibid., 346a8.

¹² *Gorgias* 449d1 ("What is the scope of rhetoric?"), 449d11(What is the field of this science?), and at 450b8-11 (Incomplete definition of rhetoric).

¹³ Ibid., 453a1.

¹⁴ Ibid., 454b5-7.

analysis of sophistry and poetry, the Platonic dialogues eventually provide us with an account of *techné*.

One of the other defining features of *techné* is its rational element. Since one of the most important components of *techné* is truth, it is also required that *techné* is based on reason or a rational account. It is again through the criticism raised against the sophist and poets that the necessity of the element of reason is emphasized. The teachings of the poets do not contain the element of reason since the source of their teaching is inspiration. In the *Ion*, Plato's Socrates argues that both the poet and rhapsode lack *techné* since they claim to speak on many different *technai* not based on reason or rational account, but on inspiration. In the *Republic*, this is explained further that it is in fact because they lack *techné* that they are capable of speaking on many different subjects. However, what they claim to teach touches on those subject matters only superficially since they are not imitators of reality but of appearances. Thus, within the scope of superficiality, they remain without any *techné*.

Another defining aspect of *techné* is that it is teachable. Two of the defining features of *techné* are the elements that together stand for knowledge: truth and rational account. This definition is provided in the *Theaetetus*. First, one needs to have a belief. Second, the belief has to be true. Third, there has to be an account for a belief which is true. This is the last and most complete definition given for knowledge in the *Theaetetus*. True belief accompanied with an account (*logos*) is said to be knowledge, and any belief without an account is said to fall outside the range of knowledge.¹⁵ So *techné* has the elements of both truth and rational account as its components. Since they together stand for knowledge, *episteme*, then the nature of *techné* seems to allow the potentiality of being teachable to the others.

¹⁵ *Theaetetus* 201d1.

CHAPTER III: THE CRITIQUE OF THREE FORMS OF EDUCATION:
RHETORIC, POETRY AND WRITTEN SPEECH

Throughout Plato's corpus, there is an ongoing quarrel with sophists and poets. If certain Platonic concerns are kept in mind, it is not difficult to realize why there is such a deep discomfort regarding the practice of those particular groups of people. Plato's motivations and concerns are totally political, which recognize education as fundamentally formative of the human self, as well as of social life. Plato finds several problems in the existing educational practices, and he recognizes the transformation of those practices as necessary. This leads to the attempt to overcome the traditional form of education, poetry, as well as the contemporary and popular forms of education—sophistry, rhetoric, and oratory—by introducing an alternative educational method. How does Plato attempt to do this? First of all, as I stated, this attempt actualizes itself through the emphasis put on the notion of *techné*. Both poets and sophists are subject to Socrates' questioning regarding their *technai*. They are the educators of Greece, but do they hold a *techné*? That's the prominent question of several Platonic dialogues.

Criticizing the Sophists: *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*

Throughout the dialogues, Plato's struggle with the sophists, who are the educators of the young, promising and upper-class people in Ancient Greece, is particularly notable. Through a constant disapproval and criticism of the manner in which the sophists aim to contribute to the education of the youth, Plato in fact is highlighting a place to be filled and a task to be taken by the right kind of education. What Plato has in mind as the right education is the philosophical education that differs from any other education by the use of the dialectical method for pursuing the truth. But since at that time the definition had not been given yet for the philosopher and

philosophical education, the resemblance between the sophists and the philosopher appears to be very close. Thus, it becomes a rather difficult pursuit to demand that there is a need for novelty in education that is to be met by philosophical education.¹⁶

In such a setting, it is also no surprise that the philosopher can easily be mistaken for the sophist. In the *Apology*, Socrates, who was described as the true philosopher by Plato, was condemned partly for practicing sophistry and partly for introducing new gods. Here, Plato has Socrates claim that his first accusers blamed him for making the weak argument appear stronger,¹⁷ and this is something attributed to the sophists. Because Socrates was not a sophist, but in part got persecuted as a result of appearing like a sophist, it becomes one of the important tasks of the Platonic enterprise to display and detail the differences which detach philosophy from sophistry and demonstrate the ways in which they are opposite. Plato does this with a unique diligence which even makes use of keen metaphors for depicting the close resemblance between the sophist and the philosopher.

The *Protagoras* is the dialogue in which the necessity of knowing about the nature of education and the educator is captured quite powerfully by an appeal to the metaphor of light. In the beginning of the *Protagoras*, young Hippocrates, son of Apollodorus, desiring to obtain the wisdom of Protagoras, consults Socrates before he goes to see Protagoras. When Hippocrates arrives at Socrates' door, it is dawn, and Socrates invites Hippocrates to the courtyard to "walk around it to pass the time until it gets light."¹⁸ Here Plato, who artfully fills his dialogues, appeals to the

¹⁶ That is why Plato in the *Symposium* also provides a definition for the philosopher and philosophical activity. Pierre Hadot says that in this dialogue Plato gave new meaning to the word "philosopher" as well as to the word "philosophy" (Pierre Hadot, *What is Ancient Philosophy?*, p. 39). It is an educational activity which is introduced as an alternative method to other educational practices which fail to qualify as *technai* as result of lacking the element of truth in their practice.

¹⁷ *Apology* 18b7.

¹⁸ *Protagoras* 311a4.

metaphor of light. Since light is the metaphor for knowledge, the passage points to the necessity that they must have knowledge of who the sophists are and what one becomes after one receives their instruction.

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates describes knowledge as that which nourishes the soul.¹⁹ He also says that it is received straight into the soul, and, accordingly, one either benefits or is harmed.²⁰ But since knowledge by definition implies that it is grounded in truth and thus is good, it is not the case that knowledge can be a cause of harm. Here, it is important to note that in the Greek text we do not find the word ἐπιστήμη which corresponds to the English word ‘knowledge,’ and fulfills the Platonic sense of knowledge, but instead, here, the Greek word is μαθήματα which means “that which is learned, a lesson.” Plato is careful enough not to use the word episteme, and thus in interpreting this passage, it can be asserted if there is anything as a cause of harm, the source of it cannot be knowledge. Rather, it is wrongly thought to be knowledge. That is to say, harm can be caused only through beliefs if they are untested and false. The implication here is that it becomes important to know whether the education one is going to get is based on truth or on untested opinions. The teachings of the sophists do not include a motivation to find out what is true and right regarding a particular subject. As a result, the education offered by them, in connection with this passage in the *Protagoras*, is demoted through the distinction between the two different states of mind described in the *Gorgias*.

In the *Gorgias*, the state of “having learned” and “having believed” are distinguished from one another.²¹ The first state is reached as a result of having

¹⁹ Ibid., 313c9.

²⁰ Ibid., 314b1.

²¹ *Gorgias* 454c8-d3.

acquired knowledge, while the second state is reached as a result of having trusted some beliefs. According to this distinction, it turns out that learning is possible only if one is getting educated in truth since the condition for something to be knowledge is that it must be embodied in truth. That is to say, learning is possible only if whatever is being told or taught is in correspondence with truth. In the *Gorgias*, when Socrates is conversing with Gorgias, the definition of rhetoric is presented and its lack of having a connection with truth is pointed out. Gorgias describes it as some kind of persuasion concerned with right and wrong and exercised in law courts and some gatherings.²² Gorgias also claims that rhetoric is capable of offering the greatest blessing to mankind, which is freedom to dominate over the others in one's own country.²³ But for Plato, it is important to be clear about the nature of persuasion that is employed by rhetoric. Only then, can the freedom and benefits provided by the practice of rhetoric be said to be just and good.

Like the two states of mind, the two kinds of persuasion are differentiated in the *Gorgias*. Socrates claims that "both those who have learned and those who believe have been persuaded," but they are two different forms of persuasion. The first one produces knowledge, while the second one produces only belief.²⁴ Rhetoric is a kind of persuasion which produces belief. It is persuasive, but it is not instructive. Philosophical and sophistic educations are similar in that they both generate persuasion, but there is a slight and very important difference between the two. Although both can be persuasive about right and wrong, the problem with sophistic education is that it aims to produce persuasion without aspiring to reveal

²² Ibid., 454b5.

²³ Ibid., 452d4.

²⁴ Ibid., 454e1-e7.

what is truly right and wrong. Philosophical education differs fundamentally from sophistic education by applying the dialogical method which is about attaining truth by transcending beliefs in instructing those who are subjected to it. However, since both of them are concerned with the same subject matters and have the character of being persuasive in common, it becomes easier to mistake one for the other.

In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates asks Phaedrus whether misbelief occurs when the difference between two things is wide, or narrow.²⁵ Phaedrus' answer is that one is misled when the difference is narrow. The sophist and the philosopher have some very important and notable elements in common such as making use of speech and aiming at persuasion. Thus, although they differ fundamentally, their difference appears to be very narrow. That is why in the *Protagoras*, Plato chooses to picture Socrates questioning the identity of the sophist at dawn where the difference between night and day is so narrow that one might easily think that it is the beginning of the day while in reality it is the beginning of the night. By presenting the discussion on who the sophist is as taking place at dawn, Plato makes it possible for the reader to realize that the sophist and the philosopher may ostensibly be alike, but in reality they are on opposite poles. The sophist is the one who stands at the end of the day making the sun go down, while the philosopher is the one located on the threshold of the beginning of the day making the sun rise up. In the *Republic*, Plato introduces the image of the sun as a symbol for truth, knowledge and the good.²⁶ It makes truth and knowledge possible by the light it possesses and spreads around. The vision of the eye exercises its function when light is present.²⁷ Plato describes the realm of

²⁵ *Phaedrus* 261e8.

²⁶ *Republic* 6. 509a.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 6. 507d11-e3.

darkness as the realm of becoming where one's lack of wisdom results in shifting opinions.²⁸ That is to say, in the *Protagoras*, Plato aims at portraying the sophistic education as that which encloses the truth and leads one into the realm of *doxa*, while he wants to maintain that the true education enabled by the guidance of the philosopher facilitates a way of uncovering the truth and carries one into to the realm of *episteme*.

