A polemical quest for authenticity: Plato and the history of dialectic (with special reference to the sophist)

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PHILOSOPHY AS DIALOGUE:

PLATO AND THE HISTORY OF DIALECTIC

(WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE *SOPHIST*)

A Thesis Submitted to The University of Durham Department of Classics and Ancient History In Accordance with the Requirements for The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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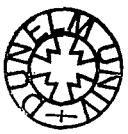

DECLARATION

I declare that the work contained within this thesis, submitted by me for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, is my own original work except where otherwise stated, and has not been submitted previously for a degree at this or any other University.

With slight modifications and under the title "Philosophy as essentially dialectical: Plato and Aristotle in comparison", I presented -in a Spanish version- from page 1 to page 19 of the Introduction as a paper for the XIV Congreso Interamericano de Filosofía, Coloquio en Filosofía Antigua, in the Universidad Autónoma de Puebla, Mexico, August, 1999, and it will be included in the Proceedings of the Congress that will be published in CD rom (forthcoming 2000).

To my Family

To Audrey and Ed

ABSTRACT

PHILOSOPHY AS DIALOGUE: PLATO AND THE HISTORY OF DIALECTIC (WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO THE *SOPHIST*)

M. T. PADILLA LONGORIA PH D THESIS 2000

The connecting thread of this thesis is the idea that philosophy is essentially dialectical or a matter of conversation. Plato's idea of philosophy plays a pivotal role insofar as one of his main preoccupations throughout his work is to define the essence of philosophy. For him philosophy and dialectic are interchangeable terms. Plato's idea of dialectic is that of a philosophical conversation. This is not a judgement that is accepted by many other philosophers; I consider objections that Aristotle, Descartes and Husserl address to this idea of the nature of philosophy.

In the first main part I discuss the etymology and origins of the word dialectic and its possible literary antecedents in Greek epic, lyric and tragedy.

I then offer, in the second part, a historical approach to the philosophical roots of dialectic with the aim of grasping its genesis and evolution. I deal with the different ancient ideas of dialectic as represented by the figures of Plato, Aristotle, Zeno (and some Sophists), and the Stoics, then moving on to the medieval understanding of dialectic. Finally I describe its modern versions through representative figures such as Kant, Hegel, Marx and Engels.

Finally, in the third part, I turn to the Socratic-Platonic understanding of dialectic. In this part I discuss the nature of the Socratic-Platonic method and some different perspectives on Platonic dialectic. As a test case, and especially with the aim of showing how dialectic operates in Plato, and how he contrasts the figures of the Philosopher and the Sophist I focus on the *Sophist.*

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

§1. PHILOSOPHY AND DIALECTIC

a) Philosophy as essentially dialectical

Throughout this thesis, we will propose that philosophy is essentially dialectical. The starting point of our reading of Plato is his idea of what philosophy is. Our account of Plato's idea (an idea with which we tend to agree) recognises the fact that there are many others, past and present, who would reject it. "Philosophy is essentially dialectical": this sweet and inevitable sentence, according to Plato's approach, implies two ideas. 1. Philosophy is intrinsically dialectical or, in other words, dialectic and philosophy are interchangeable terms. 2. Philosophy as a dialectical activity implies a specific way of carrying on dialogue. Dialectic is dialogue, but a specific form of dialogue, a philosophical dialogue or philosophical conversation which requires method in order to be developed properly, that is, scientifically. The Socratic-Platonic[1] revolution consisted in making explicit the nature of the act of philosophising: philosophy is always a dialogic act; it is an unselfish or loving search for the truth, a shared search, a shared act.[2] Philosophy, as an unselfish search for the truth, is a transpersonal act that implies dialogue. The way to truth is, in our judgement, essentially dialogic and depends on communication and that is the reason why we regard Platonic dialectic as central. That is also the

[1] The relationship that we propose between Socrates and Plato is that Socrates is the Socrates that Plato constructs. That is, we will not distinguish between the two. If Socrates is interesting it is because among other things he embodies Plato's method even if that method may have its roots in the historical Socrates. If sometimes we refer to Socrates and Plato, on the one hand I cannot say where Socrates ends and when Plato begins and on the other hand I do not want to refer everything to Plato.

[2] Even when Plato is talking about the act of thinking, it implies for him an internal dialogue. We will develop this idea in section b, and see also note 16.

reason why we regard it as important to follow out the process of its gestation, evolution and consolidation. The philosophical exploration of the truth is not only a matter involving a subject and an object, it is a dialogic act that only becomes completed and reaches its end when a subject proposes a philosophical thesis -rationally, objectively, methodically and systematically pursued- about an object to another subject or subjects, and offers it for scrutiny by them. Philosophy creates and consolidates a community: a community of searchers for the truth.[3]

According to the Platonic account of philosophy and its objects, philosophy is necessarily methodical because it is a rational and conscious process of the interconnection of things discovered in reality with the aim of explaining them or giving an account of them. Philosophy is methodical because it is a directed inquiry about any object given, with the aim of investigating it independently of personal motivations. Philosophy takes a second, more careful, look at apparently simple and common things with the aim of discovering what they really are and what sorts of connections and interrelationships there are among them. Plato thought that the man who can make these sorts of distinctions, and who can find unity among many things, was the dialectician. For Plato dialectic is equivalent to the act of philosophising, and of being a philosopher. But if dialectic and philosophy are interchangeable terms, all questions and problems related to the essence and aims of philosophy can be explored in terms of what dialectic is and means, and what the dialectician does.

When Plato defined philosophy as an unselfish search for the truth he established, at the same time, the metaphysical (ontological,

[3] My notion of the essence of philosophy is partly informed by Eduardo Nicol. On the topic of the essence of philosophy it is worth consulting his *Metafísica de la expresión*, Nueva Versión, F. C. E., México, 1974; *La idea del hombre*, Nueva Versión, F. C. E., México, 1977, and *Los principios de la ciencia*, F. C. E., 2a. reimpresión, México, 1992.

epistemological, methodological) and ethical conditions for doing philosophy.

Ontologically and epistemologically speaking, philosophy is an unselfish search for the truth because it implies a permanent duty to take - as starting point of any philosophical research- the relevant primary evidence, that is, the facts of reality as they are in themselves and as independent from the subjects who pursue the truth. Philosophy aspires to be a genuine process towards knowledge which culminates in a clearer, because rational, understanding of things. Plato thought that human reason was the ideal tool for this searching process. Plato insisted, throughout his work, that rational dialogue (which implies at least two people in conversation) is the ideal way to do philosophy.[4] On the other hand, it is not just dialogue, but dialogue about objects; and not just a matter of what an individual thinks. The act of searching for the truth is a dialogic act which reaches its highest point when interlocutors get some grasp (even if it is provisional) of the essence of the object in question and can express it clearly. For Plato, to think clearly also implies clarity of expression because thinking is essentially a verbal affair as well.

Methodologically speaking, philosophy is an unselfish search for the truth because it is a conscious and systematic path followed with the aim of grasping things rationally and objectively. Lovers of wisdom who are proud of being such have to submit themselves to a process of "purification" which removes all their previous unreflective assumptions and their personal or ulterior motivations -except towards truth. Plato's Socrates thought that this process of clearing away obstructive elements is essential because most of these elements are part of us -because we grew up with them or because they were taught to us. The aim of this purification is to liberate us from

[4] For Plato live rational dialogue is the best way to do philosophy. This rational dialogue can be imitated, represented or partially recreated in writing.

any sort of prejudice which prevents us from having a fresh and direct relationship with reality and the possibility of forming in ourselves a critical judgement which leads us to re-think and reconsider everything that we have been learned and been taught. In that sense dialectic -according to Plato's Socrates- has, at first, a negative task which is only propaedeutic.

Ethically speaking, philosophy is an unselfish search for the truth because it implies that philosophical truth is an impersonal truth. In fact, the whole dialogic exercise -as the dialectical practice that Plato understood it as being- is the way in which he showed us that love of wisdom or philosophical love for truth implies the absolute priority of grasping what things are: the central point is what we (together) objectively seem to discover from reality, not who is saying what. The loving or dialogic grasping of reality also has its ethical or human benefits: seeking for what reality is provides self-knowledge, knowledge of human nature, and therefore, the possibility of self-improvement. For Plato philosophy is education because when you are put to the test (or your theses are put to the test) through the dialogic process you become a more conscious person, a better person who knows what you really know and what you do not know . In fact, if we ask the question about the aims of philosophy or why we do philosophy the Socratic-Platonic answer is deeply humanist: because we aspire to live a worthy life which is equivalent to acting reflectively or actively reflecting, leading to a permanent exercise of, or constant searching for, self-improvement. The Socratic-Platonic idea of philosophy which is portrayed in each dialogue implies the idea that philosophy is a continuous exercise in searching and looking for what can be no more than a partial knowledge of any object given. Philosophy is presented much more in terms of partial achievements than in terms of a complete knowledge. When Plato says philosophy is dialectic he is proposing a major humanistic project: philosophy as a method of life, or the way to form an ethical,

impersonal criterion of truth which is shown in a continuous attitude of inquiring and criticism.

Because philosophy is essentially dialectical, philosophy is paideia par excellence: Plato always insists on his idea of the nature of philosophy and his efforts are concentrated on grasping the whole idea in terms of a dialogic process. Plato thought that Socrates embodied and personified this ideal of philosophy. In the Socratic figure there is a crystallisation of the human consciousness as a method of life: to be a man, a good man, a virtuous man is a task, indeed, the real task, and philosophy is the vocation *par excellence* that shows us how to become or learn to be a better human being. Socrates thought that "... the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being."[5] It is precisely in this permanent act of inquiring that philosophy transforms human life and the world: to think and to become aware of oneself and the world transmutes both and gives them a new ontological, epistemological and ethical dimension. That is the reason that philosophy -as dialectic- is *paideia.*

In short, and as Plato said, dialectic as a "science of conversation" - involving the dialectician as "... the man who can ask and answer questions"-[6] is the ideal form of communication and teaching. It is in the way that Socratic-Platonic dialectic works, as live, systematically organised conversation, that is, as a rigorous exercise of testing any thesis proposed, by questions and answers, in a process of mutual challenge with the aim of discovering its truth or falsity, that the dialectician scatters the philosophical-dialectical seed in his pupils.[7]

Some people have attributed to Socrates and Plato a sort of philosophical scepticism: a view of philosophy according to which human

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[5] *Apology,* 38a.

[6] *Cratylus,* 390c11; see also, d5; *Republic,* VII, 534b3; *Sophist,* 253d2, e4.

[7] See *Phaedrus,* 276e4-277a5.

beings and particularly philosophers are necessarily always frustrated in their search for the truth, so that they end up searching for the sake of searching without achieving anything in the end.[8] The curious point to notice is that, according to the Socratic-Platonic idea of the essence of philosophy, the real dynamism of it resides precisely in the fact that philosophical love is always an aspiration less than totally fulfilled. Real philosophers need humility, which means awareness of the fact that they are just lovers or searchers for wisdom, but not possessors of it. Socrates and Plato repeatedly advise us against the arrogance of the person who pretends to know. This false conceit of wisdom (δοξοσοφία)[9] represents the death penalty for philosophy which is sometimes a result of a) an internal crisis within philosophy itself, for instance any kind of sophistry- or b) of external pressures. Let me explain.

a) Plato mounts very strong criticisms[10] against any individual who, while pretending to do philosophy, just exhibits a false conceit of wisdom and disguises his ignorance and personal motivations with dubious and deceitful proceedings which are not part of an authentic searching for the truth at all. Plato condemns this harmful practice which is to the detriment of the honest practice of the philosophical task, according to his idea of what love of wisdom has to be. His main criticism of the different sorts of sophistry resides in the fact that sophistry transmutes the essence of philosophy into mere technical games.[11]

b) Another way to kill philosophy and to pervert its essence is to give in to reasons of necessity, or pragmatic aims, which tempt one to pretend

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[8] This is perhaps Platonism, or Socratism, as understood by for example, the New Academy and Arcesilaus and Carneades.

[9] See *Philebus*, 49d.

[10] The *Parmenides* and the *Sophist* are good examples of such criticism. See particularly in the *Sophist* the passage which refers to the sophistry of "noble lineage", 230a5-232b9.

[11] We will develop the idea of the sophist as an impostor and a magician in Part three.

that the truth is what is in fact wholly a matter of utility or personal ideology. This criticism is addressed to those who in fact to reduce philosophy to personal or group interests. Pretending to know everything or pretending to possess the whole truth is equivalent to finishing with philosophical love, which ceases to exist, if philosophical love means "love of wisdom or love of truth".[12] It is another way of asserting that the unselfish search for the truth does not have either a priority or a value itself, or that it is always subject to higher *interests*. It is also to assume that the search for the truth is just a side problem, or something that can be manipulated or subject to particular circumstances or pragmatic aims.

Unfortunately, interest is a form of arrogance, and arrogance is a contagious disease which quickly affects others. Actually, it is in the present day a natural attitude, a way of life: truth is merely a game of interests. Here we arrive at a distressful and disturbing point. Any attempt to make of reasoning, in the field of philosophy or the special sciences, something merely instrumental to other ends, implies the dangerous temptation to infringe the ethical principle or the principle of unselfishness which constitutes the conducting thread of any honest search in this area and to corrupt these activities into something different. It is this ambiguous link -sometimes disastrous- between reason and power which can be expressed in two phrases: "the power of reason" and the "reasons of power".

Regarding "the power of reason": here it is important to make the following distinction. It is one thing to talk about philosophy as a rational way of tackling reality which implies good faith in the reliability or trustworthiness of human reason; it is another thing to postulate the "power of reason" as an interested instrument for personal or ulterior motives without regard for the truth. This interested use of reason can be applied

[12] See *Lysis*, 218a-b, *Symposium*, 203-204.

positively or negatively, but the important point to stress is that these activities pursue different purposes and have different aims.

Regarding "reasons of power": here we move into the area of the justification of the exercise of any kind of power. There are clearly two sorts of areas that attempt to provide the grounds or the "reasons" for the exercise of their powers: politics and technical subjects. Both are searching for a *logos* which can found their practice. The problem is that, when any kind of power is involved in the process or aims of any activity then the principle that is going to rule will be interest and necessity, not unselfishness and freedom. Moreover: when the principle of unselfishness is replaced by mere personal interest or pragmatic necessity, the implications are considerable. It means metamorphosing or changing the nature of philosophy and the particular sciences into ideology and technical subjects and claiming that knowledge for the sake of knowing does not have any value itself. More seriously: that knowing is "having the power to". In short to establish interest and necessity as principles of knowledge it is equivalent of positing two conditions for real knowledge: usefulness and practical outcomes. We do not mean to satanise technical subjects or politics, we simply say that it is worth noticing that because both involve the exercise of power, their principles, motivations and aims will be different: they will move in an ambiguous field which contains many elements of irrationality. The real, and often gradual and subtle threat, is the ghost of reductionism: the dangerous and pragmatic game of simplifying and forcing all human activity to become mere necessity or utility This reductionism can be like an epidemic, unconsciously spreading: it is a uniform and imposed on pattern of life. Without the free exercise and the vital effects of philosophy, the special sciences and the arts, human life becomes mechanical and subject to constraint.

This invasive, pragmatic concept of life puts into considerable jeopardy the Socratic-Platonic idea of philosophy -and the reasons for the existence of philosophy in general- as a permanent task or vital humanistic project of becoming better men through the method of examining everything. The success of this omnipragmatism would imply a certain death for philosophy. Even sadder, when inside philosophy and among philosophers -suicidal philosophers- involved in this spider's web and trapped into it try to provide theoretical foundations and justifications of this tangle, breaking the ethical principle of loving search for the truth. Plato's main criticism addresses tendencies like relativism embodied in figures like Protagoras with his motto "πάντων μέτρον ἄνθρωπός ἐστιν"[13] and Callicles who states that: "... philosophy is only for the immature; real men do more productive things ..."[14] Are we in a cul-de-sac?

Fortunately, there are still faithful philosophers. Philosophy can continue with its task that started with Thales and found its climax in the Socratic-Platonic project: to ask for the essence of everything, with the sole aim of knowing what it is. Philosophy as a disinterested search for truth implies in Plato the idea that this search is a shared search. An authentic philosophical dialogue also involves in the Platonic system the essential feature that philosophical truth is an impersonal truth. Formulating a definition of anything is, the end, part of the main aim, regardless of who formulated it. In addition, the vital benefits of philosophy, where the truth -as a loving search- is important indeed, even persist in this modern world: the object of knowledge of reality, of human nature and self-knowledge. Philosophy is not pragmatic, but it is just practical, that is, ethical, its sole aim is to make better men. But for how long?

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[13] *Theaetetus*, 178b2-4: "Man is the measure of all things".

[14] *Gorgias*, 484c ff.