Thus, this metaphor points not only at the opposition between the sophist and the philosopher, but it also captures one of the most fundamental differences of the two. It is their motivational difference. While the philosopher is discomforted with the world of *doxa* and wants to attain truth, the sophist is at peace with that world and seeks for self-interest as well as instilling the ways to the others so that they achieve the same in that realm of opinions. That is why Plato chooses to discuss the question concerning the identity of the sophist at dawn. The conversation takes place under this image, which powerfully captures the importance of knowing whether education will open one's mind to free and true thinking or whether it will imprison the mind into the domain of dogmas and opinions. What prepares and carries one towards the free and true activity of thinking is the use of the dialogical method, which obtains its detailed definition in the Platonic dialogues.

Criticizing the Poets: *Ion*, *Republic* and *Symposium*

Plato's views about the poets and his critique of poetry are to be found in the *Ion*, the *Republic* and the *Symposium*. Plato's struggle with the poets, like his struggle with the sophists, is centered around the problems of truth and method. For Plato, poets do not have an acquired skill. They speak through inspiration and they are not aware that their claims may fail to be true. Yet, poetry exists as a widely used educational

²⁸ Ibid., 6. 508d7.

practice which constitutes a problem for Plato whose goal is to transcend the previous tradition and define a newer and better educational practice. Thus, the conflict with both the sophists and the poets in the Platonic dialogues has its basis in Plato's educational and political concerns. True education appears to be the profession of those who possess a *techné* and aim to teach what is true and good. Both the *Ion* and the *Republic* express and discuss the limitations of poetry as a form of education, but it is in the *Symposium* that the definition of philosophy and the philosopher is given and the philosophical practice is presented as surpassing the state of poets by employing the method of dialectic. Consequently, it is in the *Symposium* where there is not only the critique of poets but there is also a powerful turnover in the dialogue which propounds the method of dialectic as the right and necessary method for inquiring into the nature of a particular subject matter. In some of the other Platonic dialogues, the critique of sophistry and poetry is simultaneously introduced along with the presentation of the defining features of dialectic.²⁹

However, in the *Symposium*, first there are speeches of poets and then the speech of Socrates comes last, which with its dialectical form becomes capable of dominating and subordinating the speeches of the poets that fail to capture the complete truth about the subject matter, *eros*. Thus, it seems that in the *Symposium*, the critique of poetry reaches its climax and the method of dialectic is demonstrated as the right educational and investigational method for the uncovering of truth. But prior to discussing the limitation of poetry and the appearance of the dialectical

²⁹ *Ion, Republic, Protagoras, Gorgias, Phaedrus* and *Sophist* are the dialogues I have in mind here. In the *Ion*, Socrates does not speak directly about the dialectic. This is not surprising because in the early dialogues the method of dialectic is presented only in use, in Socrates' application of it while he converses with his interlocutors. Yet, although nothing is said directly about the dialectical method in the *Ion* and in the other early Platonic dialogues, the achievements of dialectic are implied when Socrates carries out the conversations in dialectical form and points out the contradictions in the claims of his interlocutors. However, as we proceed to engage with the other dialogues above, we also realize that Socrates begins to speak directly about this method he uses and provides an incredible amount of detailed information about the defining features and power of the dialectical method.

method in the *Symposium*, first let us present the criticism of poetry in the *Ion* and the *Republic*.

The *Ion* is particularly important as it is one of the earliest dialogues in which the question of *techné* and the problem of expertise are introduced. In the *Ion*, Socrates questions Ion, who has attended the contest between rhapsodes at the festival of Asclepius in Epidaurus and won the first prize. Before Socrates begins to direct his question to Ion, he ironically tells how envious he is of the rhapsodes and asserts his interest in knowing about Ion's talent. Socrates also provides a definition for the profession of a rhapsode with which Ion agrees. According to this definition, a rhapsode has to understand the poet's thoughts and interpret them to the listeners.³⁰ Charles Kahn argues that here Plato points out the role of poetry in general and Homer in particular in Greek education by "focusing attention on the exegesis of poetry and not simply on its performance."³¹ I also agree with Kahn's idea that for Plato, poetry is an object of criticism here and elsewhere and this criticism results from the moral and intellectual influence of poetry rather than from its artistic form.³² In the *Ion*, through the discussion with the rhapsode Ion, not only the art and practice of the rhapsode is criticized but also, and mostly, what is done through poetry: moral and intellectual inculcation.

Ion claims to be talented at speaking only about Homer,³³ and with this first claim Socrates begins his analysis which leads him to conclude that there is an art of poetry as a whole. That is to say, Ion's ability to speak about Homer does not come

³⁰ Ibid., 530b9-c5.

³¹ Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 105.

³² Ibid.

³³ *Ion* 531a3.

from *techné* and *episteme*.³⁴ If his ability to speak well concerning Homer were coming from *techné* and *episteme*, then Ion would have claimed to be able to speak about other poets as well since they address the same subject matters as Homer. Then Socrates offers an explanation for Ion's success in speaking about the poetry of Homer in terms of divine inspiration. Socrates says to Ion "...as I just now said, this gift you have of speaking well on Homer is not an art; it is a divine power impelling you like the power in the stone Euripides called the magnet..."³⁵ Socrates describes the act of divine inspiration by an appeal to this image of the magnet. The muse is like the magnet who first inspires the poets, and the chain is formed as the rhapsode shares the same enthusiasm with the poets and as they attract the audience by their oratorical performances. Because poets and rhapsodes are possessed in divine inspiration, Socrates maintains that they are not in their senses, and so they lack reason. When Socrates interrogates him concerning this issue, Ion accepts the fact that he is not in his senses when he recites poetry to the audience.³⁶ This non-cognitive explanation for the skills of the poet and rhapsode completely excludes any role played by reason, and thus, for Plato, any educational value is denied to the poet's thought.

However, Ion is not willing to accept that he owes his success to being possessed,³⁷ and Socrates proceeds to provide another argument which denies the possession of *techné* both to the poet and the rhapsode. Socrates challenges Ion for being ignorant about the matter he speaks of, and this challenge also applies to Homer and other poets. Homer has claims on the arts of several different people like

³⁴ Ibid., 532c5-10.

³⁵ Ibid., 533d1-3.

³⁶ Ibid., 535b1-d8.

³⁷ Ibid., 536d4-7.

charioteer, doctor, general, horseman, but it is impossible for him to be expert on all those different arts. There is a distinction specified between arts, that what is known by a particular art is only known by that art and not by any other art and Socrates gets Ion's agreement on this.³⁸ This leads Socrates to infer that "if one does not possess a given art, one will not be capable of rightly knowing what belongs to it in word or action,"³⁹ and Ion agrees with this claim as well as with what it implies. Socrates refers to the lines Ion recited about the craft of the charioteer,⁴⁰ and formulates the same question he asked previously⁴¹ in the following way: "Then, in the lines in which you recited, which will have the better knowledge whether Homer speaks aright or not, you or a charioteer?" and Ion, once again, claims that it is the charioteer.⁴² Socrates emphasizes that this is so because of the charioteer's art⁴³ and Ion is a rhapsode but not a charioteer.⁴⁴ By differentiating the art of charioteer from the art of rhapsode, Socrates points out that if the art of rhapsode is different from the charioteer's, then it is knowledge of different matters.⁴⁵ Socrates questions Ion about different passages of Homer which are about the art of physician,⁴⁶ fisherman⁴⁷ and diviner,⁴⁸ and Ion agrees that in each case only those who hold the relevant *techné* have the authority to speak over a particular subject matter.

³⁸ Ibid., 537c7-538a6.

³⁹ Ibid., 538a7-b1.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 537a8-b5.

⁴¹ Ibid., 537c1-6.

⁴² Ibid., 538b2-5.

⁴³ Ibid., 537c5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 538b6-8.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 538b9-14.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 538b15-c7.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 538c8-d7.

However, later Socrates asks Ion to indicate those passages from Homer which concern the art of rhapsode and is surprised to hear that Ion claims authority over all the passages which discuss lots of different arts.⁴⁹ Confronted by this logical contradiction, Ion claims that the cases like that of a charioteer, a doctor and a fisherman are some of the exceptional cases on which rhapsode is not the authority, but he goes on to claim that he is the one who would know best “the kind of thing...that a man would say, and a woman would say, and a slave and a free man, a subject and a ruler...”⁵⁰ This time Socrates questions him on specific situations regarding these people above, and apparently Ion is not capable of having authority over those situations in which the ruler of a ship, a doctor, a slave or a woman needs to act. Nonetheless, he insists on the art of generalship and claims to have a general’s *techné*. Socrates first responds with his well-known irony and in the following lines Ion gets subjected to the last examination of Socrates.

Socrates: When you know of military matters, do you know them because you are competent as a general, or as a rhapsode?

Ion: I cannot see a bit of a difference.

Socrates: What, no difference, you say? You mean to call the art of rhapsode and the art of general a single art, or two?

Ion: To me, there is a single art.

Socrates: And so, whoever is an able rhapsode is going to be an able general as well?

Ion: Unquestionably, Socrates.

Socrates: And then, whoever happens to be an able general is an able rhapsode too.

Ion: No, I do not think that holds.⁵¹

First of all, here Ion contradicts himself because earlier he agreed that there is a distinction between *technai* and what is known by one *techné* is not known by

⁴⁸ Ibid., 538d8-539d4.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 539d5-e5.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 540b4-6.

⁵¹ Ibid., 540e9-a9.

another. Secondly, he also falls into logical contradiction because if the art of rhapsode and the art of general are said to be a single art, then not only should the rhapsode be able to know what the general knows, but also the general should be capable of doing what a rhapsode does. Certainly, that is not the case and the dialogue shows that a rhapsode does not have a particular subject over which he is knowledgeable and can speak with an authority. This criticism is also directed towards the poets who are the composer of those lines which belong to several different arts. At the end, Socrates forces Ion to accept that he is possessed by a god to be able to speak only about Homer which means that he does not have any *techné* since being possessed excludes the element of reason and rational account, which are the defining features of that which is to be called *techné*. The poet, like the rhapsode, is possessed and thus is in lack of *techné*. Yet, despite their lack of a *techné*, they played such a tremendous role in Greek moral and intellectual education. What Plato seems to be bothered about is this undeserved effect of poets on Greek education without any systematic method and knowledge. It is through his discussion and emphasis put on the notion of *techné* that Plato provides an immense criticism for the traditional educational practices of the Greeks which demands the transformation of those obsolete and insufficient modes of teaching.

Books II, III and X of the *Republic* also deal with the poets and poetry in terms of educational concerns and the critique of Homer and Hesiod is a continuous theme of the dialogue. The *Republic* is a book about the ideal state, and since the right kind of education is conceived as the foundation of this prospective ideal state, it becomes the essential part of the discussion to reflect on what is defective and inadequate in the established traditional forms of Greek education. In the *Ion*, the poet and the rhapsode, the transmitter of the poet's thought to the public, are

criticized for lacking a specialty of their own and yet having a claim to speak on many different arts with such a deprivation of a *techné*. At the end of this dialogue, Socrates made Ion accept the fact that he is inspired and possessed which together with the rest of the dialogue demonstrated Ion's lack of *techné*. This dialogue only depicts poets and their followers as non-professionals whose lack of knowledge leave them with no authority on the subject they speak about, but the dialogue does not indicate anything which is to be done about this issue. It only addresses the issue. However, in the *Republic* there is not only a critique of poets and poetry, but poets appear as undesirable educators in the ideal state.⁵² They are rejected because of their role as educators of the Greeks.

In Book II of the *Republic*, Socrates defines the education of the ideal state. He accepts the method which was developed a long time ago and which consists of the education of the body with physical training and the education of the soul with music and poetry.⁵³ However, education in music and poetry is to begin earlier than education in physical training, but since under the former there is also education through stories, Socrates argues that they must censor most of the stories of the poets which are currently told because of constituting danger to the mind which is young, tender and in the process of growing.⁵⁴ Although some of the myths serve for the good, for the most part the stories of the poets are opposed to one of the fundamental principles of philosophy: consistency. This is one of the reasons why Plato wants to abolish poets from his ideal city. He thinks that stories of poets are not advantageous to people since they are not pious and consistent with one another.⁵⁵ Moreover, poets

⁵² *Republic* 383c2-5.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 376e2-5.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 376e6-377c5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 380c.

are also held responsible for inducing a tendency for evil deeds in young generations.⁵⁶ Plato cannot accept the possibility of Gods being evil and the way justice is presented. That is why, through the mouth of Socrates, Plato forbids the speeches of the poets and in the following lines he commands that if they are ever to speak, their stories must be supportive of Plato's picture of the good.

Because I presume we are going to say that so it is that both poets and writers of prose speak wrongly about men in matters of greatest moment, saying that there are many examples of men who, though unjust, are happy, and of just men who are wretched, and that there is profit in injustice if it be concealed, and that justice is the other man's good and your own loss, and I presume that we shall forbid them to say this sort of thing and command them to sing and fable the opposite.⁵⁷

Here and in some similar passages, Plato does appear to be dogmatic and totalitarian. However, we should not forget that the *Republic* speaks about the ideal state and what Plato says here might be valid only for the idea state, the establishment of which is difficult if not impossible.⁵⁸ The important point is that through this prospective image of the ideal state under discussion, Plato finds an opportunity to criticize the poets to the limit and introduce a number of reasons for depicting them as insufficient teachers and thus denying them any role in education.⁵⁹ Poets are said to be imitators, and by their act of imitating they are faced with the danger of falsehood. They only produce copies of *areté* which elude the truth, and such people

⁵⁶ Ibid., 391e10.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 392a12-b7.

⁵⁸ Yet, it should not be thought that Plato offers an utopia because after all his discussion of ideal state provides many ways in our own societies can be improved as well.

⁵⁹ Plato gets harshly criticized for censoring the works of poetry and expelling the poets from his ideal state. However, it is important to realize that for that time poetry meant something different than what it means today. To blame Plato for banning poetry would be to fall into anachronism. We need to understand the motivation behind this idea. The poetry of Homer and Hesiod was very much influential as a form of education in Ancient Greece. I think Plato's primary aim is to alter this idea of poetry as the essential mode of education since he has a new and better conception of education to offer: education in dialectic and truth.

cannot be the educator of mankind.⁶⁰ As imitators, their practices preclude them from having a claim to truth as well as from having a *techné* of their own.

The poet is likened to the painter in terms of their imitative products. In Book II, Socrates blames Homer and Hesiod for having composed false stories and images of the heroes and gods “like a painter whose portraits bear no resemblance to his models.”⁶¹ And in Book X, where the topic of poetry is reintroduced, the discussion begins by mentioning that it was agreed not to include most of the poetry because of its imitative nature, and Plato’s Socrates proceeds to describe poets as imitators in detail through their resemblance to the painter. There is first the form of a thing, a form of a couch which exists in nature and is created as one of a kind by god.⁶² Then, there is also a particular kind of couch which is created by a carpenter.⁶³ Lastly, there is an imitation of a couch belonging to the painter.⁶⁴ The god is called the true and natural creator, and similarly a carpenter is a creator and maker of a particular thing, but a painter is said to be only an imitator of those particular things which are created by a craftsman.⁶⁵ In the same degree, the composers of poetry and tragedy, like the painter, are imitators of particulars and three times removed from truth since they are not imitators of the thing itself in nature but of the things which are human creations.⁶⁶ That is to say, they are imitators of the appearances. Those observations regarding the distinction between creative and imitative work are in fact very

⁶⁰ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: the Ideals of Greek Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1943), p.362.

⁶¹ *Republic* 377e1-3.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 597b7, 597c1-d3.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 597a1-4.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 597b12.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 597d5-e2.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 597e6-9.

relevant to Plato's discussion and emphasis on the notion of *techné*. The notion implies and demands the presence of the element of truth. Poetic works, with their threefold removal from truth, do not even have a hold over opinions which takes away from them the possibility of being products of a *techné*. On the other hand, the poets thrice removal from truth is also given as the reason for the poet's ability to speak about many different arts in the following passage.

...the mimetic art is far removed from truth, and this, it seems, is the reason why it can produce everything, because it touches or lays hold of only small part of the object and that a phantom, as, for example, a painter, we say, will paint us a cobbler, a carpenter, and other craftsmen, though he himself has no expertness in any of these arts, but nevertheless if he were a good painter, by exhibiting at a distance his picture of a carpenter he would deceive children and foolish men, and make them believe it to be a real carpenter.⁶⁷

The criticism raised against the mimetic art also applies to the tragedies and Homer, since there is a deep disturbance about the widely held belief that "these poets know all the arts and all things human pertaining to virtue and vice, and all things divine."⁶⁸ Plato's Socrates claims that the argument of those who think of poets as wise depends on the fact that the poets have produced many lines about various subjects and that this would not have been possible if they were not possessors of knowledge.⁶⁹ Socrates tells us that these people might be mistaken in thinking this way because they do not realize that their works are thrice removed from reality and that it is easy to produce without knowledge of the truth.⁷⁰ Just as the painter is able to deceive children and foolish men, the poet is able to deceive those who are ignorant. Socrates describes this in the following passage.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 598b7-c3.

⁶⁸ Ibid., 598e1.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 598e3.

⁷⁰ Ibid., 598e4-599a3.

...the poet himself, knowing nothing but how to imitate, lays on with words and phrases the colors of the several arts in such fashion that others equally ignorant, who see things only through words, will deem his words most excellent, whether he speaks in rhythm, meter, and harmony about cobbling or generalship or anything whatever.⁷¹

Here Socrates explains why poets appear to be so wise. They address ignorant people and end up appearing wise while they do not possess any worthwhile knowledge.

The Platonic enterprise is in a way an attempt to provide a critique of previous traditions and to lead to some kind of revolutionary change in education through emphasis put on the notions of knowledge, expertise, practice and *techné*. While any product of a particular *techné* is actualized by an expert, there is a question to be asked about poetry which has a claim on education. How can a poet claim to educate while he does not hold a *techné*?

In the *Republic* the critique of poetry appears to be much broader, yet the book also contains many other claims relating to Socrates' critical assessment and ridicule of poetry as a *techné* in the *Ion* and all the claims made about poetry do get tied up around this issue of *techné*. In Book II, when the discussion begins to deal with the art of war, the demand of any *techné* in general gets mentioned. Socrates reminds Glaucon of their earlier agreement that "it is impossible for one man to do the work of many arts well."⁷² Socrates claims that a cobbler is allowed to be only a cobbler so that regarding his art he can perform the best work he can. There is no possibility that one who is a cobbler can at the same time be a good soldier. Here the main subject matter of the conversation mostly appears to be about the art of war, but it does touch upon and include some very important notions necessitated for the possibility of possessing a *techné*. Socrates' idea is that one cannot become a skilled

⁷¹ Ibid., 601a4-b1.

⁷² Ibid., 374a.

workman (*demiourgon*) or practiced in things (*atleten*) just by picking up a certain tool belonging to a specific *techné* unless the necessary knowledge is acquired along with sufficient practice.⁷³ Thus knowledge and relevant practice are said to be essential components for the possession of a *techné*. Plato seems to recognize the practice of education as that which bears the foremost importance both for the individual and the society, and this is why the poets and sophists, who engage in educational practices, are questioned on their *technai*. As we have seen in the *Ion*, the poet and rhapsode do not have any noteworthy knowledge and practice in the arts they speak about, yet they dare to claim to be knowledgeable on various subject matters. For Plato any role as educator should be denied to such people who miss something very significant about the nature of knowledge, that it does not permit expertise in many different fields.