A question that any sharp reader may put is the following: do all philosophers agree with Socrates and Plato that dialectic -as they understand the idea- is the optimum way to do philosophy? Throughout the history of philosophy we find serious objections in terms of form (that is, in relation to the way in which dialectic is to be practised) and in substance (that is, in relation to what dialectic is). We will analyse some of these objections in the next section.

b) Aristotle's objection

Aristotle thought that Zeno was the inventor of dialectic, but in the sense that Aristotle understood the idea of dialectic. The Aristotelian sense of dialectic is different from Plato's. Aristotle resorts to attributing to Zeno the origins of his new conception of dialectic because he found in Zeno's procedure a historical antecedent for his own conception. Aristotle does not have a unitary idea about what dialectic is. But at least there are some points that can be made clear; and we will try to make these clear in relation to the Aristotelian objection to Plato's idea of dialectic. For Aristotle, dialectic is not central any more and neither is it synonymous with philosophy. Indeed: for Aristotle conversation is much more susceptible to error than solitary thought. Talking about some kinds of fallacies which arise from confused thinking and the inability to make distinctions Aristotle remarks:

"... the deception occurs more commonly when we are inquiring with others than by ourselves (for an inquiry with someone else is carried on by means of words, whereas in our own minds it is carried on quite as much by means of the thing itself); ..." [15]

[15] Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations*, 169a38-40.(translated by E. S. Forster and D. J. Furley, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1992).

As this implies, for Aristotle the scientific act in the ideal case is a solitary act; it is merely a matter for an individual who is face to to face with things. At the same time Aristotle emphasises that dialogue with others just obstructs the direct relationship with things because it mediates them through words.

Moreover, Aristotle states that science does not proceed by question and answer and dialectic is not the method of science.[16] The way that he shows us what his idea of dialectic is, is as follows:

"... Dialectic, however, does proceed by interrogation, whereas, if it aimed at showing something, it would refrain from questions, if not about everything, at any rate about primary things and particular principles; for if the opponent refused to grant these, dialectic would no longer have any basis on which to argue against the objection. Dialectic is at the same time an art of examination; for neither is the art of examination of the same nature as geometry but it is an art which a man could possess even without any scientific knowledge. For even a man without knowledge of the subject can examine another who is without knowledge, if the latter makes concessions based not on what he knows nor on the special principles of the subject but on the consequential facts, which are such that, though to know them does not prevent him from being ignorant of the art in question, yet not to know them necessarily involves ignorance of it. Clearly, therefore, the art of examination is not knowledge of any definite subject, and it therefore follows that it deals with every subject; for all the arts employ also certain common principles."[17]

It is important to add also that Plato confronts Aristotle's objection in *Phaedo* 99d ff.: Plato thinks that dealing with things themselves will not give us a final explanation about what they really are. The reasons that Plato gives are mainly because the "direct contact" with things is just an approach by means of the senses which just blinds us and, without giving us a unitary account about them. We can add that natural scientists have to deal with things, but they finally have to express their theories by means of words. The only difference is that Plato suggests that the starting-point will be words, but words that refer constantly to things. In short: it is clear that Plato's ontology and epistemology are different from Aristotle's.

[16] *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, 172 a15 ff. and *Posterior Analytics* I, *passim.*

[17] Aristotle, *On Sophistical Refutations,* 172 a18-30, (trans. Forster and Furley): ἡ δὲ διαλεκτικὴ ἐρωτητική ἐστιν. εἰ δ' ἐδείκνυεν, εἰ καὶ μὴ πάντα, ἀλλὰ τά γε πρῶτα καὶ τὰς οἰκείας ἀρχὰς οὐκ ἂν ἠρώτα. μὴ διδόντος γὰρ οὐκ ἂν ἔτι εἶχεν ἐξ ὧν ἔτι διαλέξεται πρὸς τὴν ἔνστασιν. ἡ δ' αὐτὴ καὶ πειραστική. οὐδὲ γὰρ ἡ πειραστικὴ τοιαύτη ἐστὶν οἵα ἡ γεωμετρία, ἀλλ' ἣν ἂν ἔχοι καὶ μὴ εἰδώς τις. ἔξεστι γὰρ πεῖραν λαβεῖν καὶ τὸν μὴ εἰδότα τὸ πρᾶγμα τοῦ μὴ εἰδότος, εἴπερ καὶ δίδωσιν οὐκ

For Aristotle, one can clearly conclude that -at least- four things are true: 1. the art of examination does not involve knowledge of any particular subject; 2. the art of examination deals with every subject; 3. it employs certain common principles, and 4. dialectic involves a sort of an art of examination which resorts to interrogation and which does not necessarily imply scientific knowledge.

For Aristotle some kind of use of dialectic and the art of examination are common practices for everybody, even for unscientific people: everybody tries to test those who profess knowledge. The inaccuracy of dialectic and the art of examination resides in the fact that everybody knows what the first principles of science are, but with the difference that scientists express them accurately and common people do not. On the other hand Aristotle gives some value and credibility to dialectic and the dialectician. He thinks that everybody can practice refutation, but only unmethodically. Only with dialectic can you carry out this task methodically, and the man who develops this examination through an art of reasoning is the dialectician.

For Aristotle πειραστική has different meanings: it can be either a kind of dialectic, or an equivalent to dialectic, or an introduction to dialectic. The art of dialectic -Aristotle says- is an art of asking questions, and πειραστική is the same. Πειραστική does not depend on knowledge, but is still a kind of τέχνη. Dialectic in that sense represents the skilled version of *elenchos*. The dialectician is a πειραστικός.[18] In short, dialectic implies πειραστική, but the converse is not true. Previously in *De*

ἐξ ὧν οἶδεν οὐδ' ἐκ τῶν ἰδίων, ἀλλ' ἐκ τῶν ἑπομένων, ὅσα τοιαῦτά ἐστιν ἃ εἰδότα μὲν οὐδὲν κωλύει μὴ εἰδέναι τὴν τέχνην, μὴ εἰδότα δ' ἀνάγκη ἀγνοεῖν. ὥστε φανερὸν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ὡρισμένου ἡ πειραστικὴ ἐπιστήμη ἐστίν. διὸ καὶ περὶ πάντων ἐστί·πᾶσαι γὰρ αἱ τέχναι χρῶνται καὶ κοινοῖς τισίν.

[18] *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, XI, 172a ff.

Sophisticis Elenchis, Aristotle has insisted that the type of examination to which πειραστική belongs is part (μέρος) of dialectic.[19] We can go further: the art of examination is a kind of dialectic, but it restricts itself to examining the man who is ignorant and pretends to know.[20] In a sense examination is a sort of sophistry because it can also be exercised by a man who pretends to know, but is really ignorant. In this sense, for Aristotle the art of examination can degenerate into mere sophistry. Let me explain. If the *elenctic* process can be achieved by people that are ignorant, but pretend to know, the only benefits which Aristotle attributes to this art of examination will be lost. The reason is because it will be an exercise in a vacuum or a futile interchange of ignorance disguised as wisdom which will not lead to anything concrete or clear. That is also the reason why Aristotle thinks that, even when the art of examination is employed by a dialectician, it is so broad that its scientific status is highly restricted and its position in the philosophical hierarchy is low: the dialectician is not dealing with any particular object and, for Aristotle, the final criterion of truth is based on the analysis of particular objects. Indeed, in his *Metaphysics* Aristotle is more forceful on this point:

"... Dialectic treats as an exercise what philosophy tries to understand, and sophistry seems to be philosophy, but is not."[21]

In short: for Aristotle when the art of examination is practised by unskilful people who are ignorant of the subject-matter under discussion, it can degenerate into mere sophistry. The reason is because -in Aristotle's judgement- it is just an erratic interchange of unfounded opinions about any

[19] *Ibid.*, VI, 169 b25.

[20] *Ibid.*, X, 171 b4.

[21] *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 1004 b25, (translated by H. Tredennick, Harvard University Press, 1989): ἔστι δὲ ἡ διαλεκτικὴ πειραστικὴ περὶ ὧν ἡ φιλοσοφία γνωριστική, ἡ δὲ σοφιστικὴ φαινομένη, οὖσα δ'οὔ.

given object. When the art of examination is practiced by skilful people, that is, the dialectician, it can lead to the illumination of the common principles of science. But, it any case, the art of examination and dialectic are not philosophical or scientific activities anymore. Aristotle's project for science and philosophy should be does not consider living oral rational interchanges essential for searching for the truth any more, as Plato did.

Furthermore: Aristotle's idea of dialectic is radically different from Plato's. That too will have repercussions for Aristotle's idea about the proper method of doing philosophy or approaching reality.

What then will have been Aristotle's main objections against Platonic dialectic? 1. Platonic dialectic involves the Socratic *elenchos* which is *ad hominem* and unsystematic. The first charge against Platonic dialectic is its partiality, because it resorts much more to the discussion of particular points of view than to objective questions. 2. It is not completely clear if *elenchos* can be a real method from Aristotle's point of view because Socrates is not, in Aristotle's terms, face to face with things and he cannot therefore make clear what things really are and what sorts of interconnections between them there are. The second charge against Platonic dialectic is its unscientific way of tackling reality. 3. Platonic dialectic, just as an exercise in examination, can be practiced even by amateurs, and it can lead to mere refutation or sophistry. That is, dialectic does not have any positive demonstrative power and it is therefore not a method for discovering the truth. The third charge against Platonic dialectic its is inefficaciousness, insufficiency and inaccuracy as a scientific method for searching for the truth. 4. Platonic dialectic implies a living dialogue or interchange with at least one interlocutor. According to Aristotle, dialogue just complicates and hampers a direct relationship with things because reliance on verbal exchange obstructs link between the subject and the objects. The fourth

charge against Platonic dialectic is its epistemological inappropriateness as a philosophical method.

The aim of Platonic dialectic -according to Plato- is to achieve the most approximate knowledge about any given object through philosophical dialogue and stated in a definition. This philosophical dialogue sometimes involves a process of collection and division. In a way, collection is a sort of induction because you have to gather systematically a group of things which have something in common. That is, perhaps, the reason that the major -and maybe only- two merits that in Aristotle's judgement we can ascribe to the Socratic way of proceeding are inductive arguments and universal definitions, both just concerning the foundation of science, but nothing beyond that.[22]

What answers can we give to Aristotle's objections? 1. Platonic dialectic is not a subjective exercise which aims to test ideas in an unsystematic way, that is, it is not a way of talking and thinking incoherently about casual views. Socrates is not testing his personal *views*; he is testing his own *ideas* or other people's *ideas* or beliefs in a rational and coherent dialogue. Socrates' conception of being systematic involves having a coherent set of ideas and showing reasons to the interlocutors to think about and then, possibly, believe in them. 2. Platonic dialectic shows us, through the act of testing approaches to any given object extracted from reality by means of rational dialogue, if one idea about this object is compatible or incompatible with another idea about it. The methodical exercise of testing approaches to any given real object opens the possibility of searching for the different sorts of interconnections that this object has with everything else. 3. In Platonic dialectic the search for the truth is possible because the objects of thought and dialogue form a coherent system. Somebody who knows the truth, according to the Platonic Socrates,

[22] *Cf. Metaphysics,* 1078 b27 ff.

does not have gaps in his knowledge. Dialectic is a method for arriving at the truth -a method which depends on prior ontological and epistemological assumptions- because the whole process of testing things is with the aim of getting as clear and explicit as possible about the interconnections and disconnections among things. So that at the end, you *know* what can you assert or what can you deny about a given object. 4. Platonic dialectic has its epistemological foundation in the idea that rational verbal interchanges can give us the best explanation about what reality is. Human language may give rise to misunderstandings or misinterpretations, but that does not mean that human communication is *per se* an obstacle to tackling reality. Communication among human beings is a fact and an epistemological starting point.

Equally, Plato's method for searching for the truth by dialectic is positive because Socrates tries to test (or to give reasons) why he thinks the things that he thinks. Plato's idea about what philosophy is implies trust in the capacity of human reason to approach things.

After we have surveyed Aristotle's views on dialectic, it is clear that Plato and Aristotle are worlds apart on this subject. With Aristotle's response to Plato and his new idea of dialectic, the status of dialectic is *a fortiori* reduced. Dialectic will not be synonymous with philosophy; dialectic is not a scientific method of searching for the truth, and particular sciences and philosophy do not proceed by a dialogic process of question and answer, that is, methodical conversations or indeed conversations at all will not be essential to them. The new Aristotelian scientific method of searching for the truth requires just a simple individual who is dealing directly with things.

Aristotle transfers to his new idea of what philosophy and science have to be -*mutatis mutandis*- the job that Plato assigned to dialectic. Let me explain. Plato's and Aristotle's philosophical concerns are similar in the

sense that both think that we can grasp reality by rational means. But Aristotle thought that we can grasp particular things and that they are the starting point of any improvement or clarification, that is, for generalisations and discoveries. Aristotle's main objection to the dialectical method -in the way that he understands dialectic- is that dialectic is just a preamble -and not a necessary one- to science and philosophy.[23] Its benefit consists in in the fact that it can provide access to the general common principles, but it is not a way for discovering the truth. In other words: for Aristotle dialectical method is neutral in relation to the truth. Another thing which it is important to notice is that Aristotle emphasises the import of the inductive method as the scientific method *par excellence.*[24] Deduction always comes after induction. The way that one gets generalisations which end in universal propositions is through particulars. But Aristotle stresses the complementarity of inductive and deductive procedures which leads to a proper demonstration.[25] Plato thought that you cannot answer questions about particulars because they are changeable. That is, if you have only particulars to rely on, you have merely an imperfect concept of things: it would imply just asserting that knowledge is equivalent with sensation. For Plato, particulars themselves do not give you all the elements that you need for achieving a complete knowledge: you need a common principle or common link which gives unity to this plurality. The ground of the being of particulars, in Plato's judgement, is that they are a collection of properties and they are graspable, exclusively in comparison with another collection of properties.[26] In short, and as Plato tries to show us in the *Phaedo* and the

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[23] See J. D. G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic,* Cambridge University Press, 1977, pp. 49-52.

[24] See, *Prior Analytics,* 68b15-29; *Posterior Analytics,* 92a37-38, *Topics,* 105a13-14. See also, T.H. Irwin, *Aristotle's First Principles,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1988, Chapter 2, §§10-15.

[25] See, *Topics,* I, 108a-108b.

[26] See *Republic* V, 476e-477b.

Phaedrus: particulars have a use, they may point the way access towards the forms; they can remind us what forms are. Plato privileges deduction, that is, deduction has priority in relation to proceeding inductively. Yet, one has to collect before dividing.

Despite the fact that Aristotle immediately rejects the idea of dialectic in a Platonic sense, he cannot avoid being Platonic and dialogic. Plato thought that the ideal conditions for doing philosophy were provided by live philosophical dialogue, but his idea is refined enough to include, as a variant of this sort of dialogue, the internal and silent dialogue that every philosopher achieves with himself (διάνοια) in the act of thinking, which also means conversing with other past philosophers, in the present, as a historical but nevertheless interactive dialectic. When any philosopher is thinking or conversing on his (her) own, he or she is not thinking or talking in isolation. His (her) act of thinking is only a retreat -proper and in consonance with the calm that philosophy needs as an act of reflection. Philosophical reflection is also a dialectical act: a conversation.[27] The rationality of the philosophical act implies *per se* a process of communication of ideas to other individuals. The act of knowledge is not confined to one individual and an object: it always involves the must clear and rigorous expression -verbal or written- of a thought to other individuals: the truth is essentialy communicable.[28]

In short: dialectic will not be preeminent in Aristotle thought, but the new way that he proposes for approaching to things scientifically implies a variation of the sense in which Plato understood dialectic, that is, as an internal dialogue with oneself which finally has to be expressed and therefore, communicated. Even more: Aristotle is resorting all the time to

[27] Plato's notion of internal dialectic works because there is a background of external dialectic. See *Charmides* 166 c-d, *Theaetetus*, 189 e-190a; *Sophist*, 263 e, *Philebus* 38 c-39d, *Timaeus*, 37 b-c.

[28] See E. Nicol, *Metafísica de la expresión, ed. cit.*, VI, §23.

dialectic -in the Platonic sense- because his methodological style of exposition of his own hypotheses and theses implies a historical dialogue and constant reference to other philosophers' theses. Anyway, he cannot avoid being Platonicaly dialectical.

c) Two modern objections: Descartes and Husserl

If we can say that Aristotle's objection to Plato's idea of dialectic was clear and openly formulated with the aim of illuminating his own philosophical project, in the case of Descartes and Husserl it is different. In the course of developing their own methodologies they appear indirectly to criticise Platonic dialectic. Their objections are implicit: both, because of the sort of description that they give of the ideal method of doing rigorous thought, present different objections to the Platonic method of doing philosophy.