In Book III of the *Republic*, Plato's Socrates argues that it is impossible to practice many different things and do well in all of them and that if one attempts to do so one will end up having no distinction in all.⁷⁴ But with the poets, even that is not the case. They do not even attempt to practice many different things. They only produce speeches on a variety of things by having neither practice nor any knowledge. For Plato, it is the power of inspiration that enables them to speak of various matters and as a product of inspiration those speeches do not count as sources for educational purposes. Plato, through Socrates introduces an alternative educational method which promises the possibility of attaining knowledge. It is the method of dialectic which is introduced as a tool that aims at leaving the realm of appearances and achieving the knowledge of the forms.

⁷³ Ibid., 374d3-6.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 384e3-5.

[W]hen anyone by dialectic attempts through discourse of reason and apart from all perceptions of sense to find his way to the very essence of each thing and does not desist till he apprehends by thought itself the nature of the good in itself, he arrives at the limit of the intelligible...⁷⁵

For Plato, dialectic seems to be the method which is to reveal what is truly good. In the *Republic*, dialectic is stated as the only method which could achieve such knowledge. Socrates claims that “no one will maintain in dispute against us, that there is any other way of inquiry that attempts systematically and in all cases to determine what each thing really is.”⁷⁶ This is expressed in detail in the *Symposium*, where Socrates presents the highest love as the love of knowledge of the forms. How is the possibility of such highest knowledge achieved? It is achieved through a dialogical practice. This idea is powerfully emphasized in the *Symposium*. In the *Ion*, Plato puts a great deal of emphasis on the notion of *techné*, and the *Republic* undertakes a broader discussion of the limitations of poetry as a *techné* and a form of education. But it is in the *Symposium* where the critique of poetry reaches its climax and the method of dialectic is shown as that which leads to transcendence in the understanding of one who decides to engage in a true dialogue.

If the *Symposium* is to be analyzed briefly, it can be seen in three main parts. In the first part, the speeches of poets are taking place. These speeches are eulogies on love which Socrates claims to be reminders of rhetorical speeches produced by sophists such as Gorgias.⁷⁷ In the first part of the *Symposium*, there are those five different eulogies on love and then comes the speech of Socrates in the second part. After listening to those speeches, Socrates begins his criticism by irony. First, he says that there is not much left to him to say after the wonderful speech given by

⁷⁵ Ibid., 532a8-b3.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 533b1-3.

⁷⁷ *Symposium* 198c.

Agathon, but then continues by stating how foolish he was to take part in speeches of eulogies and then makes those eulogies objects of his criticism since the truth is “the last thing the successful eulogist cares about.”⁷⁸ Socrates claims to know nothing about how to produce an eulogy. He claims that in his mind he thought that one begins “by stating the facts about the matter in hand, and then proceed to pick out the most attractive points and display them to the best advantage.”⁷⁹ This passage describes how a dialectical speech begins. The first step is that it begins by stating the facts. This passage, where Socrates begins to comment on the speeches of eulogies, is also quite significant since it presents Socrates as someone who is knowledgeable.⁸⁰

[W]hat we undertook was to flatter, rather than to praise, the god of love, and that’s why you’re all prepared to say the first thing about him that comes into your heads, and to claim that he either is, or is the cause of, everything that is loveliest and best. And of course the uninitiated are impressed by the beauty and grandeur of your encomiums; yet those who know will not be taken in so easily.⁸¹

Here, Socrates describes himself. He is the one who is not taken in so easily by those eulogies and insists that he could tell the truth about love but only if the audience is interested and they let him speak in his own way and defines himself as “a speaker who only cares whether his matter is correct.”⁸² Socrates asks for permission to direct a couple of question to Agathon and after this point the dialogue continues in a

⁷⁸ Ibid., 198d8.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 198d4-7. Right after this, Socrates also says that he flattered himself that his speech would be a great success since he thought that he knew the facts. Socrates is bold here, and this important claim can be taken as a support for arguing that Socrates, in fact, possesses a vast amount of knowledge.

⁸⁰ Despite the fact that Socrates claims to have no worthwhile knowledge, in many different places of the dialogues he is captured as someone who is essentially knowledgeable, and with this aspect Platonic dialogues are supportive of the main thesis of this paper that Plato depicts dialectic as *techné* through the Socratic character who, as knowledgeable man, genuinely knows also what the defining features of dialectic are. I will talk on this later where I will also point out the different passages in different dialogues where Socrates states several important components of true dialectical practice.

⁸¹ Ibid., 198e2-199a1.

⁸² Ibid., 199a6-b6.

dialectical form. Socrates proceeds to inquire into the truth about love together with Agathon. Here, we need to go back to the beginning of the dialogue and understand why Socrates chooses to question Agathon instead of another speaker. In the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates joins the feast a little later after he stands alone thinking some thought, and Agathon wants Socrates to sit next to him so that he can share this great thought that Socrates just mastered outside. Then, Socrates' response is that wisdom is not such a thing that "one could share by sitting next to someone."⁸³ It is interesting that later in the dialogue, Socrates chooses to converse with Agathon with an aim to inquire into the true nature of love. It is as if Plato is trying to convey through Socrates the idea that neither by sitting next to someone knowledgeable nor by listening to the eulogies is it possible to attain knowledge, but only by taking an active part in dialectic. Thus, by making Agathon take a part in dialectical experience, Socrates gives him a chance to obtain what he wanted.

When the *Symposium* is considered together with these important details, the dialogue appears to reach the final point in criticizing the poets and the speeches which lack truth as a motivational component in one way, and in another way it also appears as a dialogue praising Socrates and his method of dialectic. This second idea gains more support from the third part of the dialogue where Alcibiades enters and begins to offer his eulogy of Socrates. It is in a way to say that there is no point in producing eulogies about such important subject matter like love, but if there is anything which truly deserves an eulogy, it is only the one who practices dialectic with an aim to attain truth. That is Socrates.

⁸³ Ibid., 175d3.

Criticizing Written Speech: *Phaedrus* and the *Seventh Letter*

The opening part of the *Phaedrus* quite powerfully captures the way dialectical practice works. The dialogue begins with Socrates running into Phaedrus who has just been engaged in a discussion with Lysias on love and on the differences between the lover and the non-lover. Phaedrus has a copy of the speech of Lysias which Socrates wants to hear. Before Phaedrus begins to tell what he heard from Lysias, they look for a nice spot to sit. Phaedrus shows a plane tree in the distance and suggests that they go there and sit under that tree where there is some shade and breeze. As they head towards that spot, Phaedrus asks Socrates “Isn’t it somewhere about here that they say Boreas seized Orithyia from the river?” and he also wants to know whether Socrates believes that story to be true.⁸⁴ Socrates tells that he accepts the current beliefs about such stories, but prefers to busy himself with what he thinks is the most important concern for him before he inquires into extraneous matters. That most important concern is to look into oneself and discover the nature of one’s being. In the meanwhile they realize that they arrived where they headed for. So, this opening part of the *Phaedrus* seems to intend implicitly at the power of having a dialogue. As one engages in a dialogue, one has the chance of arriving at where one wants to be. When Socrates asks, “By the way, isn’t this tree we were making for?”⁸⁵ we get a sense of what it is like to arrive at truth. The attainment of truth is shown as something which comes unexpectedly as one enters into and remains in a dialogue with the other. It is like hitting upon truth while remaining on the way.

For Plato’s Socrates the acquisition of knowledge is not something that we can achieve on our own, but it is something that is achieved through a dialogue with

⁸⁴ *Phaedrus* 229a7-c5.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 230b.

others. When Phaedrus takes Socrates to outside the city walls to read the speech of Lysias, Phaedrus notes the fact that Socrates never leaves the city. Socrates expresses his love of learning and claims that trees and open country will not teach him anything, while people in the town do.⁸⁶ Socrates listens to the speech provided by Phaedrus, but when Phaedrus finishes reading the speech Socrates describes it as a piece of rhetoric which tells the same thing just with different words,⁸⁷ and an important part of the this dialogue is devoted to a critique of written works.

In the *Republic*, Plato likened the poets to the painters and poetry to the paintings. Both poetry and painting are thrice removed from reality. This was one of the reasons for rejecting poetry as a form of education. Similarly, in the *Phaedrus* writing is defined as analogous to painting and the limitations of it are uttered through this analogy.

The painter's products stand before us as though they were alive, but if you question them, they maintain a most majestic silence. It is the same with written words; they seem to talk to you as though they were intelligent, but if you ask them anything about what they say, from a desire to be instructed, they go on telling you just the same thing forever.⁸⁸

Thus, writing is seen as something which has a limited force when it comes to be instructive. Socrates claims that written words cannot do more than reminding "one who knows that which the writing is concerned with"⁸⁹ which means that they do not have any good for one who is ignorant about the subject matter they discuss. Then there is potential danger in written works which is said to be overcome only by a living dialogue. Socrates claims that once something is written down, it drifts around and gets into the hands of those who understand it as well as of those who does not,

⁸⁶ Ibid., 230d4-6.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 234e4-235a8.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 275d5-10.

⁸⁹ Ibid., 275d1.

and when such texts are abused they always need their author for their right meaning to be set since they are unable to defend themselves.⁹⁰ For Socrates the right kind of speech is a living dialogue which “goes together with knowledge, and is written in the soul of the learner...”⁹¹ The idea seems to be that it is in a living dialogue that true knowledge is achieved. Socrates explicitly tells that wisdom is not something which could be transferred to others by means of writing.

It is no true wisdom that you offer your disciples, but only its semblance, for by telling them of many things without teaching them you will make them seem to know much, while for the most part they know nothing...⁹²

For Plato’s Socrates it seems that wisdom is something that we achieve on our own with our own enduring effort. It is something that requires one to do one’s own thinking, and this is achieved through the method of dialectic.⁹³ After Socrates reminds Phaedrus of the speeches they carried out on love and of the procedures they followed, he points out what power is given to those who practice dialectic.