If we analyse the Cartesian method, it carries the implication that any philosopher needs a deliberate and complete isolation as a condition of thinking and, in his particular case, also to identify an evident and irrefutable starting point as a foundation of all his system. But the strong claim that we make that philosophy is unavoidably dialectical continues to be valid in this case. Descartes' methodical enquiry is an extreme and explicit exemplification of διάνοια or internal dialogue:[29] the absorption or mental engrossment that philosophy requires as a reflexive vocation in the search for the truth. Throughout Descartes' exposition of his method, which seems like an antidialectical position or at least unfriendly to Platonic notions of dialectic, we will show that his position in fact goes on keeping essential elements of the Platonic idea of dialectic. Our larger claim is, of course, that no philosopher can avoid being dialogic.

[29] See notes 2 and 27.

What does Descartes propose as the ideal method for doing philosophy? To answer this question it is worth noticing first the peculiarity of the explicit title of his book devoted to this aim: *Discourse on the method of properly conducting one's reason and of seeking the truth in the sciences.* The title by itself reveals the project as a whole: firstly a disagreement with previous methodologies, secondly a proposal of an accurate and correct way of searching for the truth.

Descartes' epistemological starting point is that all human beings are naturally well endowed with common sense or reason. Because of that, all of us have the same capacity for discerning the true from the false. In Descartes' judgement the main source of error comes from a mistaken application of our thoughts.[30] Descartes insists also that it its better to progress in small steps than to try to do it in a flash and finish totally lost.

Descartes indicates that his method is just *a method* and not *the method par excellence.* He insists that he just wants to propose a safe path which others can follow without causing any harm:

"So my intention is not to teach here the method which everyone must follow if he is to conduct his reason correctly, but only to demonstrate how I have tried to conduct my own. Those who take the responsibility of giving precepts must think themselves more knowledgeable than those to whom they give them, and, if they make the slightest mistake, they are blameworthy. But, putting forward this essay as nothing more than an historical account, or, if you prefer, a fable in which, among certain examples one may follow, one will find also many others which it would be right not to copy, I hope it will be useful for some without being harmful to any, and that my frankness will be well received by all."[31]

[30] See R. Descartes, *Discourse on the method,* translated with an introduction by S. F. Sutcliffe, Penguin, 1968, I, p. 27.

[31] *Ibid.*, I, pp. 28-29.

Descartes describes his philosophical itinerary -*mutatis mutandis*- in a Socratic sort of way. He was a curious child with a longing for learning. He became a man of letters and he thought that by this means he could get a complete knowledge of any practical subject. But as soon as he completed his studies he realised that he was wrong; many doubts and errors assailed him and:

"... the only profit I appeared to have drawn from trying to become educated, was progressively to have discovered my ignorance."[32]

Descartes thinks that philosophy has been cultivated by the best minds throughout its history. However, there is no philosophical thesis at all which cannot be called into question. That is, any philosophical thesis contains a degree of uncertainty. Descartes realised that because there are possibilities of there being different learned opinions about the same object, one no more true than another, from now on, he was going to consider as equivalent to false everything which before was merely probable.[33] Descartes' main objection to probable truth resides in the fact that he considers that other sciences "borrowed" their principles from philosophy, and nothing firm can be built on this uncertain and changeable foundation. He thinks that philosophy needs a real, permanent start which can constitute the general and firm principle for the whole of science.

Descartes also rejects what he calls "false sciences", in which he includes alchemy, astrology and magic, because they involve false promises, superstitious predictions and impostures. He cannot be misled by them just because they are practised by people

[32] *Ibid.*, I, p. 29.

[33] *Cf. ibid.*, I, p. 32.

"... who profess to know more than they do."[34]

Finally, Descartes became disappointed with the study of letters and abandoned them. He decided to get real knowledge from "the great book of life": he was travelling and was mixing with many different ranks of people. His conclusions after this mundane experience are as follows:

"... For it seemed to me that I might find much more truth in the reasonings which each one makes in matters that affect him closely, the result of which must be detrimental to him if his judgement is faulty, than from the speculations of a man of letters in his study which produce no concrete effect and which are of no other consequence to him except perhaps that the further away they are from common sense, the more vanity he will derive from them, because he will have had to use that much more skill and subtlety in order to try to make them seem dialectically probable. And I had always had an extreme desire to learn to distinguish true from false in order to see clearly into my own actions and to walk with safety in this life."[35]

There are some points to make here: 1. Descartes makes a clear epistemological distinction between theoretical reasoning, speculation proper for the man of letters, and pragmatic reasoning, proper for the man of experience. 2. Theoretical reasoning just stays in an abstract world and therefore remains very far away from common sense. Even more: theoretical reasoning involves a personal dialectical technique which pursues useless ends rather than an objective search for the truth, because, as Descartes declares previously, probable truths are extremely fallible, and therefore, ineffective as a starting-point. Descartes uses the term dialectic in a very pejorative sense, that is, as an inefficient method which enables one to reach merely probable conclusions by using persuasion and techniques

[34] *Ibid.*, I, p. 33.

[35] *Ibid.*, I, p. 33.

based on verbal skills.[36] 3. Pragmatic reasoning gives us a sense of the epistemological discernment required for distinguishing the true from the false, and with its base in this, an ethical criterion for seeing clearly in one's actions and for having a safe path in life. With Descartes it is clear that theoretical thought does not have any sense in itself. Theoretical thought is redeemable in so far as it could provide good pragmatic consequences. The new and real epistemological path implies that knowledge is useful because it gives us a concrete, powerful and new ethical criterion[37] for secure action.

Descartes' next methodological step is not to believe in those things which one has been persuaded to accept merely by means of example and custom. He thinks that if you become gradually liberated from this sort of learning you will also be free from many of the mistakes which obscure "the natural light" of human understanding and cause an inability to reason. From this point, Descartes takes a crucial methodological decision which will give a very particular mark to his procedure: to concentrate and study just by himself, using all the powers of his mind to select the steps which he should follow.

Descartes continues his methodological itinerary by talking about the fact that the ideal way to work rigorously is alone. He privileges the solitary work which permits him to avoid any sort of distraction. Also, he reinforces his position in a metaphorical way by saying that any work that is made just by one person is "more beautiful" and "better ordered" because it does requires fewer corrections:

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[36] Despite the fact that Descartes seems to be here again extremely antiplatonic, he continues to resort to an internal and historical dialogue. Nevertheless, his new project of a "pragmatic philosophy" is clearly very far away from the strict Socratic-Platonic idea of what philosophy must be.

[37] We are referring to a "new ethical criterion" in the sense that, for Descartes, the unselfish search for the truth will not be the metaphysical and ethical principle or parameter for a proper philosophical or scientific task. More radically put: with this proposal Descartes broke with the ethical criterion of truth which had distinguished philosophy as an disinterested task for seeking the truth and for promoting a better human life. Descartes' new criterion of truth is based on pragmatic aims. Philosophy and particular sciences main task will be adjusted to a new parameter: to get useful consequences.

"... I spent the whole day shut up in a room heated by an enclosed stove, where I had complete leisure to meditate on my own thoughts. Among these one of the first I examined was that often there is less perfection in works composed of several separate pieces and made by different masters, than in those at which only one person has worked."[38]

Again, this position looks unfriendly to Platonic notions of dialectic. To a certain extent that is true in the sense that Descartes is rejecting live methodological conversations as an ideal way of doing philosophy. But Descartes cannot avoid being dialectical, in a Platonic sense because he is portraying in great detail the intrinsic adventures and internal and historical dialogues that all processes of thinking involve. As we have shown, he has to refer to previous historical philosophical positions in order to defend his theses and to give reasons for rejecting others. Equally, even if it is just a fictional internal "dialogue", he has to converse with himself and to keep before him possible questions, answers and objections which any other interlocutors might put to him in his methodological exposition.

Descartes' main methodological aim is to find certainty in his foundations. He rejects paths that are more an outcome of chance, custom, consensus than a result of reason and certain knowledge. His criterion of truth will be based on four rules: 1. Something will be true only if it is evident, clear and distinct; 2. he will divide and analyse difficulties into many parts with the aim of solving them as well as possible; 3. he will introduce a hierarchical system in his thoughts, starting with the simplest objects and those easiest to understand. He will ascend gradually to the

[38] *Ibid.*, II, p. 35.

most complex objects, 4. he will give complete enumerations and make general reviews in order to certify he has not omitted anything.[39]

Descartes applied his rules to the study of algebra and exercised himself in the practice of them. Eventually, because he was too concentrated on the search for the truth, he realised that he had to practise exactly the opposite, that is, a sort of healthy scepticism which allowed him to arrive at an absolutely indubitable starting-point: to refuse to accept as true anything which he supposes involves reason for doubt. If one continues with this process one will get a final indubitable result:

"... And finally, considering that all the same thoughts that we have when we are awake can also come to us when we are asleep, without any one of them then being true, I resolved to pretend that nothing which had ever entered my mind was any more true than the illusions of my dreams. But immediately afterwards I became aware that, while I decided thus to think that everything was false, it followed necessarily that I who thought thus must be something; and observing that this truth: *I think, therefore I am,* was so certain and so evident that all the most extravagant suppositions of the sceptics were not capable of shaking it, I judged that I could accept it without scruple as the first principle of the philosophy I was seeking."[40]

Descartes proposes methodical doubt as the ideal philosophical method. The *ego* who doubts is the existent *ego cogitans.* This *ego cogitans* constitutes the indubitable philosophical principle. If the *ego cogitans* is the Cartesian starting-point, who is going to be the guarantor that my thoughts on it are true and that you are you and not just a shadow? Because Descartes' starting-point is the *ego cogitans* he has to conclude by deduction that God will be the guarantor that my thoughts are not mere illusions and that you are you. Descartes' position is one of the most

[39] See, *ibid,* II, p. 41.

[40] *Ibid.*, IV, pp. 53-54.

extreme cases in which a philosopher tries to test how the internal and dialogic act of thinking can give us a starting point that can be presumed or taken to be irrefutable. The fact that he arrives at the conclusion that the *ego cogitans* itself is that incontrovertible beginning will give him some ulterior ontological and epistemological complications to explain why I can be certain that reality is really reality and why I can be sure that you are you. Descartes tries to solve these theoretical questions by resorting again to the method of internal philosophical dialogues with himself. In the case of Plato, the existence of reality and the existence of myself and the rest of humanity are just primary evidences from which his philosophical work starts. Ordinary dialogues with other individuals are for Plato just a result of the human condition: we are capable of communication. Philosophical dialogues are for Plato the *conditio sine qua non* for proper philosophical work. Plato considers dialogue essential for philosophical activity because interlocutors constitute the fundamental and evident epistemological element in the search for the truth. Interlocutors always present and represent the necessary challenge that any proposed thesis needs in order to be tested. The act of testing implies the possibility of corrections, emendations and even rejection of the thesis. Plato is convinced that two pairs of eyes "see" more than only one pair of eyes. Ontologically speaking, Plato takes external reality as a fact from which we begin any possible dialogic consideration, that is, reality and what it includes are the objects of our philosophical searches. Descartes cannot share these positions; but he still has shared the essential elements of Platonic dialectic.

The case of Husserl is rather similar to that of Descartes'. In fact he recognises his direct debt to Descartes' method. Husserl's phenomenological method is again applied with the idea of getting an evident or irrefutable starting-point for his complete system. Husserl was working on two main basic principles: 1. Return to things themselves, and

2. philosophy must be a rigorous science. The point is that Husserl, in his search for a clear starting-point, resorts to his famous *epoché* or "putting in brackets". His aim is to grasp the essence of things, leaving out their accidental characteristics. In this process he concludes that the transcendental *ego* is indispensable for the authentic grasping of reality. Again, it seems that for him, dialectic as a live dialogue is methodologically inessential for doing philosophy. However, we will show how Husserl continues to be trapped under one of the senses of the Platonic idea of dialectic as the unavoidable way to philosophise: dialectic as an internal dialogue with yourself and with other past and present philosophers. We will work under the assumption that his methodological itinerary -very similar to Descartes'- and his conclusions, are an outcome of the phenomelogical theory that he has in mind. Husserl's starting point comes from a deliberate epistemological abstraction because, from now on primary eveidences will not be the case anymore. He thought that this methodological resort could provide him grasping the "real core" of any object. His theoretical proposition may be true or false; the undeniable fact is that the process and the conclusion were made in a dialectical process based on διάνοια[41] and historical conversations, that is, an internal dialogue with himself and other philosophers' ideas.

Husserl starts his *Cartesian Meditations* by acknowledging that Descartes' *Meditations* are a prototype of philosophical reflection because they gave a new impulse to transcendental phenomenology. Despite that fact, Husserl rejects the content of the Cartesian philosophy. He will explain the motives of his formal Cartesian affiliation, in terms of method, and the motives of his material rejection of some aspects of the content and conclusions of the *Cartesian Meditations.*

[41] See notes 2 and 27.

Husserl accepts the Cartesian *ego cogitans* as an indubitable starting-point. He accepts also Descartes' aim of looking for a comprehensive philosophical science which gives the real foundations to scientific knowledge.[42] That is, there is a necessity of a radical new beginning for philosophy:

"... Descartes, in fact, inaugurates an entirely new kind of philosophy. Changing its total style, philosophy takes a radical turn: from naïve Objectivism to transcendental subjectivism -which, with its ever new but always inadequate attempts, seems to be striving toward some necessary final form, wherein its true sense and that of the radical transmutation itself might become disclosed. Should not this continuing tendency imply eternal significance and, for us, a task imposed by history itself, a great task in which we are summoned to collaborate?"[43]

Husserl thinks that western philosophy had a unitary history in its methods and problems, that there was a sort of clear split in the nineteenth century when religion was recognized just as a human and outward convention and when modern men of intellect perceived the necessity for an autonomous philosophy and science guided exclusively by scientific insights. Husserl remarks also the crisis of philosophy in his time that is expressed in the proliferation of "philosophical literature" lacking in rigour and unity. In Husserl's judgement this "unhappy present" is rather similar to the situation that Descartes came across in his time. He suggests putting an end to this vast and spurious philosophical literature and starting with a new set of *meditationes de prima philosophia.*[44]

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[42] See E. Husserl, *Cartesian Meditations. An introduction to phenomenology,* translated by D. Carins, Kluwer, 11th impression, Dordrecht, 1997, Introduction, §1, pp. 1-3.

[43] *Ibid.*, Introduction, §2, p. 4.

[44] See *ibid.*, Introduction, §2, p. 5.

Husserl thinks that in recent times there is a sort of persistent desire and encouraging renaissance for a "fully alive philosophy". He adds that the real and fruitful renaissance will be that which revives the spirit of the Cartesian *Meditations:* not in adopting its content but in renewing its strong and radical spirit of self-reliance to validate this radicalness, that is, the essential and inevitable regress to the *ego.* Only with this regress can philosophy overcome the naïveté and aberration of earlier ways of philosophising -including Descartes'.[45] This purifiying operation is the first step which leads to transcendental phenomenology.

The guiding idea of Husserl's first meditation is based on Descartes: the establishment of a completely genuine, fundamental and all-embracing science, ridding ourselves of the different convictions that we have had, including all given sciences, and, Husserl adds, even of our idea of science itself, even of its possibility. We do not have to presuppose anything. In fact Husserl criticises Descartes' assumption that the ideal model of science has to be based on the deductive and axiomatic scheme of mathematics and geometry. Descartes just postulates his axiom of the total certainty of his *ego* and the axiomatic principles inherent in the *ego.* Instead of that Husserl proposes the following:

"None of that shall determine our thinking. As beginning philosophers we do not as yet accept any normative ideal of science and only so far as we produce one newly for ourselves can we ever have such an ideal."[46]

Following in Descartes' steps, Husserl proposes a process of clearness or cognition which allows us to arrive at primary irrefutable evidence about what science is, that is, and in Husserl's terms, becoming

[45] See *ibid.*, Introduction, §2, p. 6.

[46] *Ibid.*, I, §3, p8.

immersed in science *"qua noematic phenomenon"*.[47] With this new methodological principle the scientist grounds his judgements and nothing will be a matter of "scientific knowledge" until he can corroborate that it adjusts to *absolute* primary and certain evidences.

Husserl considers that there are grades of evidence. You arrive at apodictic evidence when after its submission to critical reflection this evidence remains absolutely certain and *its not being is absolutely inconceivable.*[48]

Husserl's next methodological step -again following Descartes' model- consists in stating that the evidence of the factual existence of the world is not apodictic. He considers that the being of the world as a universal basis, experience or obvious matter of fact has been a "naïve acceptance". For him it will be henceforth merely an "acceptance-phenomenon".[49] Husserl mounts the following hypothesis: it could be a being that is prior to the world which constitutes the real presupposed basis for the existence of the world.