I am myself a lover of these divisions and collections, that I may gain the power to speak and to think, and whenever I deem another man able to discern an objective unity and plurality, I follow ‘in his footsteps where he leadeth as a god.’ ...it is those that have this ability whom for the present I call dialecticians.⁹⁴

There is certainly so much trust put in the method of dialectic and writing is depicted to be as inferior to dialectic as other forms of educations such as oratory and poetry. Yet, it is interesting to find Plato in the *Seventh Letter*, which is considered as his autobiographical work, to claim that it is not possible to speak with a claim to

⁹⁰ Ibid., 275e1-6.

⁹¹ Ibid., 276a7.

⁹² Ibid., 275a7-b1.

⁹³ As I have just stated at the end of the previous section, this idea is very nicely expressed in the *Symposium* that in order to acquire knowledge and wisdom one needs to enter into a dialectical practice and maintain an enduring effort required by that dialectical activity.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 266b4-10.

knowledge and that if it ever were possible, it would have been him to do it best.⁹⁵ On the one hand, we have Plato's harsh critique of writing and on the other hand here stand his written works in front of us. What is more, in this letter Plato also tells us that he has composed no work with a claim to knowledge.⁹⁶ Then, what can be said about the Platonic dialogues? Are not they the written works of Plato? They are, but we can hardly say that they are written with a claim to knowledge. There are certain things about which Plato seems to convey certain opinions as right, yet most of the time we do not feel that there is complete commitment to the ideas discussed in the dialogues. The goal of the author seems to be the presentation of the form of a living speech as much as it is possible in written form, while the objective of this goal seems to be that the one who reads the dialogues goes on to imitate the form with an attempt to attain true knowledge. It is possible to object to this idea by saying that there are other works of Plato such as *Timaeus*, which are not written in a dialogues form. That is a remarkable work of Plato with many interesting cosmological claims, but this work is not written with a claim to knowledge since in the beginning of the dialogue Plato warns the reader that this work offers only a likely story.

⁹⁵ *Seventh Letter* 341b9-c7.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 341c5.

CHAPTER IV: DEPICTION OF DIALECTIC AS A *TECHNÉ* AND AS A WAY OF ACHIEVING A VIRTUOUS LIFE

The *Parmenides*: Parmenides Educating Young Socrates in the Practice of Dialectic

The teachability of virtue is one of the most discussed topics in the Platonic dialogues, and it appears as an unsettled question. At the end of the *Protagoras*, the discussion carried out by Socrates and Protagoras leads them to accept virtue as teachable since it is shown to be knowledge, while the *Meno* ends with the opposite claim that virtue is acquired by divine dispensation. Although these dialogues seem to end with opposite assertions, the concluding lines have something in common which is important and germane to our discussion; the ultimate attitude Socrates develops right before the conversation comes to an end. Before examining whether virtue is teachable or not, the inquiry should be about virtue itself and its essential nature.⁹⁷ Socrates directs his interlocutors towards the discovery of the universal definition of virtue which will be uncovered through further investigation, and through an engagement in a dialectical practice.⁹⁸ The advice Socrates gives to his interlocutors seems to be the instruction he was given by Parmenides.

The *Parmenides*, the dialogue where Socrates meets Parmenides in a fictional setting, will be very important for the succeeding sections. It is necessary to keep in mind what Plato presents in this dialogue concerning education in dialectic. The readings of the *Parmenides* usually concentrate on the metaphysical subject matter of the dialogue. However, this dialogue is much richer and my reading of

⁹⁷ *Protagoras* 361c3, *Meno* 100b3.

⁹⁸ Socrates' attitude will be understood better if we take into account what he has been taught by Parmenides. When the inquiry is into the forms, he is advised to engage in a search which is extensive and continuous, so it is no surprise that he invites his interlocutors to pursue further investigation since a definitional search is one of the hardest.

Parmenides will point out two related aspects of the dialogue. Firstly, the dialogue is indeed about the forms. Secondly, I shall focus primarily on a second important aspect in this dialogue: Socrates' depiction as a young boy who is not experienced in the art of dialectic. Leo Strauss describes this depiction as a rare occurrence in the dialogues⁹⁹, and I think this rare occurrence deserves special attention. Strauss also points out that the *Parmenides* is one of the three dialogues which belong to the group of narrated dialogues that are not narrated by Socrates. The other two dialogues are the *Phaedo* and the *Symposium*.¹⁰⁰ In the *Phaedo*, Socrates appears speaking about the extraordinary passion he had in his early years for the study of natural science.¹⁰¹ In the *Symposium*, Plato depicts Socrates as getting educated about *eros* by a wise woman, Diotima, through the method of dialectic.¹⁰² When we come to the *Parmenides*, Socrates again is in the role of a pupil and is getting educated by Parmenides. But this time he is taught about the art of dialectic itself.

In the *Parmenides*, the dialogue begins from the point when Zeno just finishes reading a philosophical treatise. Socrates begins by criticizing the theory presented because it asserts that there is no plurality. The narrator says that

⁹⁹ Leo Strauss, *On Plato's Symposium* (Chicago; London: The University of Chicago Press, 2001), p. 186.

¹⁰⁰ The description Socrates gives of himself in the *Phaedo* and the depiction of his young attitude in the *Symposium* fit with Plato's portrayal of him in the *Parmenides*. All the accounts tell us of Socrates' highly enthusiastic character for philosophical inquiry. The *Symposium* and the *Phaedo* also include the mature image of Socrates who we see as having undergone a transformation.

¹⁰¹ *Phaedo* 96a5.

¹⁰² In this dialogue, Plato has Socrates change the rhythm of the dialogue through his attempt at performing his speech in a dialogue form. Socrates explicitly says that he received lessons from Diotima and that he was taught the philosophy of *eros* (*Symp.* 201d1-6). He also says that he will present what he learned from Diotima by her own method of inquiry which is by question and answer (*Symp.* 201e2). The significance and magnificence of this part of the dialogue becomes intensified when we realize that Socrates is conversing with Agathon in a dialogue form in which Socrates himself was educated about *eros* by Diotima. What once Diotima did to him is now what Socrates does to Agathon, and in the dialogue Socrates' speech is presented as capturing the truth of the subject matter. Plato presents Socrates' speech as surpassing all the previous speeches because of its dialogue form.

Parmenides and Zeno listened to what Socrates had to say very attentively and with admiration. Here Socrates' desire for philosophical discussion, which is fundamental for education in dialectic, is stressed. When questioned by Parmenides, Socrates asserts that there exist forms of things like rightness, beauty and goodness.¹⁰³ He admits his confusion as to whether there are also forms of human being, fire or water, but thinks that to suppose that undignified objects like hair, mud or dirt have a form would be absurd. Then he describes how he avoids thinking of them as a result of his fear of ending up in nonsense and how he keeps the focus of his thinking on the things which have forms. Parmenides tells him that this attitude of his is due to his being very young and states that "...philosophy has not yet taken hold of you so firmly as I believe it will someday."¹⁰⁴ Parmenides and Socrates proceed to a conversation concerning the perplexing difficulties raised by the forms, and at the end, Parmenides points out two possible responses to the difficulties. One response is to question their existence and to assert that they do not exist. A second response is to assert that even if they do exist, they must be unknowable by human beings.¹⁰⁵ These responses taken towards the forms lead to a point where there is nothing on

¹⁰³ *Parmenides* 130b9.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 130e1.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 135a4-c2. Here Parmenides also claims that "only a man of exceptional gifts will be able to see that a form, or essence by itself, does exist in each case, and it will require someone still more remarkable to discover it and to instruct another who has thoroughly examined all these difficulties." Socrates agrees with what Parmenides says. This is one of the most difficult passages and it needs to be interpreted carefully. The word 'see' is used with a meaning to understand. The Greek word for that is *μαθεῖν*, which means "to understand, to learn, to come to know." For the moment, I shall only ask whether Plato depicts Parmenides as that exceptionally gifted man who, whoever he was in real life, took part in instructing Socrates, for in the following lines Parmenides begins to inform Socrates about the severe training he needs to undertake if he is to engage in philosophy. We could also ask whether this gifted man is Socrates himself, who was influential in shaping the ideas of Plato, so Plato now depicts the result of this influence in a fictional way. Since in the *Parmenides* the philosophical inquiry into the knowledge of forms is through the method of dialectic, Plato seems to express his belief in the possibility of instruction through a dialogical exchange of ideas.

which thoughts can be fixed, and thus the significance of all discourse is destroyed.¹⁰⁶ In either case, the possibility of engaging in further inquiry disappears.

When Parmenides asks what Socrates will do about philosophy in view of those two consequences, Socrates says “I can see no way out at the present moment”¹⁰⁷ and thus expresses his state of *aporia*. Parmenides tells him that the reason Socrates feels this way is because he attempts to define forms like ‘beautiful,’ ‘just,’ and ‘good’ before he completes a preliminary training. Parmenides praises Socrates’ noble passion for philosophical inquiry, but advises him to submit himself to a severe training in what many call idle talk if he wants to attain the truth.¹⁰⁸ When Socrates asks which form this exercise should take, Parmenides says that it should be in the form Zeno used in the treatise that Socrates just heard. However, having realized that Socrates asked Zeno to extend the survey to things that are especially apprehended by means of reasoning and might be considered as forms, Parmenides instructs Socrates that if he wants to be thoroughly exercised, he needs to analyze two hypotheses. First, a hypothesis that ‘a thing is’ needs be considered with its consequences, and then the hypothesis that ‘a thing is not.’¹⁰⁹ Socrates claims to have no understanding of this method of inquiry, and wants Parmenides to illustrate the method. In order to illustrate the method to Socrates, Parmenides chooses to carry the discussion to Aristotle, who is the youngest among them. Throughout that second part of the dialogue, many difficult arguments are developed and several *aporiai* are reached at the end, but each time they begin the discussion all over again.

¹⁰⁶ *Parmenides* 135b5-c4. This in fact is Gorgias’ argument which aims at refuting Parmenides’ thesis on Being. For Gorgias, Being does not exist. Even if it exists, it will be unknown by a human being, and even if it can be known, it will be incommunicable to the other.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 135c9.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 135c10-d7.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 135e9-136a3.