Taking the Cartesian *ego cogitans* Husserl makes -he says- the big change of direction in the right manner which leads to transcendental subjectivity: the *ego cogitans* will be the ultimate, apodictic and certain starting point for judgements and the basis of any fundamental philosophy:

"Let us consider. As radically meditating philosophers, we now have neither a science that we accept nor a world that exists for us . Instead of simply existing for us - that is, being accepted naturally by us in our experiential believing in its existence- the world is for us only something that claims being. Moreover, that affects the intramundane existence of all other Egos, so rightly we should no longer speak communicatively, in the plural. Other men than I, and brute animals, are data of

[47] See *ibid.*, I, §4.

[48] See *ibid.*, I, §6, pp. 15-16.

[49] See *ibid.*, I, §7, p. 18.

experience for me only by virtue of my sensuous experience of their bodily organisms; and, since the validity of this experience too is called in question, I must not use it. Along with other Egos, naturally, I lose all the formations pertaining to sociality and culture. In short, not just corporeal Nature but the whole concrete surrounding life-world is for me, from now on, only a phenomenon of being, instead of something that is.[50]

This transcendental ego considers life as it is *for me:* the ego who philosophises and practises this phenomenological abstention can grasp the most "original originality", getting rid of intuitions. Phenomenological abstention means that everything is retained in the consciousness, but merely as a phenomenon.

Husserl insists that this "phenomenological *epoché*" and "parenthesising" of the objective world does not leads to a vacuous state. On the contrary, Husserl thinks that this process permits us to situate everything as it really is from the perspective of the I, that is, phenomena as phenomena. Equally the *epoché* is the proper fundamental and universal method for apprehending myself purely: that is, as an Ego who possesses his own conscious life which has meaning in the way, and by the way, that objective world is presented for me and as it is for me. Following Descartes' assertions, Husserl states that the world is the one that exists for a conscious mind as a result of his *cogitationes.* There is a prior being itself or a transcendental being of the pure ego and his *cogitationes* which antecedes the natural being of the world:

"... The fundamental phenomenological method of transcendental epoché, because it leads back to this realm, is called transcendental-phenomenological reduction."[51]

[50] See *ibid.*, I, §8, pp. 18-19.

[51] *Ibidem*, I, §8, p. 21.

Husserl thinks that the next step is whether this reduction really makes possible this irrefutable or *apodictic* evidence of the being of transcendental subjectivity and to what extent it is possible that the transcendental ego be deceived about himself. In order to answer these questions, Husserl addresses some criticism to Descartes. He thinks that Descartes' failure was due to his lack of attachment to the radicalism of the principle of pure "intuition" or evidence: not accepting anything beyond the field of the *ego cogitans* in *epoché*. That is the reason that Descartes could not grasp the authentic transcendental subjectivity which leads to the genuine transcendental philosophy:[52]

> By phenomenological epoché I reduce my natural human Ego and my psychic life -the realm of my *psychological self-experience*- to my transcendental-phenomenological Ego, the realm of *transcendental-phenomenological self-experience.* The Objective world, the world that exists for me, that always has and always will exist for me, the only world that ever can exist for me- this world, with all its Objects, I said, derives its whole sense and its existential status, which it has for me, from me myself, *from me as the transcendental Ego,* the Ego who comes to the fore only with transcendental-phenomenological epoché."[53]

The concept of *transcendental Ego* and its correlate, the concept of the transcendent, derives exclusively from this state of meditative philosophy. My *transcendental Ego* is independent of the world, and the world -including any worldly Object- is not part of my Ego. Nevertheless, anything worldly acquires sense just from my own evidence, that is, my grounding acts. Therefore all the philosophical problems which emerge from this correlation are called transcendental-philosophy.

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[52] See *ibidem*, I, §10, pp. 24-25.

[53] *Ibidem*, I, §11, p. 26.

Recapitulating: Husserl's idea about what a new real and scientific philosophy must be implies an authentic process of exploration and internal and historical dialogue, above all with Descartes and some of his contemporaries. In that sense he continues to keep the Platonic model of dialectic, in one of its possible variants. Husserl's dialogue is with Descartes and some of his contemporaries. In that sense he goes on keeping a kind of Platonic dialogue, but carried on sequentially. Nevertheless, again, as I pointed out in Descartes' case, it is a fact that any philosophy, like Husserl's which proposes the *ego* as starting-point can only with difficulty and avoid a solipsism. In that sense Husserl's philosophy is deeply antisocratic and antiplatonic. Equally the ontological and epistemological split that Husserl proposes between the world as phenomenon and the word as *noumenon,* giving more credibility and scientific status to the latter, puts him in a position which denigrates what is normally taken as primary evidence as a safe beginning. Moreover: it is one thing to try to find an irrefutable beginning for your thoughts, but it is another to deny primary evidence which constituted by *matters* of fact and basic principles of knowledge and existence. Let me explain: if you deny that reality is reality, that it is a fact that there is reality, that we share a common space-temporal reality which can be understood rationally by human beings it seems that for you any phenomenon has a lesser important ontological status -even if it is just a provisional or methodological move. In that sense you are giving a particular colouring to your appreciation of what reality is. It becomes more important how individuals construct reality than how reality is.

In short: we have been trying to expose the similarities and dissimilarities of Descartes' and Husserl's methods with the aim of emphasising the differences in relation to the Platonic methodological starting point: dialogue which implies the primary evidence of the existence

of interlocutors and the world. That does not mean that Plato's position shows a naïve attitude in relation to philosophical knowledge. It simply means that his ontological, epistemological and methodological starting points are clearly different. However, we insist, Plato was refined enough in his idea about what dialectic has to be to include as a variant of this ideal live dialogue, the reflective process of philosophical "retreat": the art of thinking with yourself and the extension of this dialogue to any other philosopher, past and present.

Descartes and Husserl retain the essential characteristics and advantages of Platonic dialectic. Their internal dialogues contain a fictional interlocutor which provides us with the fundamental elenctic process to which any thesis given has to be submitted. That is, in this internal dialogue you will provide an imaginary person who takes part in a philosophical conversation and who can put to you different questions, answers, propose agreements, make objections which any real interlocutor could make to you with the aim of testing your proposed thesis. Also, Descartes and Husserl continue to keep up a historical conversation with their predecessors and with contemporary philosophers -even if the outcome is the rejection of their ideas.

After this long introduction we are now in a position to start tackling two basic points about the idea of dialectic: its etymology and origins and its literary antecedents. These are the contents of the following part.

PART I. ON THE IDEA OF DIALECTIC

We will put forward our main thesis by resorting to three sources of foundation:

a) A philological and historical-literary foundation in Greek epic, lyric, and tragedy to show the literary antecedents of dialectic and other related activities (Part I);

b) A historical-philosophical foundation in the history of philosophy to show the philosophical roots and development of philosophical dialectic itself (Part II);

c) A theoretical-practical philosophical foundation. This philosophical approach will be metaphysical, that is, ontological and epistemological, and ethical. The aim is to trace the unity of the Socratic-Platonic dialectic which can be illustrated in Socrates' *elenchos* and *aporia* in the early dialogues, the *Phaedrus* and a sequence of other passages which specifically deal, with dialectic particularly in Plato's *Sophist* (Part III).

The first Part will describe the idea of dialectic in terms of its etymological and literary origins.

First of all we will try to explore the different meanings and the evolution of the idea of dialectic as a term in itself and as a concept (§2). Secondly, in §3 we will develop some ideas about the literary antecedents of dialectic.

§2. ETYMOLOGY AND ORIGINS OF THE WORD DIALECTIC

The aim of this general philological exposition is based on the conviction that the process of evolution and gestation of any concept involves a history which is potentially capable of giving us some clues about its ordinary uses

-normal- and also provides some understanding of its prephilosophical -historical and literary- and philosophical uses. We are aware that words and ideas only exceptionally have a linear evolution. In short, language typically involves randomness and disorder and one cannot resort just to etymologies as the only and final foundation of an idea. Despite this fact we think that in this particular case, etymologies can provide us with some light.

The second point that we would like to make is that Plato is not wholly inventing the concept of διαλέγεσθαι because he was using a term which already had a variety of uses and applications. We can say that Plato, taking advantage of this word invents, perhaps, the term διαλεκτική (τέχνη) (just as he invents the term πολιτική) and creates with it a new philosophical use and a whole systematic conception of philosophy as dialectic. In that act of creation consists his originality.

It is highly probable that the term dialectic, *i.e.*, ἡ διαλεκτική (τέχνη) would have been invented by Plato on the same model as *e.g.* ῥητορική. The history of dialectic as a philosophical concept starts with Plato. The important point is to try to track down the linguistic and conceptual genesis of the notion of διαλέγεσθαι.[1]

In Plato the verb διαλέγεσθαι and the noun διάλεκτος mean communication, or a certain kind of talking. The word διαλέγεσθαι and its cognates διάλογος and διαλεκτικός are recurrent throughout his works. But as we shall see,we can find some antecedents of the Platonic use of this group of words in Homer, Herodotus, Archilochus, Sappho, Alcaeus, Xenophon and Thucydides

Grammarians like Meillet-Vendryes, Schwyzer-Debrunner, and Frisk conclude that if we analyse the etymological structure of the verb

[1] Concerning to the topic of the etymology and origins of the word dialectic it is worth consulting L. Sichirollo, *Διαλέγεσθαι-Dialektik. Von Homer bis Aristoteles,* Georg Olms Verlagbuchhandlung, Hidelsheim, 1966, II, pp. 18-33, and his *La dialettica,* Instituto Editoriale Internazionale, Milano, 1973, I, pp. 13-24. Some of my examples come from Sichirollo.

διαλέγειν/διαλέγεσθαι it contains the following: 1. the root δια, equivalent to the latin *dis* which expresses the idea of division into two, of distribution and differentiation, but at the same time of complementarity. The Attic use of δια expresses the idea of emulation and completion and above all, the convergence of two subjects in an action with reciprocal influence; so δια/κελεύομαι expresses the idea of mutual encouragement or reciprocal exhortation, δια/βοάομαι means to shout to somebody in a competition.[2] 2. The root λεγ- originally implies the sense of calculating and dividing a quantity. It is only later that the verb acquires its well-known meaning of talking.

The noun λόγος comes to express the idea of a thing said or a spoken item. A second meaning of λόγος gives the idea of a thought that is expressed in language. Equally, λόγος has the meaning of number, calculation, proportion and analogy, and perhaps by a sort of derivation from this meaning λόγος comes to give the sense of reason. The idea of λόγος as word or as reason or as both is the most well known throughout Greek philosophy.[3] It is interesting also that Homer uses the word λόγος in the plural to express the idea of artful or scheming uses of words when Odysseus is talking to Calypso; and the idea of "persuasive words" when Patroclus distracts the injured Eurypylus from his pain.[4]

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[2] See Meillet-Vendryès, *Traité de grammare compareé*, Paris, 1948, §§455, 521 ff., 782 ff., and 822. Schwyzer-Debrunner, *Griechische Grammatik*, Volume II, München, 1950, pp. 448-449. Frisk, *Griechisches Etymologisches Wöterbhuch*, Volume I, p. 383, 1973. P. Chantraine, *La formation des noms en grec ancien*, Champion, Paris, 1933, pp. 18, 20.

[3] We are not trying to claim a fixed sense of the word λόγος at all. We are aware that this idea is untenable. On this topic, see C. Ramnoux, *Héraclite ou l'homme entre les choses et les mots*, Les Belles Lettres, 10me édition, Paris, 1968.

[4] Sichirollo (1973), p. 16: "... Omero, nei due soli luoghi in cui *logos* ricorre, al plurale, è estremamente significativo. *Odissea*, I 59: Calipso cerca di far dimenticare Itaca a Odisseo con *discorsi artificiali*; *Iliade*, XV 393: con *parole abili* Patroclo distrae dal dolore Euripilo ferito. Sono dunque presenti gli espedienti oratori della sofistica e gli ulteriori sviluppi razionali. All'alba della sua storia *logos* evoca un *calcolo*, una *stima, conte e profitto.*"

The fact that the word λόγος involves the idea of argumentative or rational talk and the idea of a word which somehow corresponds with the thing named will be crucial for Plato's dialectical thesis.[5]

Focussing again on the word διαλέγειν/διαλέγεσθαι: διαλέγειν keeps the original meaning of the verb διαλέγεσθαι, that is, to choose or to select from a group, to collect from a previous process of picking out. Herodotus uses the word in this sense:

"Xerxes, having entrusted Artemisia with the duty of conducting his sons to Ephesus, sent for Mardonius and told him to pick the troops he wanted, ..."[6]

Xenophon uses the verb διαλέγεσθαι to characterise Socrates' approach, that is, the method of deliberation and ending in possible common agreement through a process of discernment (διαλέγοντας):[7]

"... The very word 'discussion' (διαλέγεσθαι), according to him, owes its name to the practice of meeting together for a common deliberation, *sorting* (διαλέγοντας) things according to their kinds ..."[8]

Xenophon gives us, in a passage to be cited below, what may be an interesting historical clue. It is a fact that the term διαλέγεσθαι implies the idea of discussion, but a particular kind of discussion: it is not a polemical discussion, but a face to face encounter which has the aim of deliberating

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[5] It is also worth noticing that the idea of λόγος with the meaning of to discuss, to consult on a point or to realise something appears in Herodotus repeatedly in expressions as λόγον ἑωυτῷ διδοναι and some others; see I, 34; I, 97; III, 45; III, 76, VIII, 9. See Plato, *Sophist*, 261c-263b.

[6] Herodotus, VIII, 107, (translated by A. de Sélincourt, Penguin, 1996): Ξέρξης δὲ ὡς τοὺς παῖδας Ἀρτεμισίῃ ἐπέτρεψε ἀπάγειν ἐς Ἔφεσον, καλέσας Μαρδόνιον ἐκέλευσέ μιν τῆς στρατιῆς διαλέγειν τοὺς βούλεται, ...; see also CXIII, 3.

[7] Sichirollo -see Sichirollo (1973), p. 18- indicates that the figurative use of the verb διαλέγεσθαι involves the idea of "expressing to somebody", of "discussing and expecting and explanation" with the aim of getting a reciprocal understanding from a common starting point.

[8] Xenophon, *Memorabilia*, IV, 5, 12, (translation by E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, with modifications).

carefully about any given subject and clarifying it as much as possible. It is clear that Plato developed a very original sense of the term διαλέγεσθαι and built on a dialogic idea of philosophy in form and content; here (whatever may be the relationship between Xenophon's *Memorabilia* and Plato's dialogues) Xenophon glimpses two of the key meanings of διαλέγεσθαι, that is, as partnership or reciprocal discussion and as sorting out according to kinds which will be central to Platonic description of dialectic. Xenophon's full testimony is as follows:

"And thus, Socrates said, men become supremely good and happy and skilled in discussion (διαλέγεσθαι). The very word 'discussion' (διαλέγεσθαι), according to him, owes its name to the practice of meeting together for common deliberation, *sorting* (διαλέγοντας) things according to their kinds: and therefore one should be ready and prepared for this and be zealous for it; for it makes for excellence, leadership and skill in discussion.

I will try also to show how he encouraged his companions to become skilled in discussion. Socrates held that those who know what any given thing is can also expound it to others; on the other hand, those who do not know are misled themselves and mislead others. For this reason he never gave up considering with his companions what any given thing is."[9]

We can exemplify the use of διαλέγεσθαι in some passages from various genres of literature.

First Homer, in the *Iliad,* says:[10]

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[9] *Ibid.,* IV, 5, 12-VI, 1, (translation by E. C. Marchant and O. J. Todd, with modifications): Καὶ οὕτως ἔφη ἀρίστους τε καὶ εὐδαιμονεστάτους ἄνδρας γίγνεσθαι καὶ διαλέγεσθαι δυνατωτάτους. ἔφη δὲ καὶ τὸ διαλέγεσθαι ὀνομασθῆναι ἐκ τοῦ συνιόντας κοινῇ βουλεύεσθαι διαλέγοντας κατὰ γένη τὰ πράγματα·δεῖν οὖν πειρᾶσθαι ὅτι μάλιστα πρὸς τοῦτο ἑαυτὸν ἕτοιμον παρασκευάζειν καὶ τούτου μάλιστα ἐπιμελεῖσθαι· ἐκ τούτου γὰρ γίγνεσθαι ἄνδρας ἀρίστους τε καὶ ἡγεμονικωτάτους καὶ διαλεκτικωτάτους.

Ὡς δὲ καὶ διαλεκτικωτέρους ἐποίει τοὺς συνόντας, πειράσομαι καὶ τοῦτο λέγειν. Σωκράτης γὰρ τοὺς μὲν εἰδότας, τί ἕκαστον εἴη τῶν ὄντων, ἐνόμιζε καὶ τοῖς ἄλλοις ἂν ἐξηγεῖσθαι δύνασθαι· τοὺς δὲ μὴ εἰδότας οὐδὲν ἔφη θαυμαστὸν εἶναι αὐτούς τε σφάλλεσθαι καὶ ἄλλους σφάλλειν· ὧν ἕνεκα σκοπῶν σὺν τοῖς συνοῦσι, τί ἕκαστον εἴη τῶν ὄντων, οὐδέποτ' ἔληγε.

[10] We emphasise the Homeric use of internal dialogue just to show that there is a literary antecedent for the same idea in Plato.

"Now Odysseus, the famous spearman, was left himself, and none of the Argives stood by him, as fear had taken hold of them all, In dismay he spoke to his own great heart: 'What will become of me now? A great dishonour if I turn and run in fear of their numbers: but worse if I am caught isolated -the son of Kronos has put the rest of the Danaans to flight. But what need for this debate in my heart?(τίη ... διελέξατο θυμός ;) I know that it is cowards who keep clear of fighting while the brave man in battle has every duty to stand his ground in strength, and kill or be killed.'"[11]

The context of the use of διαλέγεσθαι here provides clear connections with the philosophical use: the character, in a soliloquy -which implies an internal dialogue with himself- is in a personal dilemma of consciousness when he has to take a decision which always implies the combination of necessity and freedom. In the other example in Homer, the context illustrates also these moments of tension, preceding the taking of a difficult decision: the importance of the act of self-reflexion of the character, his internal dialogue, the consideration of the alternative; the pros and cons:

"... When Agenor saw the approach of Achilleus, sacker of cities, he stood his ground, but his heart was in a turmoil as he waited there. In dismay he spoke to his own great herat: 'What am I to do? If I run from mighty Achilleus along the way where the others are crowding in terror, he will catch me even so, and butcher a coward. But if I leave them to be drive on by Achilleus son of Peleus, and run by another way away from the walls to the Ilian plain, until I reach the spurs of Ida and can hide in the bushes: then in the evening I could return to Ilios after washing in the river and drying off the sweat -but what need for this debate in my heart (τίη ... διελέξατο θυμός)? He may see me as I make my way to the plain away from the city, and chase after me and

[11] Homer, XI, 401-410 (translated by M. Hammond, Penguin, 1987): Ὠιώθη δ' Ὀδυσεὺς δουρικλυτός, οὐδέ τις αὐτῷ Ἀργείων παρέμεινεν, ἐπεὶ φόβος ἔλλαβε πάντας· ὀξθήσας δ' ἄρα εἶπε πρὸς ὃν μεγαλήτορα θυμόν· 'ὤ μοι ἐγώ, τί πάθω ; μέγα μὲν κακὸν αἴ κε φέβωμαι πλθὺν ταρβήσας· τὸ δὲ ῥίγιον αἴ κεν ἁλώω μοῦνος· τοὺς δ' ἄλλους Δαναοὺς ἐφόβησε Κρονίων. ἀλλὰ τίη μοι ταῦτα φίλος διελέξατο θυμός ; οἶδα γὰρ ὅττι κακοὶ μὲν ἀποίχονται πολέμοιο, ὃς δέ κ' αριστεύῃσι μάχῃ ἔνι, τὸν δὲ μάλα χρεὼ ἑστὰμεναι κρατερῶς, ἤ τ' ἔβλητ' ἤ τ' ἔβαλ' ἄλλον'.

catch me with the speed of his legs. And then there will be no escaping death -he is too strong, stronger than any man. But suppose I go to face him in front of the city...'"[12]

In accordance with the origins of λόγος and λέγειν the Homeric use of διαλέγομαι implies the notion of reflexion, of logical discernment, of thinking and "calculating" possibilities. It is a first seed that makes explicit the rational process that any mature deliberation and decision involve: the dialectic or internal dialogue of choosing, of confronting situations.

In Greek lyric the word διαλέγεσθαι is used rarely. The following cases are illustrative but they do not give us any particular clue for our case. We have three examples. The first one is in Archilochus:

"Charilaüs son of Erasmon, I'll tell thee a droll thing, thou much the dearest of my comrades, and the hearing of it shall delight the . . .

to love him though hateful and not talk with . . ."[13]

The second one is in Sappho:

"I talked with you in a dream, Cyprogeneia."[14]

The third one is in Alcaeus; I cite it with some of its context, which simply suggests the sense of friendly conversation

"Come, with gracious spirit hear our prayer, and rescue us from these hardships and from grievous exile; and let their Avenger pursue the son of Hyrrhas, since once we

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[12] *Ibid*, XXI, 550-570. See also XXII, 122 and 385.

[13] φιλέειν στυγνόν περ ἐόντα μηδὲ διαλέγεσθαι. *Fragment* 107-108 (Diehl) in *Greek Elegy and Iambus*, Volume II, (translated by J. M. Edmonds, Hainemann/Harvard, London/Cambridge, 1979).

[14] 134e (L-P) in *Greek Lyric. Sappho and Alcaeus* Volume I (translated by D. Campbell, Harvard, London/Cambridge, 1994): ζά <τ'> ἐλεξάμαν ὄναρ, Κυπρογένηα.

swore, cutting . . . , never (to abandon?) any or our comrades, but either to die at the hands of men who at that time came against us and to lie clothed in earth, or else to kill them and rescue the people from their woes. But Pot-belly did not talk to their hearts; he recklessly trampled the oaths underfoot and devours our city[15] . . . not lawfully . . . grey . . .written(?) . . . Myrsilus."[16]

Turning now to Herodotus' case we may notice that when he starts his description of the Ionian region he uses the word διαλέγεσθαι in referring to the fact that many people from this place speak the same language. This idea implies that talking the same language makes possible a reciprocal understanding because a common language gives unity in conversation to different individuals. It is not accidental that when Herodotus mentions that not everybody speaks the same language, he refers to this fact using a different word:

"These Ionians to whom the Panionium belongs had the good fortune to establish their settlements in a region which enjoys a better climate than any other we know of. It does not resemble what is found either further north, where the weather is both too hot and too dry. There are four different dialects of the Ionic language, distributed as follows(γλῶσσαν δὲ οὐ τὴν αὐτὴν οὗτοι νενομίκασι, ἀλλὰ τρόπους τέσσερας παραγωγέων): the most southerly of the Ionian towns is Miletus, with Myrus to the north of it, and then Priene, these three being in Caria and speaking the same dialect (κατὰ ταὐτὰ διαλεγόμεναι σφίσι). Ephesus, Colophon, Lebedus, Teos, Clazomenae, and Phocaea are in Lydia, and share a common dialect completely distinct from (ὁμολογέουσι κατὰ γλῶσσαν οὐδέν) what is spoken at the places previously mentioned. There are three other Ionian settlements, two being the islands of Samos and Chios and one, Erythrae, a mainland town. The two latter use the same dialect (κατὰ τὠυτὸ διαλέγονται), Samos a peculiar one of its own."[17]

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[15] κήνων ὁ φύσγων οὐ διελέξατο πρὸς θῦμον ἀλλὰ βραϊδίως πόσιν ἔ]μβαις ἐπ' ὀρκίοισι δάπτει τὰν πόλιν ἄμμι δέδ[.] . . [.] . ί . αις.

[16] 129(L-P), (M. Edmonds' translation).

[17] Herodotus I, 142 (De Sélincourt's translation). See also III, 50-52. Sichirollo mentions (see Sichirollo (1973), p. 22) that Gorgias in his *Defence of Palamedes* alludes to the idea of discussing when he is

In Thucydides the only use of the word διαλέγεσθαι is in a context of persuasion:

"Next day, alarmed as they were, the Four Hundred still held a meeting in the Council Chamber. The hoplites in Piraeus released Alexicles, whom they had arrested, pulled down the fortification, and marched to the theatre of Dionysus near Munychia, where they grounded arms and held an assembly at which it was decided to march to the city. They did so at once, and halted again in the Anaceum. Here they were met by people who had been chosen for the purpose by the Four Hundred, and these people came up and spoke to them individually, trying to persuade (ἀνὴρ ἀνδρὶ διελέγοντό τε καὶ ἔπειθον) those whom they saw to be reasonable persons not to proceed any further themselves and to help hold back the others. They said that they would publish the names of the Five Thousand and that the Four Hundred would be chosen from them in rotation, just as the Five Thousand should decide: they begged them meanwhile not to take any action which might destroy the state or let it slip into into the hands of the enemy."[18]

This brief philological approach to the use of the word διαλέγεσθαι shows us the variety of its meanings and applications in different contexts. The point at issue is also that Plato assumed this philological legacy and created with it an entire philosophical project.

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referring to the fact of talking to your adversary or the act of demanding an answer. In those cases he uses the word διαλέγεσθαι and its cognates; but when Palamedes is addressing to the judge from whom he is not demanding an answer he uses the verb εἰπεῖν. See Gorgias, 11a (D-K): 6, 11, 15, **22**, 28.

[18] Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian* War, VIII, 93 (translated by R. Warner, Penguin, 1972). The context and use of Thucydides' idea of persuasion remind one of Plato's *Cratylus*, specifically 390c-391a3 in which Plato describes the dialectician as the man who knows how to ask and answer questions, and the Socratic task of "persuasion". Hermogenes: "I don't know how to oppose you, Socrates. It isn't easy for me suddenly to change my opinion, though. I think you would be more likely to persuade me if you show me just what this natural correctness of names you're talking about consists in" (C. D. C. Reeve's translation): Οὐκ ἔχω, ὦ Σώκρατες, ὅπως χρὴ πρὸς ἃ λέγεις ἐναντιοῦσθαι. ἴσως μέντοι οὐ ῥᾴδιόν ἐστιν οὕτως ἐξαίφνης πεισθῆναι, ἀλλὰ δοκῶ μοι ὧδε ἂν μᾶλλον πείθεσθαι, εἴ μοι δείξειας ἥντινα φῂς εἶναι τὴν φύσει ὀρθότητα ὀνόματος.

We have now to clarify the content of the historical literary antecedents of Plato's dialectic which -in our judgement- are present in Greek epic, lyric and tragic poetry.

§3. LITERARY ANTECEDENTS OF DIALECTIC: GREEK EPIC, LYRIC AND TRAGEDY

The main thesis of this Section is the following: human beings are ontologically and constitutively incomplete, insufficient, relative. Because of their essential insufficiency, men try to find different means of completion, of relationships, of interchanges. One of the ideal means to try to make up for this insufficiency is conversation, dialogues. To become aware of this incompleteness took time, and so too to grasp it in a written form. *The first written form of human self-consciousness was poetic.* Greek poetry was one of the most eminent examples of this poetic awareness. Homeric, Hesiodic and lyric poetic consciousness is an heroic and tragic consciousness: man is a suffering and mortal being, a limited being, but he has the chance of opening vital possibilities to become better or to achieve self-improvement. This tragic awareness appears in tragedy as a consciousness of the human condition captured in spoken/written dialogue which is a literary and dialectical consciousness: we are inquisitive and responsible beings.[19] Greek poetic consciousness is a humanistic one which reaches its highest point in the crystallisation of an ethical consciousness in Socrates and Plato.

The reason that we have gone so far back in trying to trace the antecedents of dialectic is because the Platonic dialogue portrays not only what philosophy is but what humanity must be. The Socratic-Platonic idea

[19] It is generally accepted that the Homeric tradition was originally an oral one. The point is that at a given moment it became a written tradition and we will take it as that.

of philosophy as dialogue is a humanistic project: philosophy is a living method of learning how to become a better human being.

In my judgement we can find two sorts of dialogues in Greek literature: metaphorical and actual. Both sorts of dialogue show us a kind of human search for completion through dialogue. The metaphorical sense of dialogue is present in Greek epic and lyric, and answers to a deep need for communication, sharing and internalising values. That is, the need for dialogue has its roots in human nature. Actual dialogue is present in tragedy and particularly debates in tragedy that resemble those in a law-court. Platonic dialogue has its roots in this actual dialogue, but because of Plato's humanistic preoccupations, the metaphorical senses of dialogue represent an important antecedent of his idea of philosophy.

a) Epic

Starting with Homer, we will make four main claims: 1. Homer portrays in his poems the tragedy that human consciousness involves and a way to transcend it; 2. Homer includes a model of written dialogue. The importance of Homer's poems resides too in the poems themselves: the poet, who is in dialogue with a reader and the poet who portrays people in dialogue.[20] The act of completion of human nature is double: in the written act and in the effect that its content produces in the community; 3. Homer understands and portrays in his poems what an internal dialogue means; and 4. Homer is aware that two people are better than just one in any human enterprise.

We start with Homeric heroism because it pictures the desire for self-improvement as an eminent way of overcoming human beings' incompleteness. Heroism represents also in its desire to overcome human

[20] Obviously tragedy will be more interesting in relation to this particular aspect.

insufficiency a moment of self-awareness. Heroism in Homer has always a communitarian context: to be a hero implies the act of being seen by others performing great deeds. Homer represents this heroism in two central figures: Achilles and Odysseus.

The *Iliad* is a poetic presentation of men as the locus of possibilities. Achilles is the hero *par excellence* because he assumes his human condition consciously and with intensity as the fact and challenge of life. Achilles also has the mark of a man of excellence for his deeds. It is because of Achilles' human sense of his own honour (τιμή) that he reacts furiously against Agamemnon. The reason for his choleric reaction is that Achilles feels that this sense of honour has been transgressed: he is losing his status. It is necessary to remind ourselves that for the Greeks any word given under oath implies honour.[21] Equally, Achilles feels proud of being an authentic man, as for him the individual who holds one opinion but expresses the opposite is obnoxious.[22] This dialogue between Achilles and Agamemnon is central because it is a prelude to what Homer will present throughout his poem and what Homer's literary intentions and messages to his audience will be. In this initial presentation Homer is portraying his characters in an exchange of words which permits us to appreciate their personalities. At the same time, Homer is stressing the importance and the force of words themselves. The gift of speech is fundamental: 1. it is the way to express any thought; 2. it is the way to complete ourselves by expressing these thoughts to other people; 3. it is the way to make agreements; 4. it is even the way to express hostility. 5. As "entertaining a public" Homer is communicating his key message to humanity: the spoken word is the strongest power that human beings possess. When it is used well it can provide us with the best means of communion with others and of making up

[21] See *Iliad*, I, 188-219.

[22] See *ibid.*, III, 276-301.

for our ontological insufficiency. When it is misused it can bring about the worst calamities and isolation among human beings. With the use of words man is able to achieve either sublimity or vileness. With the act of talking and by contrasting heroic deeds and unheroic actions, Homer is portraying with mastery the human moral condition, that is, the perpetual effort and risk that any decision implies. We will proceed point by point, and giving more examples.

First we will approach the character of Achilles who contains in his dignity values which are not merely individual. In fact, the real force of the Greek spirit resides in its communitarian root. The human ideals which Homer expresses in his poetry are proper to men who live in, by and for the community. According to the Homeric notion of man, if you do anything which is to be considered of great worth, somebody has to observe it. A hero is appreciated for his achievements, not for his inner qualities. Despite this fact it is worth noticing that Homer shows an indissoluble binomial and dynamic relationship between individuals and community. He presents characters who have clear communitarian ideals, but at the same time they are very strong personalities who still manage to be individualist and retain very well-defined qualities. In other words: Homer represents human beings who are outstanding as individuals, but who also live for the community.

The "good" man (*i.e.*, the ἀγαθός) of the Homeric epic is essentially a man conscious of his communitarian ideals which are taken with pride. These ideals provide impulse and dynamism in the community. The ideal of the "good" man in Homer is centred in the permanent zeal to be better. This idea is very well summarised in Glaucon's words:

"... Hippolochos fathered me, and he is the man I spring from. He sent me to Troy, and gave me constant instructions, always to be bravest and best and excel over others, and

not bring disgrace on the stock of my fathers, who were far the best men in Ephyre and in the breadth of Lycia. This is the family and blood I am proud to call mine."[23]

There is another passage in book XI in which Nestor, after a long narration, tells Patroclus of his meeting with Achilles and how the Peleus gave to his son the sound advice of

"... always to be bravest and best and excel over others ..."[24]

In this sense Homer is central not only as a pristine literary creator but also as author of moral guidelines which will be important for subsequent ethics. It is in the mere act of seeking to be better that any individual might try to make up for his constitutive incompleteness. Even more: to become excellent has always in Homer a communitarian connotation because it means being seen to be excellent. Homer communicates this universal message to his audience which is presented in a very particular way in his characters. Homer portrays in his poem that this advice to become better contains a double effect: 1. it is the soundest that you would have to communicate -morally speaking- as the most valued legacy for any individual and 2. because becoming better is always a public act the search for excellence is the supreme social act. His message is addressed simultaneously to any potential audience in his own and any future time.

Paraphrasing W. Jaeger we can say that the *pathos* which inspires the *Iliad* is centred on the high heroic destiny of men.[25] The *pathos* of epic

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[23] Homer, *Iliad,* VI, 206 ff., (translated by M. Hammond, Penguin, 1987).