On the one hand, Parmenides illustrates the application of the method; on the other hand, he shows the importance of maintaining a desire to begin the discussion all over again with a hypothesis. Thus, while the subject matter of the dialogue is thought to be about things such as Being, Sameness, Difference, and Unity, at the same time the dialogue is about the application of philosophical method to a philosophical investigation and the significance of a desire to maintain such a philosophical inquiry.

I consider the way Socrates is portrayed in the *Parmenides* to be as extremely important. Since Plato makes Socrates refer to his meeting with Parmenides both in the *Theaetetus* and in the *Sophist*, I think what he has in mind is that the reader pays attention to what is illustrated in the *Parmenides* in relation to other dialogues.¹¹⁰ I consider the depiction of Socrates as a young boy, with an admirable desire for intellectual discussion, getting educated in the art of dialectic, as having meaning in such a framework, which puts emphasis on the method of inquiry and the necessary desire for maintaining the search in the *Parmenides* that goes on in the other Platonic dialogues as well.

There is also another aspect of the *Parmenides* which is in line with the idea that the method of dialectic is both a *techné* and a way of acquiring virtue. The dialogue is about the forms, and when Parmenides specifies two different attitudes towards the existence of the forms, his suggestion seems to be that overcoming them

¹¹⁰ In the *Sophist*, when Socrates mentions his meeting with Parmenides, he says that Parmenides in his presence was able to develop magnificent arguments by using the method of asking questions (*Soph.* 217c3). In the *Theaetetus*, Socrates says that he met with Parmenides and describes how he was impressed with the noble depth in Parmenides' speaking (*Theaet.* 183e7). Both of these references to Socrates' meeting with Parmenides include the additional information that when this meeting took place Socrates was quite young and Parmenides quite elderly. These references are completely in parallel with the setting of the *Parmenides*. In view of the overall emphasis on *techné* and the necessary components of the dialectical method, I would say that we have a considerable amount of reason to think that Plato would not have filled in these reference passages into the *Theaetetus* and the *Sophist* except for a reason.

is necessary because they destroy the power of dialectic (διαλέγεσθαι) entirely.¹¹¹ In the *Parmenides* the suggested ideas seem to be that the existence of the forms has to be assumed for human thought to be fixed and for any philosophical inquiry to have a direction. It makes sense for Plato to portray Socrates in the *Parmenides* as a pupil getting educated in using the method of dialectic where this method is demonstrated as especially suitable for inquiring into the forms. Is not that also what Plato's Socrates does in the other dialogues? Plato's Socrates makes use of dialectical method in the dialogues that inquire into the definitions of virtue, piety, courage, love, moderation and so on. He also directs us towards further inquiry at the end of some dialogues as a result of being dissatisfied with what is found out.¹¹² The inquiry into the universal definitions of things, as Socrates says in the *Parmenides*,¹¹³ is not an easy task, and if any gain is to be attained, it seems that it will only be achieved as a result of continuous engagement in the dialectical practice.

The *Theaetetus*: Socrates' Claim to Possess a *Techné*

Socrates, who is known to disclaim any possession of worthwhile wisdom, does seem to possess a considerable amount of information about what makes any dialogue a true dialogue. He also appears to have very good reasons for refusing to accept the practice of the sophists and of the poets as a *techné*. By contrast, it is quite

¹¹¹ *Parmenides* 135a6, 135c4.

¹¹² Before, I said that both at the end of the *Meno* and the *Protagoras* Plato's Socrates concludes the dialogue by directing his interlocutors and readers towards further investigation concerning the subject matter they just discussed. Socrates requires that before they decide whether virtue is teachable or not, they must inquire into what virtue itself is. Because of the emphasis put on inquiry, it seems that for Plato as one engages in an inquiry, one necessarily becomes subject to a transformation in one's self.

¹¹³ "There would be no end to such an undertaking, Parmenides, and I don't altogether understand (ἀμήχανόν γ' ἔφη, λέγεις, ὦ Παρμενίδη, πραγματείαν, καὶ οὐ σφόδρα μανθάνω, 136c4)." These are the exact words of Plato's Socrates. When Parmenides explains the required process of this method of inquiry, Socrates' feeling is that the practice of this method is a very diligent work (πραγματείαν) which is kind of despairing (ἀμήχανόν). It requires that one retains a desire to continue searching, and Socrates seems to have gained his lesson as we see him in the other Platonic dialogues with his eagerness to engage in searching through the use of the dialectical method.

interesting to find Socrates in the *Theaetetus* claim that he possesses a *techné*.¹¹⁴ He defines the highest point of this *techné* as “the power to prove by every test whether the offspring of a young man’s thought is a false phantom or instinct with life and truth.”¹¹⁵ Accordingly, he also says that he can bring nothing into life because there is no wisdom in him.¹¹⁶ Socrates is right to claim that he lacks wisdom because what is deduced from the Platonic dialogues is that wisdom is something that comes about continuously through the practice of dialogue which is experienced by two interlocutors, but it is not something that is attained in a complete sense.¹¹⁷

With the little wisdom he has, Socrates does appear to know genuinely about the practice of dialectic. That is to say, Socrates knows the kind of questions he needs to raise so that the conversation will be directed to uncovering the truth of the matter at hand. Otherwise, he would not be able to test whether the thoughts of his interlocutors have anything to do with truth. Socrates refers to the power of his *techné* when he describes two groups of people. The first group of people contains those who remain in the company of Socrates, and as they engage in continuous discussion they are favored by surprising progress.¹¹⁸ Those who belong to the second group fail to recognize the assistance Socrates provides. Thinking that all they achieved resulted from their own efforts, they leave the company of Socrates too early and suffer miscarriage of their thoughts by falling into bad company.¹¹⁹ We

¹¹⁴ *Theaetetus* 149a4.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 150c1.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 150c5.

¹¹⁷ That is why in the *Symposium* the philosopher is depicted as someone who is between ignorance and wisdom. He is not ignorant for he knows that he does not know, but he is not wise as he is only getting wiser and wiser but is failing to attain complete wisdom.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 150d3.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 150d11-e6

know from the *Parmenides* that acquiring mastery in the art of dialectic is a task that requires a long duration and a tremendous dedication. Here what Socrates points at is that those who left his company sooner than they should have failed to attain mastery in the art of dialectic. Is not Socrates, then, teaching the art of dialectic although he is not teaching them any truths about the subject matter of their dialectic inquiry? Does he not know what the dialectical practice is and how it is exercised?

Interestingly, although he claims to be in possession of some kind of *techné*, which I consider to be the dialectical practice itself, at the end of the *Theaetetus* he finishes the discussion by saying that this *techné* of midwifery is a gift from heaven.¹²⁰ This claim definitely makes it harder to interpret the art of dialectic as teachable. However, on the one hand implying that dialectical practice is a *techné*, and on the other hand claiming that this *techné* is a gift from heaven is quite inconsistent. If something is a *techné*, then is it not teachable?¹²¹ It is hardly acceptable that Plato would actually intend to make Socrates mean it. This is the same Plato who depicts Socrates as a young boy getting taught by Parmenides in the art of dialectic. Then he portrays him in dialectical practice together with an inquiry into what a *techné* is, and finally has Socrates say that he possesses a *techné*. In view of all these facts, the practice of dialectic does appear to be some kind of *techné*.

There is a certain number of things which could be gifts from heaven, but a *techné* cannot be such a gift. In the *Seventh Letter*, Plato describes natural intelligence, good memory and affinity with the subject as things that are given. He argues that it is required that one has all these three so that the most complete truth

¹²⁰ Ibid., 210c6.

¹²¹ Charles Kahn states that “The wisdom that Socrates lacks but seeks is indiscriminately referred to as *sophia*, *episteme*, and *techné*; but the latter term more particularly implies an ability to teach others” (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, p. 103). I would agree with Socrates’ lack of *sophia* or *episteme*, but I do not think that he lacks *techné* as he explicitly claims to have possession of it.

regarding moral concepts can be attained.¹²² However, the combination of them is only necessary but not sufficient. He claims:

The study of virtue and vice must be accompanied by an inquiry into what is false and true of existence in general and must be carried on by constant practice throughout a long period...after practicing detailed comparisons of names and definitions and visual and other sense perceptions, after scrutinizing them in benevolent disputation by the use of question and answer without jealousy, at last in a flash understanding of each blazes up, and the mind, as it exerts all its powers to the limit of human capacity, is flooded with light.¹²³

In this passage, Plato again describes the method of dialectic through which the power of natural intelligence or good memory can truly be realized. We also know from the *Parmenides* that becoming an expert in application of the method of dialectic requires dedication, effort and severe training. The acquisition of it demands a long period of time. This is also mentioned in the *Theaetetus* when Socrates refers to those who left his company before they become competent in using the method. As a result, the art of dialectic cannot be naturally given. When Socrates at the end of *Theaetetus* is referring to his midwifery art as a gift from heaven, he might be appealing only to one of those qualities such as natural intelligence that are necessary for the realization of aim of dialectical practice. Thus, we are still justified in considering the method of dialectic as Socrates' *techné*.

Then how do we interpret Socrates' claim that he lacks a *techné* in the *Apology* together with his claim to possess a *techné* in the *Theaetetus*? In the *Apology*, when Socrates claims not to possess a *techné*, the *techné* he is referring to is that which is thought to belong to the sophists.¹²⁴ Here Socrates denies taking any

¹²² *Seventh Letter* 344a3-11.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 344b1-10.