[24] *Ibid.,* XI, 784. See also IX 441-443 where Phoenix speaks out in relation to his mission under Achilles: "... The old horseman Peleus sent me out with you on the day when he sent you from Phthia to join Agamemnon -you were a child, with no knowledge yet of levelling war or of debate, where men win distinction. So he sent me out to teach you all these things, to make you a speaker of words and a doer of deeds."

[25] See, W. Jaeger, *Paideia: los ideales de la cultura griega,* trad. J. Xirau y W. Roces, F.C.E., México, 1974, Libro Primero, III, p. 51.

heroes permits us to know them for their nature: the epic hero is radically tragic. If we analyse Achilles as a character we are aware that he represents a sort of cognitive monument of human life; he is a sort of vital *pathos*. Homer's heritage resides -in our judgement- in his grasping of a poetic consciousness of the vital human problematic which he receives from the tradition. To become a hero is so important because it is the fundamental path to self-consciousness: that one is incomplete and that one has to struggle for completeness. That is the reason that Homer singles out his heroes' deeds, keeps their actions within the communitarian bounds of "being seen", and contrasts them with other characters who lose the perspective on this central human task.

Homer gives a poetic testimony of what human beings actually are and would be. The feeling of his heroes reveals it. A clear example of this is the meeting between Priam and Achilles, when the former goes to recover his son's body: on the one hand both weep and recognise human misfortune, and on the other hand, both accept each other's grandeur. Homer shows in the figures of Achilles and Priam his communitarian ideal: honour has primacy in human relationships. Also in this scene Homer represents two people in dialogue: they are sharing and interchanging opinions about the fragility of the human condition. In this act of sharing weaknesses Homer portrays dialogue as a key to understanding and to overcoming them. The echo of this key Homeric "dialectical" lesson reverberates in his audience, with continuing effects in the community. This is Achilles' conclusion:

"... This is the fate the gods have spun for poor mortal men, that we should live in misery, but they themselves have no sorrows. There are two jars standing on Zeus' floor which hold the gifts he gives us: one holds evils, the other blessings. When Zeus who delights in thunder mixes his gifts to a man he meets now with evil, and now with good. But when Zeus gives from the jar of misery only, he brings a man to degradation,

and vile starvation drives him ever the holy earth, and he wanders without honour from gods or men."[26]

From the preceding passage we may also see Homer showing a very dynamic relationship between gods and human beings. Achilles' and Agamemnon's time is, above all, a heroic age. Men of this time had a very close relationship with deities. Deities directly intervened in human activities and were linked to men on earth. That means that we can get an understanding of the nature, limits and possibilities of human life by thinking about this relationship between gods and men. In that sense the archetypal Greek maxim of knowing yourself becomes a perpetual tension between the divine and the human which can be summarised in a strong sentence for mortals: men, do not struggle awkwardly and vainly to become a god because it is *a fact* that you are not.[27]

In Homer, the effect of the opposition of gods' and men's natures is that the latter become self-conscious, self-aware. The gods consider human events important enough to be worried about, but not to become excited about in the same way and proportion as divine events. The truth is that for human beings life is struggle: they have to work hard and to make a constant effort to get things, while for gods human works are easily destructible, just like a mere amusement, like a children's game. Even more, as J. Griffin puts it:

"... As the gods need not be dignified unless they choose, so too they need give no reason for their attitudes and actions; again we are brought up against the hard fact of the supremacy of heaven, which places human life and suffering in the perspective in which the poet wishes us to see them."[28]

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[26] *Iliad*, XXIV, 524-534, (M. Hammonds' translation).

[27] See *ibid.*, XV, 361-366.

[28] J. Griffin, *Homer*, Oxford University Press, reissued, 1996, Chapter 2, pp. 25-26.

The interesting thing to notice is that Homer pictures human beings as being in touch with gods and in interchange with them. The result of this interchange is again human self-consciousness of our mortal, insufficient condition but at the same time of positive possibilities of self-improvement through dialogue and community. It is clear that in the act of presenting religion as central Homer is giving another moral message to his audience.

The central question with which the *Iliad* confronts the reader is the same question with which it confronts its characters, that is, in what being a hero consists. Homer's answer to this question is highly eloquent in the sense that it is realistic and convincing. Through his great descriptive style, Homer shows us a coherent development of the action from one scene to another. He goes deeper in his thoughts because he touches with mastery the capital facts of human life.[29] So long as Homeric heroes stay alive, they get the gods' love and favours and they are frequently compared with divinities. All of this emphasises the radical contrast between life and death. While the hero exists, he is full of vitality and power, he is brilliant and a doer of great deeds, but at any time when he has to confront the enemy he has to accept that he is a contingent being, with the risk of dying, including the total horror and absolute ending that the act of dying implies.

The epic hero is in principle tragic because human life involves the inevitable hallmark which is summarised in that hard and implacable sentence: human beings not only have to suffer, but they are mortal. Even more: in the case of Achilles, for example, he knows not only that he will die, but that he will die young.

Homer shows us by way of contrast the inseparable union of human greatness and fragility which constitutes the heroic nature. Homer also plays a game of analogy: gods do not know either of time passing or of the

[29] See *ibid.*, p. 31.

experience of death; nevertheless, they are similar to men. Gods have virtues, desires, passions. These similarities permit Homer to put emphasis on his vision of human nature, alluding always to a comparison between mortals and immortals.[30]

It is precisely in this conscious recognition of the tragic condition of the hero that human nature reaches its highest point. That is, individuals become as human as possible and similar to gods. The majority of the characters in the *Iliad* have scarce or null intuition of the essence and tragic content of events. Hector and Patroclus are caught unprepared and are misled by their own success. They could not discern that they victories were merely temporary and that in Zeus' project they just constitute one more chapter of his inevitable negative prognosis: defeat and death. It is only Achilles and Priam who arrive at an understanding of the universal human destiny: being a suffering and mortal entity. In this understanding resides the greatness of these Homeric heroes. But it is again in this strong contrast that Homer projects the possibilities and boundaries of human life that he communicates to his audience what any human being might reach and what he can lose.

We make reference again to the meeting of Priam and Achilles as a succinct and conclusive view of the *pathetic* condition of human beings. In Jasper Griffin's words:

"... Then Achilles raises Priam to a chair and in a long speech expresses the deep humanism of the poet. All men must suffer; that is the way the gods plan human life, 'while they themselves are free from care'. [...] The ending which the poet has devised allows his poem to finish, not with a mere heroic triumph, but with great opponents meeting at a level from which they see, with deep pathos but without bitterness or self-pity, the fundamental condition of the life of man. Achilles and Priam recognise their

[30] In relation to the Homeric comparison between human beings and gods, see H. C. Baldry, *The Unity of Mankind in Greek Thought*, Cambridge University Press, 1965.

kinship in mortality and suffering; [...] This very Greek sensitivity, even at such a moment, to beauty, which is present not only in the young warrior but also in the old king, gives the last touch to the scene. We see the poet give a concrete example of his conception that it is out of suffering and disaster that beauty emerges. Achilles and Priam are brought together by the terrible fact that Achilles has killed Hector, and the war will go until Troy is destroyed; but their encounter enables them to show a high civility, and to recognize in each other both the splendour and the fragility which are united in the nature of man."[31]

The moral heritage of Homer's epic poetry resides in the projection of a consciously heroic attitude before the force of destiny. Because dignity is the human attribute that is gained and gives excellence, human beings are, *per se,* an object important enough to be treated poetically. The Homeric secret was to know how to contemplate human nature. Human beings are busy trying to perform great deeds and at the same time they are under the threat of ineluctable destinies. The characteristic Achillean *pathos* hinges on this perpetual tension. Homer's sublimity resides in his ability to grasp the critical condition of any given event and to represent his characters in a kind of dialectical tension deliberating with themselves or with others.[32] This latter point is crucial for our purposes because Homer's message on this issue is clear: our human limitation compels us to search for completion. This searching implies taking decisions. The search for making better ones implies reflective acts. Reflective acts involve internal dialogues or conversations with others. In short: dialogue is the best way of acquiring completeness and self-consciousness.

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[31] J. Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 39-40.

[32] This reference to a dialectical tension is just addressed to the internal debate and dialogue that Homer's characters show. We are not referring to P. Szondis' line of interpretation (*Versuch über das Tragische,* 1961), that is, talking about "the dialectical structure of the tragic" in the sense of Hegel and other German philosophers and poets, *i.e.*,, as opposition of contraries. For an approach similar to that of Szondis, see B. Seidensticker, "*Peripateia* and tragic dialectic in Euripides tragedy", in M. S. Silk (ed.), *Tragedy and the tragic. Greek theatre and beyond,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, 377-396.

There is also a passage in the *Iliad* which it is important to underline because it contains the idea that the act of searching for something in company gives you the advantage that one of the searchers can see something before the other or discerns things that the other one cannot at first. Homer expresses his point in the context of a spying expedition using a proverb. But even in this context it is a striking point introducing the general idea that two minds "see more" than just one. It is particularly striking because it is precisely the key idea which is involved in the Socratic and Platonic dialectical method: for Plato dialogue is essential to philosophy because the other person have a different approach to things from one's own. The passage is the following:

"... then Diomedes, master of the war-cry, spoke out: 'Nestor, my heart and proud spirit urge me to penetrate the camp of our enemies the Trojans who are lying so close to us. But if another man would go with me that would be a comfort and bring greater confidence. When two go together, one is quicker than the other to see where advantage lies (σύν τε δύ' ἐρχομένω, καί τε πρὸ ὃ τοῦ ἐνόησεν)- a man on his own may see it, but even so his mind has less range than two, and his resource is not so strong'."[33]

[33] *Iliad,* X, 219-227 (M. Hammond's translation). The interesting point to stress is that Plato picks up this idea, intentionally misquoting it in *Symposium* 174 d3-4, where, by implication, it has something to do with philosophical conversation: "Socrates said: 'As we two go together further along the way' we'll work out what we'll say. Come on, let's go" (C. J. Rowe's translation). The second reference to Homer's line is in *Protagoras*, 348 c-d. This one is more explicit and central for our present preoccupations because it shows the importance of the interlocutor in Plato's philosophical conversations. The interlocutor or interlocutors provide different elements to the search and they are a sort of guarantor, allowing the result of the elenctic method or process of examination of any proposed thesis to be corroborated or validated. It is also a strong argument against Aristotle's thesis which privileges solitary philosophical work: Socrates.- "It looked to me that Protagoras was embarrassed by Alcibiades' words, not to mention the insistence of Callias and practically the whole company. In the end he reluctantly brought himself to resume our dialogue and indicated he was ready to be asked questions. 'Protagoras,' I said, 'I don't want you to think that my motive in talking with you is anything else than to take a good hard look at things that continually perplex me. I think that Homer said it all in the line, *Going in tandem, one perceives before the other.* Human beings are simply more resourceful this way in action, speech and thought. If someone has a private perception, he immediately starts going around and looking until he finds somebody he can show it to and have it corroborated. And there is a particular reason why I would rather talk with you than anyone else: I think you are the best qualified to investigate the sort of things that decent and respectable individual ought to examine ..." (S. Lombardo's and K. Bell's translation).

We turn now, briefly, to the *Odyssey*. This epic poem continues the Homeric project: 1. to talk and to write about the limitations of human nature and 2. to display -through this act of entertaining people- how great figures overcome this insufficiency.

Now the hero is Odysseus. He illustrates men's condition, that is, a combination of greatness and weakness. He reflects also a picture of individual self-consciousness and an awareness of heroism as the human vital task. Homer relates and shares with his audience Odysseus' suffering, struggling and final overcoming.

As he did in the *Iliad,* Homer will represent in the *Odyssey* an active relationship between human beings and gods. The aim is again to put them in contrast and in that way to get a better view of their natures. The *Odyssey* begins with an assembly of the gods. Zeus, who presides over the meeting starts his dissertation on the present state of things by raising the general problem of human suffering and the relationship between human destiny and human culpability:

"Lo you now, how vainly mortal men do blame the gods! For of us they say comes evil, whereas they even of themselves, through the blindness of their own hearts, have sorrows beyond that which is ordained."[34]

The heroism of the *Odyssey* has very particular characteristics. Odysseus is the hero who knows how to confront suffering with perseverance. Homer endows Odysseus with all sort of illustrious experiences. In relation to this point we can centre our attention on that passage which contains a dialogue of great proportions and effect, when Odysseus finds the shadows of his mother and his friends who died at Troy:

[34] *Odyssey,* I, 32-34 (translated by Butcher and Lang, MacMillan and Co., London, 1887).

Odysseus' mother.- "Dear child, how didst thou come beneath the darkness and the shadow, thou that art a living man? Grievous is the sight of these things to the living, for between us and you are great rivers and dreadful streams; first, Oceanus, which can no wise be crossed on foot, but only if one have a well-wrought ship. Art thou but now come hither with thy ship and thy company in the long wanderings from Troy? and hast thou not yet reached Ithaca, nor seen thy wife in thy halls?"

'Even so she spake, and I answered her, and said: "O my mother, necessity was on me to come down to the house of Hades to seek to the spirit of Theban Teiresias. For not yet have I drawn near to the Achaean shore, nor yet have I set foot on mine own country, but have been wandering evermore in affliction, from the day that first I went with goodly Agamemnon to Ilios of the fair steeds, to do battle with the Trojans."[35]

This passage is particularly illustrative of my main claims: 1. It combines two points: a) Odysseus lamenting *his* condition and b) Odyssesus lamenting the *human* condition. 2. It shows Homer as a writer of a poem which contains a main heroic and tragic character in dialogue with another character. In this dialogue full of *pathos* Homer shows Odysseus in conversation as the best means for relieving his condition. In other words: Homer in his epic fiction represents his characters talking about their weaknesses. This mere act of expressing and spelling out one's limitations is a cathartic way of overcoming one's tragic condition. 3. It shows Homer entertaining his readers and showing how through dialogue we may overcome our human insufficiency. 4. It shows Homer's suggestion that in the act of talking, sharing and interchanging opinions with others, human enterprises might have better approaches and upshots.

There is also a moral message in the *Odyssey:* Odysseus overcomes his adversities because of his qualities. That is, his search for nobility and his honour are shown in his shrewdness way of acting. Odysseus is the prototypical hero. His power resides in his astute judgement and shrewd

[35] *Ibid.*, XI, 155-169 (Butcher's and Lang's translation).

attitude. The archetype of the anti-hero is the indolent man, the upstart individual who just wants to reap wthout sowing; the man who premeditates his trickeries. Homer personifies this indolence in Penelope's suitors:

"The *Odyssey*, less intense, more inclusive, with its wide range of interest in the world and all its variety, has a different conception of the gods and of heroism. Gods and heroes alike need and receive moral justification, of a sort much closer to our ideas. Odyssseus, the hero of endurance and guile, replaces Achilles, the hero of openness and dash, in a world grown full of treachery, deception, and complexity; and he must contend with disloyal subordinates ..."[36]

In short: the Homeric poems portray human beings confronted by their situation. Men assume consciousness of their situation: we are suffering and mortal beings, but we can challenge this fact without self-pity or evasion. Starting from this permanent and tragic situation, we learn how to enjoy and ascend to the heights of the positive things that this earthly life can offer to us. Life is worthy enough to be lived with a wise heroism and moral sense. Homer has an understanding of the tragic human condition, but in the very act of writing he transcends -with his model of dialogue- this condition by the act of communicating his ideas to an audience: to act for human beings is always to interact.

Hesiod's poetry retains -in our judgement- a similar importance to Homer's in relation to the history of dialectic (in the widest sense): he portrays the tragic human condition and at the same time overcomes it by the act of writing and communicating to others about human weaknesses and proposing an ideal model of humanity. In this act of communication Homer and Hesiod transcend human insufficiency. The difference is that Hesiod does not portray (for the most part) characters in conversation, but he shows his audience a view of men, the world and gods which includes

[36] J. Griffin, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.

stories and admonitions to help us overcome our insufficiency and to improve our lives. Homer writes about great figures or heroes while Hesiod creates a model of humanity in a different way.

We start by stressing that Hesiod's poems begin by attempting to draw the audience in. In the *Theogony* Hesiod tries to to do this by stating that what he will say comes from divine inspiration; that his story is a real one.[37] In the case of *Works and Days* he resorts to asking for divine inspiration because in that mode he might tell the truth to Perses.[38]

The way Hesiod presents human beings overcoming their incompleteness is similar to Homer's. Hesiod's human prototype is a reflective and self-conscious individual who meditates about his own condition and aspires to become better. Hesiod portrays this reflective man becoming attentive to his constitutional insufficiency and trying to surpass it by following the path to ἀρετη.[39] Centrally, Hesiod also represents the man who misunderstands his human condition and considers himself as complete and sufficient. The consequences of this misunderstanding will be a miserable life. In this mere act of contrasting human positive and negative possibilities Hesiod communicates his central message to humanity.

Hesiod is a gnomic and essentially moralising poet. The first sample of this morality is shown in his *Theogony* through the figure of the king, fair and equitable because of the Muses' favour.

"So sang the Muses of Olympus, nine
Daughters begotten by almighty Zeus,
Cleio, Euterpe, and Melpomene,
Thalia, Erato and Terpsichore,

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[37] See Hesiod, *Theogony*, 1-30 (but we should notice that Hesiod represents the Muses as having the ability both to speak the truth and to make up convincing lies).

[38] See Hesiod, *Works and Days*, 1-10.

[39] *N.b.* ἀρετή as social standing, status or esteem. See *Works and Days*, 313.

Polymnia, Urania, and most
Important one of all, Calliope,
For she attends upon respected lords.
And when the daughters of great Zeus would bring
Honour upon a heaven-favoured lord
And when they watch him being born, they pour
Sweet dew upon his tongue, and from his lips
Flow honeyed words. All people look to him
When he is giving judgement uprightly,
And speaking with assurance, he can stop
Great quarrels sensibly. Wise lords are wise
In this: when public harm is being done
To the people, they can set things straight with ease,
Advising with soflt words. And when a lord
Comes into the assembly, he is wooed
With honeyed reverence, just like a god,
And is conspicuous above the crowd,
Such is the Muses' holy gift to men."[40]

In the Hesiodic vision of the cosmos the world of the gods sometimes includes personifications of -what we call- moral concepts like justice, prudence, moderation. Some divinities constitute a new range of virtues and they have a high influence and power in the human world.

There is a direct relation between human behavior and natural phenomena: if human beings keep themselves firm and follow the straight road of justice which Zeus indicates, nature will be prodigal in its benefits to them; if they move away from the good way, immediately nature will punish them by depriving them of its fruits. In short: nature is for Hesiod the wise, ordered and fair will of Zeus.

[40] *Theogony,* 81-96 (translated by D. Wender, Penguin, London, 1973).

Zeus is the powerful and wise god who experiences a metamorphosis after eating Metis. The effect that this ingestion has on Zeus is, in my judgement, that prudence implies justice, that is, the new way of governing requires a wisdom that permits a distinction between good and evil. From now on the benefit of Zeus' way of ruling will be *Peace* and *Good Law:*

"Now Zeus, king of the gods, first took to wife
Metis, wisest of all, of gods and men.
But when she was about to bear her child
Grey-eyed Athene, he deceived her mind
With clever words and guile, and thrust her down
Into his belly, as he was advised
By Earth and starry Heaven. In that way
They said, no other god than Zeus would get
The royal power over all gods
Who live forever. For her fate would be
To bear outstanding children, greatly wise,
First, a girl, Tritogeneia, the grey-eyed,
Equal in spirit and intelligence
To Zeus her father; then she would bear a son
With haughty heart, a king of gods and men.
But Zeus, forestalling danger, put her down
Into his belly, so that the goddess could
Counsel him in both good and evil plans.
And shining Themis was his second wife.
She bore the Horae: Order, blooming Peace,
And Justice, who attend the works of men,
And then the Fates, to whom wise Zeus has paid
The greatest honour: Clotho, Atropos,
Lachesis, who give men all good and bad."[41]

[41] *Ibid.*, 886-906.

Hesiod represents the world of human beings with its positive and negative elements: good and bad things -both from divine origins- are given by gods in combination.[42] In Hesiod there is a coincidence between his view of man and his view of reality. Positive and negative forces cohabit but contrast. Human forces have specific moral characteristics: man is ruled by a double principle of responsibility and purpose. Thus human beings can enjoy a peaceful and ordered life in which evils have precise boundaries and are, to certain extent, foreseeable. Hesiod's message to his audience involves the idea that all of us are able to distinguish the good and the bad paths in life. Once one discovers the right path, one must make the daily effort of keeping there.

What are the characteristics of the Hesiodic ideal man? Mainly, he is just, that is, he is temperate in conduct, because he knows what he has to do according to divine judgement. That will connect us with what is -we think- the central aim of Hesiod's *Theogony:* to show us the divine and human genealogical successions as an evolutionary and historic process. For the ancients knowing the name of "things" -*i.e.,* gods, men, and objects- was equivalent to knowing their nature, origin and characteristics. That is important because, here again, Hesiod tries to put his audience on alert. The first requirement is to be attentive to whatever surrounds you. The second requirement is to look at things carefully. The third requirement is to develop a critical attitude in relation to what you see. Once you start distinguishing good and bad things you have the opportunity to decide in favour of a morally positive life if you follow the voice of what is good. One element which it is important to emphasise is that Hesiod tries to teach us how to listen to and to take notice of our internal voice. This element is crucial for our purposes and main argument because it shows how essential for Hesiod too internal dialogue is to being human.

[42] As in Homer's *Iliad* XXIV, 524-534 which we cited earlier on n. 26.

For Hesiod the real and knowable world is a result of successive genealogies. This high manifestation is bipolar: rivers, sea, love, but also death, hunger, deceit, wars and human griefs.[43] It is only through such knowledge of origins that human beings can ponder the force which negative powers have had in the development of the cosmos, and value the meaning of the new order that begins with Zeus' kingdom. In this new kingdom, excesses have no room. That is the reason that order will be equivalent to justice and disorder will be synonymous with injustice or arrogance. Hesiod's *Theogony* presents the following central values: 1. a high concept of divinities, who impose a principle of order which involves morality and justice;[44] 2. justice is the value *par excellence* and is in a relation of complementarity with Zeus: he is the agent of justice. In other words: Zeus is the god who exerts his power and produces the effect of justice. Hesiod tries to promote moral reform. That is the reason that he insists on showing us justice as Zeus' favourite child and therefore with noble rank.[45] As we shall see, justice will become the main feature of Hesiod's model of man. That is the reason that the main advice that Hesiod gives us is to listen to justice and to follow it because to follow justice is equivalent to keeping to the good path that the gods indicate.[46]

Under Hesiod's perspective there is a peaceful coexistence between gods and men. Freedom and responsibility will be the two new categories for measuring the consequences of men's actions. Because now Zeus is implacable towards man and:

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[43] See *Theogony*, 223-232.

[44] There are two points to emphasise: 1. Homeric and Hesiodic gods do not behave morally despite the fact that they impose it on human beings to behave morally and 2. in Greek epic poetry gods cannot defeat fate or the way that things are.

[45] *Supra*, p. 60.

[46] See *Works and Days*, 213.

"He [man] pays harsh penalties for all his sins."[47]

It is precisely in Hesiod's *Works and Days* that he shows us what the moral consequences of the kingdom of Zeus are. In other words Hesiod will tell us how human and divine consciousness operate in relation to will and responsibility. Let me explain. Justice is from now on the regulatory principle of the different sorts of human links and relationships with other individuals and with divinities. How does justice work? Hesiod thinks that the first step towards exercising justice is to keep far away from the wicked Strife (Ἔρις κακόχαρτος) which enjoys evil and removes you from work.[48] He distinguishes two kinds of Strife: the first one that we can call productive, because it makes men better since it is a consequence of the education that the effort of daily work gives, and the second one which is sterile because it is a product of negligence that only knows envy and calumny addressed to the man who has been motivated by the good Strife (ἀγαθὴ Ἔρις).[49] This good Strife is the one that belongs to the hard-working, diligent man who soundly vies with others.

The people of the present time, according to Hesiod, belong to the iron race. They have to struggle for their lives, which are subject to death and changeable:

"Far-seeing Zeus then made another race,
The Fifth, who live now on the fertile earth.
I wish I were not of this race, that I
Had died before, or had not yet been born.
This is the race of iron. Now, by day,

[47] *Ibid.*, 334.

[48] See *ibid.*, 28.

[49] See *ibid.*, 11-29 (D. Wender's translation).

Men work and grieve unceasingly; by night,
They waste away and die. The gods will give
Harsh burdens, but will mingle in some good;
Zeus will destroy this race of mortal men,
When babies shall be born with greying hair."[50]

Even more: men of the iron race will be corrupted; they will become injust and the gods will abandon them.[51] Hence Hesiod's admonition to Perses:

"O Perses, follow right; control your pride
For pride is even in a common man.
Even a noble finds it hard to bear;
It weighs him down and leads him to disgrace.
The road to justice is the better way,
For Justice in the end will win the race
And Pride will lose: the simpleton must learn
This fact through suffering."[52]

The previous verses constitute -in my judgement- the key to the Hesiodic reflection in relation to his model of mankind as the way to aquire self-consciousness. The point to be stressed is in verse 213: "Ὦ Πέρση, σὺ δ' ἄκουε δίκης μηδ' ὕβριν ὄφελλε." What Hesiod wants to express to us is clearly the advice to be attentive, observant of justice and not to give in to ὕβρις. The latter is the way of excess, and therefore, of injustice. Justice and lack of moderation are opposites, but if you cultivate justice you will defeat any excess.

[50] *Ibid.*, 174-181.

[51] See *ibid.*, 185-201 (D. Wender's translation).

[52] *Ibid.*, 213-218.

Hesiod considers that the way that the simpleton understands this central moral message is through suffering, which permits him -albeit belatedly- to pass from the state of naivity to the state of experience. That is the reason that Hesiod insists in 218 that if Perses does not listen to him and ignores his message Perses' learning must be through suffering : " ... παθὼν δέ τε νήπιος ἔγνω."

So Hesiod concludes, whoever does not go far away from the just (δικαίου)[53] and follows the right, causes productive and peaceful relationships among men and with divinities. In short, wherever there is justice, there is peace.[54] Justice is considered as the highest divine disposition which is given to men. The exercise of justice increases the ranks of illustrious men. Hence the act of giving one's solemn word implies a relation of complementarity between justice and uttering what is true: to give your word solemnly provides the foundations of justice; justice makes of the act of giving your word a moral virtue, because the person who tells and expresses what is true, discovers what is just.[55]

Justice is also a necessary condition of keeping oneself on the right road. This way of behaving requires daily effort. Therefore, the man of excellence (πανάριστος) is for Hesiod the one who meditates and acts after such reflection, and follows the most reasonable course; the one who listens to and obeys sound advice. The πανάριστος is the prototype of the Hesiodic hero, because becoming the best as an upshot of daily work gives moral primacy:[56]

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[53] See *ibid.*, 219-221.

[54] See *ibid*, 225-230 and 258-285.

[55] With respect to this point R. Lamberton says: "The individual in his relations with others and confronted with the whole range of possibilities of human actions must *choose justice* and at the same time keep before the mind's eye the corrective -and intensely imaginatively involving- spectacle of the consequences of unleashed absolute and irresponsible power" (*Hesiod*, Yale University Press, 1988, p. 94).

[56] See *Works and Days*, 313 ff.

"I say important things for you to hear,
O foolish Perses: Badness can be caught
In great abundance, easily; the road
To her is level, and she lives near by.
But Good is harder, for the gods have placed
In front of her much sweat; the road is steep
And long and rocky at the first, but when
You reach the top, she is not hard to find.
The man is best who reason for himself,
Considering the future. Also good
Is he who takes another's good advice.
But he who neither thinks himself nor learns
From others, is a failure as a man."[57]

It is also striking to see how Hesiod, with his base in the countryman's *ethos*, derives the inherent human dignity that conscientious work involves. This way of acting brings to the agent many gifts: favours from immortals and men, glory, wealth and merit. Fame is for Hesiod ἀρετή, that is, a form of excellence as a result of hard working.[58] Idleness, as its contrary, gives rise to dishonour.

What sort of justice does Hesiod propose? He proposes an equitable justice, that is, to give to and to love whoever gives to you and loves you, avoiding extremes such as usury or robbery.[59]

The just man is diligent and careful with his work; that is the reason of his prosperity: [60] he loves "good order" and keeps measure (μέτρα φυλάσσεσθαι) in the right moment (καιρός). These elements are the ideal

[57] *Ibid.*, 286-297 (D. Wender's translation).

[58] See *ibid.*, 308-313.

[59] See *ibid.*, 352-363.

[60] See *ibid.*, 412-474.

conditions in everything.[61] In conclusion: the *Works and Days* shows us the Hesiodic model -maybe less spectacular than the Homeric, but equally forceful and educative: the one of the man with good habits[62] that follows the good Strife, constantly and quietly; the man who works and lives in justice.

In conclusion: there is some evidence, strictly speaking, of conversations in Hesiod's poems, but we find in his works a narrative which exhorts us to live a different sort of life: a moral of reflective thoughts and acts, based mainly on justice. Hesiod shows us the importance of internal dialogues in the model of the reflective or thoughtful character who possesses moral ideals and who deliberates about what the good and evil moral life imply. He portrays himself as a person giving sound advice to others. In the act of portraying this model and the anti-model, Hesiod gives a poetic expression of human life, the human condition and a mode of achieving awareness of it and of ameliorating it. That is his heritage to humanity.

After having tried to show that epic is a mode of self-consciousness, somehow comparable with that involved in Platonic dialectic (dialogue) - insofar as the function of dialectic for Plato is to reflect effectively, and Homer and Hesiod are perpetually reflecting, because they describe human beings as incomplete, and therefore as needing reflection- we can turn now to lyric poetry.

b) Lyric

[61] See *ibid.*, 694.

[62] See *ibid.*, 470 ff.

In line with the conducting thread of this section, we will show the sort of human consciousness that lyric poetry contains -in our judgement- and the elements that it provides for the emergence of dialectic.

The first question that strikes us is the following: is it possible to talk about a lyric model of man? Our answer is affirmative. We will give reasons for saying this.

If we go through each lyric poet we notice that they try to portray a model of man which is a result of their personal inspiration, but always resorting to talk about civic values -proper to a city or region- presented in concrete models of people. In that sense lyric poetry gathers together concrete archetypes which are more accessible for ordinary people in the community to follow. Lyric poetry continues to show the tragic view of human life that epic poetry did: human beings become conscious again of their limitations, of their mortal, erratic and suffering fate. But despite this fact of permanent contingency, human beings get force and greatness from weakness. Lyric poetry is still a call to become better in a communitarian context; it is a call to human beings not to be tempted by excess or apathy.

There are some verses -according to Plato[63]-attributed to Pindar and some of the divine poets which say:

"Persephone will return to the sun above in the ninth year
the souls of those from whom
she will exact punishment for old miseries,
and from these come noble kings,
mighty in strength and greatest in wisdom,
and for the rest of time men will call them sacred heroes."[64]

[63] See *Meno*, 81b5-c4.

[64] *Frg.* 133 Snell, (translated by G. M. A. Grube).

Pindar also says:

"Do not, my soul, pursue the life of gods
with longing, but exhaust all practicable means."[65]

There are three main reasons for emphasising these two passages according to our main thesis in this section: 1. to show that lyric poetry contains a particular sort of model of man which is based on the poets' view of life and their desire to persuade us of the tragic human condition and the way to confront or overcome it (as the first passage illustrates); 2. to show that lyric poetry implies an evolving understanding of how developing metaphorical or fictional internal dialogues -as we have shown in the cases of Homer and Hesiod[66]- will be central for the understanding of one of Plato's senses of dialectic (as the second passage illustrates); 3. to show that despite the fact that lyric poetry tends to express the personal views of the poet, these views are normally connected with communitarian ideals that bring us back to the idea of communication, dialogue and search for human completion.

Two of the main characteristics of lyric poetry are its simplicity and naivety. These two features are recurrent in its topics: death, descriptions of graceful girls, the eulogy of young age, the fleetingness of time, nostalgia, love, imaginery descriptions of gods' shapes, etc. What is clear is that with lyric feeling there is a stress on expressing common values shared by a city or a region but captured in a very personal style. That was due to the resistance that cities had to offer against invasions and as a way of showing regional pride.[67] It is precisely from this form of consciousness that lyric portrays a particular view of men: there is a vital dignity in human beings

[65] Pindar, *Pythian* 3, 61-62 (translated by A. M. Miller, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1996).

[66] See *supra*, pp. 44-45 (to recall our main argument); pp. 54-56 (for Homer) and p. 67 (for Hesiod).

[67] The cases of Callinus, Tyrtaeus and Pindar are particularly illustrative.

which is shown in any sort of understanding or supportive relationship. From the expression of personal views Greek lyric gives a message of courage to the community because all of us share the same fragile and faded human nature, but as a fruit of this poetic expression and because of this communication we get some notion of our completion.

One of the virtues that the model of "lyric man" stresses and considers as the highest in the community is courage. Courage is a poetic evocation of the collective consciousness of honour. This consciousness opens to the person who practises courage the following vital and moral possibilities: the highest honour if he gives his life for his city; the achievement of fame as a result of his personal effort, and of dignity as a result of his exercise of good and just behavior. Again, as in epic poetry, honour always has communitarian connotations, because it implies that somebody else has to see you doing great deeds. Callinus gives us an illustration of this:

"How long will you lie idle? When will you young
men
take courage? Don't our neighbours make you
feel
ashamed, so much at ease? You look to sit at
peace,
but all the country's in the grip of war!
. . . . .
and throw your last spear even as you die.
For proud it is and precious for a man to fight
defending country, children, wedded wife
against the foe. Death comes no sooner that the
Fates
have spun the thread; so charge, turn not aside,
with levelled spear and brave heart in behind the

shield

from the first moment that the armies meet.