¹²⁴ Kahn mentions that in the *Apology* Socrates denies possessing two things (*Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, p. 103). Firstly, he denies that he has any of the scientific knowledge pursued by the natural philosophers (*Apol.* 19c4). Secondly, he denies possessing the kind of *techné* by which the sophists

part in the education of the young, but it is important to see that the earlier speech in the *Apology* takes place in public, while the one in the *Theaetetus* takes place in private. Socrates is not in any position to claim that he has a *techné* in front of his accusers, who blamed him for corrupting the youth. Socrates cannot say that although he does not possess the kind of *techné* which the sophists claim to have, he has his own *techné* because first of all, he cannot explain to the general public that dialectic is a kind of *techné* and that he has it. However, in the *Theaetetus*, he is in the private sphere and he is comfortable asking Theaetetus not to give his secret away since it is not known that Socrates possesses this *techné*. As I consider his confession in private as genuine, together with all the other aspects mentioned in this paper, I think that Plato aims at demonstrating the method of dialectic as *techné* through the Socratic figure in the dialogues.

The *Sophist*: Dialectic as a Source of Purification

In the *Sophist*, two types of education are specified and both of them are done through the means of words.¹²⁵ One of the educational methods is the “time-honored method of scolding or gently encouraging.”¹²⁶ However, this method fails to achieve any good when one thinks one is wise because this implies that one will be “unwilling to learn anything about what he thinks he is clever at.”¹²⁷ The other method is that which will be effective in making one become aware of one’s ignorance. This method is the method of dialectic, through which there arises a

claim to educate the youth (*Apol.* 20c2). Kahn states that Socrates describes the *techné* of the sophists as that of an “expert in perfecting the human and social qualities” (*Apol.* 20b4), but Plato’s Socrates in fact, as we see in the dialogues, completely devalues that type of *techné*.

¹²⁵ *Sophist* 229e1.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 229e4.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 230a6.

possibility for being refuted and realizing one's ignorance. When the dialogue proceeds to present the effects of dialectic, one of the first achievements of this dialectical experience is said to be the state of purity when one realizes one's limits and becomes modest. This clearly presents the method of dialectic as the highest form of educational method. The achievement of those who apply this method is summarized in the following passage:

They cross-examine a man's words, when he thinks that he is saying something and is really saying nothing, and easily convict him of inconsistencies in his opinions; these they then collect by the dialectic process, and placing them side by side, show that they contradict one another about the same thing, in relation to the same things, and in the same respect. He, seeing this, is angry with himself, and grows gentle toward others, and thus is entirely delivered from great prejudices and harsh notions, in a way which is most amusing to the hearer, and produces the most lasting good effect on the person who is the subject of the operation.¹²⁸

This passage recalls what Socrates is trying to achieve when he engages in a dialectical procedure in the other dialogues. He cross-examines the statements of his interlocutors, raises the contradictions implied by their speeches and shows that they in fact do not know what they think they know. In the *Sophist*, this is described as the achievement of the dialectical practice: one is delivered from one's prejudices and made to think that he knows only what he knows and nothing more.¹²⁹ This is the well-known Socratic attitude. Then, is not Socrates trying to make it possible for the others to realize their own ignorance and develop a moderate attitude required for the search for knowledge? Is not that also something that Parmenides taught Socrates while he was educating him in the practice of dialectic?

To be moderate and to examine things extensively is what Socrates tries to make possible for his interlocutors, and like the method of dialectic, it was taught to

¹²⁸ Ibid., 230a4-c4.

¹²⁹ Ibid., 230d1. On being delivered from prejudices, see also the *Gorgias* 458a3-b1. Socrates claims that holding a false belief is the worst evil for a human being.

him by Parmenides. It is necessary to discuss why that kind of attitude is required. The recognition of ignorance is depicted as essential to the search of knowledge. It is also a theme in the *Symposium*. It seems that it triggers one's desire for knowing and allows one to engage in further search which means that one continues to expand one's knowledge and the possibility of transcending the current state of mind is maintained. When one becomes aware of a false belief as a result of the dialectic experience, not only is this belief left behind, but also any action which would follow from it. Thus, any intellectual achievement attained through engagement in dialectic is likely to anticipate moral achievements as well. This is also stated by Gregory Vlastos in *Studies in Greek Philosophy*. Vlastos claims that one is improved morally by right action, while intellectual improvement is actualized through right thinking.¹³⁰ For him, these two are inseparable from one another.

In the *Sophist*, purification of the soul is said to be the aim of dialectic.¹³¹ However, since the achievements of dialectic seem to be more than that, it can be said that it is one of the first achievements of it, and there is something very special about the possibility of purification of the soul. In the previous section we have mentioned that the true dialectical practice is in need of two interlocutors, so purification is achieved with the collective engagement of two people in a dialectical exercise. When Plato defines thinking and discourse, he seems to assign a higher value to discourse and right thinking produced by the dialectical activity. In the *Sophist*, Plato defines thinking and discourse as the same thing. Thinking is a dialogue, but it is "the inward dialogue carried on by the mind with itself and without

¹³⁰ Gregory Vlastos, *Studies in Greek Philosophy* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 8.

¹³¹ *Sophist* 227c4.

spoken words.”¹³² The product of the inner dialogue is a judgment, while the conversational dialogue is composed of statements. Plato does not assign a different value to judgments and statements, but points to that which they have in common. Both have the possibility of being true or false.¹³³ However, it is reasonable to argue that Plato values the conversational dialogue more than he values the inner dialogue.

He names two very important things taking place in discourse. There occurs assertion and denial in the dialogue, and thus the truth of one’s beliefs is subjected to the questioning of the other. The inner dialogue, as being a dialogue, could include assertion and denial as well, but it could happen that it only produces assertion but no denials, which would lead to newer and perhaps better assertions. This limitation is overcome in the conversational dialogue since the denial comes from the other who is different than one’s own self. Plato’s depiction of a dialogue as a source of purification of the soul establishes the presence of the other as necessary for the possibility of the act of purifying. The presence of the other is also necessary for the possibility of the dialogue itself. In the dialectical experience, the beliefs of two parties become expressed in actual speech and thus become subject to a test to determine their truth or falsity, while outside of dialectic beliefs remain as untested opinions.¹³⁴

¹³² Ibid., 263e4.

¹³³ Ibid., 264a8.

¹³⁴ The benefit provided by a dialectical experience is also stated in the *Philebus*. Socrates says that when a thought is expressed in an actual speech addressed to a companion, it is no longer an opinion but an assertion. (*Philebus* 38e1).

CHAPTER V: DIALECTIC AS A *TECHNÉ*

In the second chapter, I introduced some of the important elements which are found as the defining features of *techné*. Then I tried to demonstrate how Plato gradually works towards revealing the idea that the dialectical activity is a kind of *techné*. As was stated earlier, Plato's concern is educational and the aim is to transform the traditional educational forms which fail to qualify as *technai*. In the third chapter, I presented Plato's critique of three forms of education, rhetoric, poetry and writing. According to him rhetoric and poetry fail to qualify as *technai* because they lack the element of truth. Rhetoric, which was defined as a persuasion through belief, is devoid of truth. The Sophists, who exercised rhetoric as a form of education, lacked the element of truth in their practices as a motivational force in the first place, and thus the sophistic educational practice was not to be considered as a *techné*. In the case of poetry, there was a possibility that the poet might convey some truths.

However, truth by itself is not considered as enough. One has to be able to give an account of that which is to be conveyed to the others. Poets speak without providing any rational account. They acquire their ability to speak about several different matters from inspiration which is rooted neither in reason nor in any rational account. Similarly, rhetoric is defined as an irrational activity since it aims at persuasion based on opinions in order to obtain what is pleasant by ignoring the good.¹³⁵ The limitation of writing was, on the other hand, its impotence to address itself to subjects with differing natures. Because of this limitation, the ideas put in written form are in danger of being misunderstood and not understood at all, whereas the ideas discussed in a dialectical form have the chance of being clarified, exemplified, and thus properly conveyed to the others.

¹³⁵ *Gorgias* 464e1-465a6.

Through all the criticism provided for these different forms of education which fail to qualify as *techné*, the *method* of dialectic seems to be presented as the only available and proper method for the practice of teaching because it appears to exhibit all those elements which are lacked by the traditional forms of education. Based on the analysis of different Platonic dialogues, in the second chapter these defining elements of *techné* were enumerated. Working with an aim towards truth and utility, having a definite subject matter, being grounded in reason or rational account, and lastly, being teachable are the main elements defining that which is going to be called *techné*. Since the method of dialectic is depicted as exhibiting all of them and as having all that is lacked by those other educational forms, it does appear to be some kind of *techné*.

Truth is one of the most essential defining features of a *techné*, and a true dialogue is defined as a practice engaged with truth. Its engagement with truth is also in the sense of having truth as one of its main objectives. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates claims that the sayings of the poets should be left aside and the discussion should be based on the interlocutors' own ideas. Socrates asserts that "it is the truth, and our own minds, that we should be testing."¹³⁶ In the *Phaedrus*, through the critique of written speech, Socrates once again finds the opportunity to criticize rhetoric which is practiced also in a written form and to discuss what constitutes any speech as a *techné*. When in the *Phaedrus* Socrates enumerates the conditions for a proper speech, the first condition he mentions is the element of truth. Socrates claims that if one is to define one's act of speech as a *techné*, then one has to "know the truth about the subject" he speaks or writes about.¹³⁷ This implies that one has the ability

¹³⁶ *Protagoras* 348a4.

¹³⁷ *Phaedrus* 277b6.

to isolate the subject in definition and divide it into its kinds according to its given definition until the limit of division is reached.¹³⁸ If a speech is to qualify as a *techné*, the one who produces it needs to be competent regarding these specifications. In the *Symposium*, when Socrates changes the form of the dialogue and criticizes the speeches of the poets, the first thing he emphasizes is again the element of truth. The poets are criticized for overriding the importance of connecting their speeches to truth. In the dialogue, Socrates claims that he can tell the truth about love in his own way which is through engaging in a dialogue. This is one of the most powerful appearances of the dialectical method as a method which carries the interlocutors towards the attainment of truth. Depiction of the dialectical practice as a way to attain truth is one part of its definition which marks it as some kind of *techné*.

Another important defining feature of *techné* is that it has a specific subject matter. In the dialogues dialectic appears as a method whose object is to arrive at the universal definitions of justice, good, beauty, courage, piety, etc. Thus, its subject matter is said to be the first principles of reality. The following interesting passage regarding the subject matter of dialectic appears in the *Statesman*.

...to the highest and most important class of existents there are no corresponding visible resemblances, no work of nature clear for all to look upon. In these cases nothing visible can be pointed out to satisfy the inquiring mind... Therefore we must train ourselves to give and to understand a rational account of every existent thing. For the existents which have no visible embodiment, the existents which are of highest value and chief importance, are demonstrable only by reason and are not to be apprehended by any other means.¹³⁹

The passage points out what dialectic is capable of achieving. It is a method which is capable of making possible the grasp of abstract things such as the forms, and its

¹³⁸ Ibid., 277b8-10.

¹³⁹ *Statesman* 286a1-11.

highest object is the knowledge of the form of the good. Such an achievement is to be attained only through a discourse grounded in reason.

In the *Phaedrus* where the subject matter is to define what art is and is not, one of the most important powers of dialectic is mentioned. It enables its subject to think.¹⁴⁰ When Socrates continues to describe a true speech, he names several steps which stand for a rational account of a dialectical speech. Socrates claims that speech has to begin with a preamble. Then he says “and next comes exposition accompanied by direct evidence, thirdly indirect evidence, fourthly, probabilities.” There is also a proof and a supplementary proof as well as a refutation and supplementary refutation both for prosecution and defense. In the same passage, towards the end, Socrates also mentions one more thing about the kind of demand for speech required by the notion of *techné*. Its demand is neither long nor short speeches.¹⁴¹ While the sophists have a hard time providing a definition for what rhetoric and its scope is, Plato’s Socrates provides a detailed definition for the defining aspects and elements of dialectical speech.

The length of speech is one of them. It is emphasized in several places that a proper dialogue has to use a speech of a moderate length.¹⁴² We understand from the Platonic dialogues that long speeches tend to be oratorical which make it harder, if not impossible, to attain the truth since one who listens to it has difficulty to follow

¹⁴⁰ *Phaedrus* 266b4-6.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 267b5.

¹⁴² For example, in the *Protagoras*, Socrates raises criticisms of long speeches which make it harder to follow the argument (*Protag.* 329a5, 335b5). In fact, in the *Protagoras* Socrates’ discussion with Protagoras gets interrupted because of Protagoras’ tendency to make a lengthy speech. He underlines that Protagoras is capable of making long speeches as well as short ones (*Protag.* 335b5-7). This capability requires Protagoras to construct a harmony with the demands of his interlocutor. That is to say, if any communication is to occur and continue between Protagoras and Socrates, Protagoras is required to recognize Socrates’ need. Only when there is a mutual care for one another’s demands can there appear true communication and discussion leading to the truth of matters by providing a rational account. Thus, the true dialectical practice requires two interlocutors who are both aware of the demands necessitated by that practice.

the argument.¹⁴³ On the other hand, the ones which are too short might end up not saying much.¹⁴⁴ A proper speech has to have a moderate length and it has to provide information about facts or events.¹⁴⁵ In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claims it is necessary that the speeches are kept as short as possible so that he can follow and the possibility of refuting and being refuted can emerge.¹⁴⁶ This is very crucial for the dialectical experience because the experience of being refuted seems to be quite essential to the dialectic. The idea of dialectic as a purification of the soul, which is discussed in the *Sophist*, depends on this experience of refutation. One who is subject to a dialectical experience has the possibility of being refuted by the other, in which case he is called to revise his own belief. If through revision this belief is recognized as false, such recognition leads to the subject becoming free of this false belief as well as of any actions generated by it. Thus dialectic also appears to be a way of becoming virtuous which can be specified as one of the most important utilities provided by it. This aspect of dialectical method could add up to its definition as a *techné*. However, this idea of dialectic as a way to become virtuous deserves further study and some diligent thinking.

Yet, there is one last point, and I believe it is the strongest support to consider the method of dialectic as a *techné*. It is the point made about its teachability. For something to be a *techné*, it also has to have the possibility of being taught to the others. In chapter four, I presented how through the depiction of Socrates Plato captures this point. As I said, for Plato it seems that the teachability of virtue is

¹⁴³ The disturbance of Socrates caused by long speeches in the *Protagoras* (*Protag.* 335b5) is expressed again in the *Gorgias* where he says that he will engage in a conversation only if the condition of short speech is observed (*Gorg.* 461d4).

¹⁴⁴ *Sophist* 262b10-c6.

¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 262d2.

¹⁴⁶ *Gorgias* 461d7-462a3.

possible only if there are particular kind of students and teachers, and through the Socratic character Plato seems to define them both. One of the central dialogues is the *Parmenides*, which depicts Socrates as a young student who is getting educated in the practice of dialectic by Parmenides. There is an emphasis put on Socrates' desire to learn and eagerness for discussion.¹⁴⁷ This element of desire, which is central to the possibility of learning and teaching, is also emphasized in the *Theaetetus*.¹⁴⁸ Through the Socratic character, the presence of inner desire is displayed as one of the most essential elements for the possibility of learning. Once there is that desire, the second thing required is a qualified educator. When two encounter each other, the acquisition of knowledge becomes a collective achievement. This, I believe is what Plato aims at demonstrating in the *Parmenides*.

The meeting of young Socrates and Parmenides, who is experienced in the art of dialectic, is a crucial moment in the dialogues, which constitutes an example for the teachability of dialectic. In the dialogues, there are two references being made to this fictional meeting of Socrates with Parmenides. One is in the *Theaetetus*, where Socrates confesses that he has a *techné*, from the description of which this *techné* seems to be the dialectical practice itself. The second reference to this meeting is in the *Sophist*, where the idea of dialectic as a purification of the soul is introduced. Once attention is paid to these points, it is possible to that Plato invites the reader for a careful consideration of the reason why Socrates is depicted as a young boy in the *Parmenides*. By recognizing the two references made to the meeting of Socrates with Parmenides in this dialogue, I believe Plato aims to depict the method of dialectic as teachable. Further support for this idea is provided in the other dialogues, where

¹⁴⁷ *Parmenides* 130b1.

¹⁴⁸ *Theaetetus* 148e1-7.

Socrates is found with his practice of dialectical method and criticisms against the practices of the sophists and poets. In those dialogues, Socrates generously presents all he knows about the art of dialectic. Through the criticism provided for educational practices of the sophists and poets, it is observed that whatever is lacked by their methods of education is possessed by the method of dialectic. Thus, not only the limitations of those methods seem to be overcome by the dialectical method, but also the method of dialectic appears as some kind of *techné*.

CHAPTER VI: CONCLUSION

The motivation of this work was to examine Plato's depiction of the method of dialectic as a *techné* which qualifies a method of education and promises an improvement not only intellectually but also morally. Two things were essential to this study. One was a focus on Plato's Socrates, who is depicted in the dialogues as someone who, having acquired the art of dialectic, engages in the practice of dialectic and knows all the necessary features defining it as *techné*. The second focus was on the criticism provided for the sophists and poets who claimed to provide an education in virtue. It is in fact through the criticism raised against them that the Platonic concern and definition for the notion of *techné* is revealed.

The necessity of the elements of truth, reason and rational account was emphasized the most. Besides those elements, the other elements constituting the definition of *techné* had to do with having a definite subject matter, being directed towards utility, and being teachable. The practices of the sophists and poets were demonstrated as lacking the elements of truth and rationality, which completely takes away the two most important defining elements of *techné*. When questioned, they were also incapable of providing a definite subject matter for the *techné* they claimed to have. One of the defining things about any *techné* was its differentiation from all the other *technai*. This was necessitated for the sake of proper function and utility. Because the sophists and poets appeared to provide education in things concerning many different *technai*, their practices seemed to face the danger of not being useful. Moreover, considering the absence of the element of truth in their teachings as well, the utility of their teaching appears as already doubtful. In the Platonic dialogues, truth is tightly connected to the notion of good. The absence of the element of truth implies the absence of good as well.

Thus, within the background of this criticism, the definition of *techné* gradually builds up. Then, it becomes quite interesting and exciting to observe that all the elements lacked by the educational practices of the sophists and poets are met by the method of dialectic. Aiming at truth and rational account is one of the most emphasized aspects of dialectic. Dialectical method is also demonstrated as having a definite subject matter which has to do with the first principles of reality. It is concerned with the universals and its highest aim is to attain the knowledge of the forms. Also, while there is difficulty with and ambiguity in the definitions provided for the other forms of education, there is a clear and detailed definition provided for the method of dialectic through Plato's Socrates. It is also through the Socratic character that the method of dialectic is depicted as having the possibility of being taught, which is one of the most important ways in which dialectic appears as some kind of *techné*.

The method of dialectic contains the elements of truth and rational account, which already connects it to the good as well. Thus, it is possible to think that in some way, it is already directed towards utility. The idea of dialectic as a purification of the soul presented in the *Sophist* suggests the possibility that engaging in the practice of dialectical method might be a way of becoming virtuous. The demand put by the dialectical practice is that two interlocutors state whatever they truly believe. These beliefs face the possibility of being refuted, in which case, one of them acquires this chance of having to revise one's beliefs which were proved to be false. As a result of this revision, the false beliefs are to be abandoned, and this implies that actions caused by those beliefs are to be left as well. This is a very important aspect of the dialectic, but since the aim of this study was to provide the background for Plato's discussion of the notion of *techné* together with a consideration of the

presentation and analysis of the defining features of *techné*, it does not really explore in detail the idea of dialectic as a way of becoming virtuous. This idea calls for further study, and in the light of such a prospective investigation as well as of the overall examination of dialectic as a *techné* provided in this study, I believe, it might be possible to argue that for Plato, the method of dialectic is a *techné*. Having stated this, lastly, such a study might also show that although in the dialogues the question of the teachability of virtue appears as an unsettled issue, as a *techné*, the method of dialectic is teachable and the acquisition of virtue might be possible in a rather indirect way: through persistent and arduous effort in the practice of dialectic.

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