A man has no escape from his appointed death,

not though his blood be of immortal stock.

Men sometimes flee the carnage and the clattering

of spears, and meet their destiny at home,

but such as these the people do not love or miss:

the hero's fate is mourned by high and low.

Everyone feels the loss of the stout-hearted man

who dies; alive, he ranks with demigods,

for in the people's eyes he is a tower of strength,

his single efforts worth a company's."[68]

So too Tyrtaeus:

"But Heracles unvanquished sowed your stock:

take heart! Zeus bows not yet beneath the yoke.

Fear not the throng of men, turn not to flight

but straight toward the front line bear your

shields,

despising life and welcoming the dark

contingencies of death like shafts of sun.

You know what wreck the woeful War-god makes,

and are well to the grim fight's temper tuned.

You have been with pursuers and pursued,

you young men, and had bellyful of both.

You know that those who bravely hold the line

and press toward engagement at the front

die in less numbers, with the ranks behind

protected; those who run, lose all esteem."[69]

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[68] Callinus, *Frg.* 1 West (M. L. West's translation).

[69] Tyrtaeus, *Frg.* 11 West (M. L. West's translation).

Another virtue which some lyric poets insist we should cultivate as central is wisdom, as an act of learning or searching for what human life is. For our purposes these lyric considerations are central because they show us the process that lyric poets suggest for acquiring this wisdom. This process is described as the result of an internal reflection. The purpose is to show us through this reflective process that any human being can know and improve himself. Lyric poets show us the way to get practical wisdom that comes from experience. This practical wisdom is central because it is the best source for providing us with knowledge of human nature and the ability to discern how to live a better life. On this point, Solon is a very illustrative case. For him the way of wisdom has its grounds in experience. Real wisdom consists in the act of acknowledgment that wisdom is a process of permanent search and renewal, not a fixed condition. In Solon, it is clear that all his poetical reflections are a call to be heard by his community. We will see a clear example of this in the following verses:

"But wisdom's hidden formula, which holds the key
to all things, is the hardest to discern."[70]

and

"As I grow old I'm always learning more."[71]

It is also interesting to remark that in Solon's political poems there is a connection between the benefits that poetical wisdom can provide individually as an act of self-reflection, and politics as a communal activity which requires practical wisdom in the person who wants to practise it -*i.e.*,

[70] Solon, *Frg.* 16 West (M. L. West's translation).

[71] Solon *Frag.* 18 West (M. L. West's translation): γηράσκω δ' αἰεί πολλὰ διδασκόμενος.

politics- reasonably. What Solon asks from the Muses, more than anything else, is the advice that will enable him to govern successfully with Justice as his guideline. Justice implies for Solon temperance, honesty, equanimity and consistency in his actions.[72]

Still on this topic of wisdom, Xenophanes in his lyric fragments insists on the human necessity of finding what is good as an act of freely searching for the best. At the same time he contrasts the gods' perfection and human insufficiency with the aim of emphasising human limitations and human possibilities. This is a way that lyric poetry provides more light in relation to human condition and human self-consciousness:

"The gods have not of course, revealed all things to mortals
from the beginning;
but rather, seeking in the course of time, they discover
what is better."[73]

Virtue is in Theognis mainly an upshot of learning from the good example that "good" human beings can bring to their community. The poet advises us to be close to and in company with the better sort of man because they are the source of practical wisdom.[74] Following the Hesiodic tradition, Theognis opposes sense or judgement (γνώμη) -the greatest value- to lack of moderation:

"The gods give nothing better to a man
Than sense, Kurnos; with sense, a man controls
The outcome of all action. He who has
Sense in his thoughts is lucky, for it is

[72] See Solon, *Frags.* 1-4, 13.

[73] Xenophanes, 18 D-K (A. M. Miller's translation).

[74] See Theognis, *Elegies,* 27-38.

Stronger than evil pride and wretched greed.
There's no worse thing for mortal men than greed;
Greed, Kurnos, is the source of every wrong."[75]

For Archilochus the mettle of any man is tested when he knows and appreciates that all human beings are subject to the ups and downs of fortune. That conception will be central for tackling the meaning of tragic consciousness. The lesson that he thinks that everybody has to learn is to distinguish the "reason" that motivates the behaviour of any individual and to try to keep this reason within human limits and possibilities. That is, one should not become euphoric or over-optimistic with happy events or too overcome by sorrows because both will be always present in human life.[76] The key for Archilochus is to be found in the understanding of the changeability of human life and not surpassing human boundaries. Because, Archilochus advises us:

"Tis fortune and fate, Pericles, that give a man all things."[77]

As for Simonides, he will try to give us a more systematic view about what human virtue is by linking it to what he considers true, worthy, excellent and good for one's city. Simonides insists on indicating that the truth always imposes itself. He tells us that just to a few people gods concede perseverance in the practice that virtue involves. Human destiny is imperfection, but when human beings recognise their limited condition they

[75] Ibid., 1171-1176.

[76] See Archilochus, *frg.* 67a (Diehl).

[77] Archilochus, *frg.* 8 (Diehl) (J. M. Edmonds' translation). It is important to stress that for Archilochus the heroic virtue of dying for your city is the highest. In that sense communitarian ideals remain fundamental. As Homer and Hesiod show us in their poetry, the act of sharing and communicating values is central because it is a way that through dialogue we can understand and overcome our tragic human condition as insufficient and mortal beings.

can become virtuous through their own efforts. It is worth noticing that Simonides -like the majority of lyric poets- addresses his poetry to the community, insisting on the key meaning of virtue. To become virtuous always has communitarian connotations: it is a call for courage, it is call to achieve the highest honour, that is, to die for your city.[78] The following passage illustrates how difficult is for human beings to get excellence:

"There is saying
that Excellence dwells on cliff ledges difficult to climb
and there tends, close to the gods, a hallowed spot.
Not to all mortals' eyes
is she visible, but only to one upon whom heart-rending
sweat
comes from within,
and who in that way reaches the height of manliness."[79]

In the case of Pindar we can find important elements for our purposes. He insists on the cultivation of three fundamental values: 1. *wisdom* to govern a community with 2. *justice* and 3. always to utter the *truth*.[80] His personal lyric evocation of human virtues is always in a communitarian context. The act of sharing these important values and of expressing poetically their intrinsic sense to an audience brings out why willingness in dialogue, communication and sharing of common things are central to consolidating a community, to getting an understanding and overcoming our limited condition. Pindar is a poet who celebrates in his poems public events that show us somebody's abilities or merits. In that sense, Pindar's poems have a very didactic aim: they strengthen

[78] See Simonides, *frgs.* 531, 542.

[79] Simonides, *frg.* 579 (A. M. Miller's translation).

[80] See Pindar, *Pythian* I, 81-87.

communitarian links by extolling individual glories. These individuals become social models worthy of being imitated. Furthermore Pindar clearly expresses a poetic consciousness of the human tragic condition. Human beings are contingent, ephemeral, submitted to a random destiny and to the gods' will. All these elements are combined with one which is fundamental: in spite of mortals' being subject to changeability they can still forge their humanity, as long as they allow themselves to be illuminated by the gods. The reason is that human possibilities and what is good come from divinities:

"He who has newly won some noble object
and feels himself buoyed up in luxury
soars in his kindled hopes
on winged deeds of manhood, his ambitions
outstrippping mere concern for wealth. With suddenness,
for mortals,
pleasure springs up and grows, but so it also falls to earth,
shaken by purposes of adverse power.

Being defined by each new day! What is a man?
What is he not?
A shadow's dream
is humankind. But when the gleam that Zeus dispenses
comes,
the brilliant light rests over men, and life is kindly..."[81]

Sometimes there is, in some lyric poets, a hint of bitterness in relation to human destiny and a sort of complaint addressed to gods. Others maintain a more positive view. That is relevant for our purposes because

[81] Pindar, *Pythian* VIII, 88-97 (A. M. Miller's translation). See also *Pythian* I, 41-46 and *Nemean* VI, Str. 1, 1-7.

the way that lyric poets portray and question this pessimistic or unbalanced view of life is a clear prelude to the tragic consciousness that will be presented in drama in a dialogic form. For example, Callinus considers that human destiny is inevitable. We will die and life does not offer positive chances.[82] Solon's view is that it is fate which gives good and bad things to human beings. Gods give their gifts indiscriminately. Any human action involves risk: when you undertake any project you do not know the outcome of the adventure. The man who tries to act correctly cannot predict that a resounding failure is coming. Another person who acted evilly, receives all sorts of successes and good luck from the gods. All of this can cover his negligence. In short: the divine moves in mysterious ways according to the perspective of human beings:

"Fate brings to mortal men both good and ill: the
gifts
the immortals give are inescapable.
There's risk in every undertaking. No one knows,
when something starts, how it will finish up.
One man makes noble efforts, but despite them
all
falls into unforeseen calamity;
another handles ill, yet God gives him complete
success, from his folly's consequence ..."[83]

Hence the bitter complaint of Theognis to Zeus. The poet admits that Zeus governs with glory and great personal power, but he concedes the same fate to a just man and to the evil one. Theognis launches these questions: why does an honest man have infinite misfortune? Why does

[82] See Callinus, 1 (Diehl).

[83] Solon, 13 (M. L. West's translation).

the man with lack of moderation have unlimited fortune? Why does the just man achieve unhappiness, misery and powerlessness?[84] For Theognis human life is essentially ill-fated, and it is much better never to be born or to die as soon as possible. The tension between human fate and human possibilities to become better is totally unbalanced: fate, normally, wins. There are no real possibilities for self-improvement because for Theognis nobody has the formula to teach people how to become virtuous or intelligent or how to transform themselves.[85]

Simonides openly exhorts us to be aware of our human contingency: we are susceptible to a different sort of uncertainties, our power is minuscule and, without the help of the gods, virtue is inaccessible. Human life is work and risk:

"As you are mortal, don't ever affirm what
tomorrow will bring,
or how long the man that you see in good fortune
will keep it:
not even the wing-spreading house-fly
changes perch so fast."[86]

To summarise: lyric poetry continues to have a similar importance to that of epic poetry for our purposes. It portrays in a kind "metaphorical dialogue"[87] the tragic human condition and possible ways of overcoming it or in some cases -as we just have showed- to succumb to pessimism. Despite the fact that lyric poetry portrays the individual views of each poet, these approaches relate to communitarian contexts and ideals. That brings

[84] See Theognis, *Elegies* 373-392.

[85] *Ibid.* ,425-439.

[86] Simonides, *Frg.* 521.

[87] See *supra*, footnote 66.

us back again to the idea that communication and dialogue between the poet and his audience remains central to representing and understanding ourselves as human beings. Lyric poetry is a communitarian call to self-awareness and self-improvement. Sometimes it is an expression of the way that we have to bear our grief with dignity; sometimes it is an open complaint about our limited human condition. In these two latter senses lyric poetry is the threshold to tragedy.

c) Tragedy

Our next and unavoidable step is to clarify the relationship between dialogue and tragedy, that is, the key presence of διαλέγεσθαι in the structure of tragedy. It is true that in Homer we can appreciate the presence of well developed characters. In Hesiod we can see a similar pattern with his reflective characters. The point is that Homer's and Hesiod's works are still narrative poems and the narrator has to introduce any character or event of the story to the readers. In lyric we can appreciate metaphorical conversations, but not direct dialogues between independent characters. What is definitive is that dialogue or the dialogic form or structure is, on the other hand, essential to tragedy. This open dialogue and confrontation between independent characters might permit us to talk about a dialectic of tragedy. It is in tragedy that we find for the first time an extended representation of dialogic human activity. That is, we can see different kinds of human discourse -including soliloquy and monologues- among different characters. In other words: διαλέγεσθαι as human conversation is obvious in tragedy.[88] In that sense tragedy is a direct literary antecedent of the Platonic formal dialogic style of writing.

[88] A good example of the intense and intrinsic dialogic form of tragedy might be found in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes*, particularly in 375-652.

In this last section on the literary antecedents of dialectic there will be three main parts:

I. Whatever we have said about dialogue as a literary antecedent of dialectic in epic and lyric is even clearer in tragedy. We will propose that the *dialogic content* of the three tragedians includes a poetic reflection on the human tragic condition. Because of our human insufficiency we need communication and completion. Drama pictures a way of completion in its heroic characters. The dramatist portrays them in such a way that we can appreciate the process in which they acquire this tragic self-consciousness through well defined conversations. The moral message of this tragic conversation is central insofar as it contains two main points: 1. a proposal of a model of man and 2. a communitarian model of humanity.

II. We will set examples of that in the three tragic poets, stressing the slight differences in the way that they illustrate my points.

III. We will show that in the particular case of Euripides the *dialogic form* is central because he illustrates with his tragedies a specific mode of verbal intercourse that has many formal similarities to the Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic as a philosophical method of conversation through questions and answers.

I. The dialogic content of tragedy:

Tragedy is even more central for our purposes. In tragedy, poetic consciousness acquires a definitive form through dialogue. What tragedy adds in relation to epic and lyric is that characters are talking directly to each other. Furthermore, characters are openly talking about the human condition and they are aware that this human condition moves between necessity -what is determined- and liberty -what it is possible to change. In tragedy it is noticeable that characters are talking about values -and the

personal challenge that that implies for their achievement - as a pre-eminent way of completing human nature.

Tragedy is fundamental in the process of the emergence of human self-consciousness. Socially speaking, tragedy was an activity that was present in the community through the institution of tragic competitions. Aesthetically speaking, tragedy is a new creation as a literary genre. Psychologically speaking, tragedy implies a deep human change insofar as tragic man and tragic consciousness take definite shape through the formal representation of actual dialogues.[89]

The invention of tragedy involves something new in human experience: the idea that human beings are questioning, responsive and responsible. Let me explain. The tragic sense of responsibility involves the portrayal of independent characters who are talking openly and directly about themselves and their activity. In tragedy human beings are a question for themselves. Human action becomes problematic and an object of "poetic reflection". To understand the message of the tragic poets implies understanding what tragic consciousness involves, that is that everything that is related to human beings is an open question.[90] The tragic performance becomes central because it portrays the wide range of human experiences as an object of dialogic understanding. The tragic experience involves a deep human meaning, produces a reflection in the audience and through dialogue shows us many different possible human ways of acting

The three tragic poets present different features in their characterisation of tragic human consciousness through conversations.

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[89] See, J. P. Vernant et P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne*, Volume I, Maspero, Paris, p. 27.

[90] See *ibid.*, Preface, p. 9.

Aeschylus

Aeschylus' tragic consciousness gives the greatest weight to fate. The hero debates in a dilemma of consciousness which oscillates from the inevitability of things, due to the power of misfortune that comes from the gods' impositions, to the small chance of acting in a different way. This possibility of acting in a different way is presented generally as a process of reflection and deliberation by the protagonist who is in dialogue with other characters and as a process of persuasion from the gods who talk to the character to urge him to act against any sort of excess: violence, revenge, arrogance, etc.

The human condition involves a paradox for Aeschylus: we become aware of our incomplete condition through different sorts of experiences, and preeminently through suffering. But it is in the act of sharing, interchanging and communicating these experiences with others that we get completion. All human experiences take us back always to communitarian or dialogic contexts. Even the most personal experience is susceptible to communication, and in that way the individual who has it gets clarity and understanding about it, when he talks directly and explains it to others. That is the reason that Aeschylus' well defined characters become concrete models of humanity and that tragedy and its representation are central for the community.

The subject who lives this transformational process experiences a change that makes him more human because he becomes aware of what he is and what he can become. Hence, suffering is the threshold of awareness of human dignity.

Aeschylus tries to emphasise the element of finitude as central for the clear understanding of the tragic human condition. From this we may infer

that for Aeschylus the human condition is sad because of its ephemeral nature: prosperous and ill-fated events will vanish anyway.

Aeschylus' aim is to redeem his heroes in an environment of freedom in spite of the huge limitations that permeate human life. A typical feature of his tragedies is to portray great contrasts, mainly through verbal interchanges between human beings and the gods and among different characters. Human beings participate in a permanent self-cognitive and deliberated determination before the divine powers. This participation is an evolving process that shows us the different elements involved in the development of self-consciousness. Self-consciousness is a matter of responsibility before one's destiny. Even when the fate is unhappy the effects on the subject who experiences them are beneficial, because to suffer involves knowledge.

Tragic characters in Aeschylus are human beings in action, nearly always at a crossroads and with the necessity (destiny) of deciding (freedom) something in which they are totally involved. They are searching for the best path, in a reflexive deliberation. In that sense Aeschylus follows the line of tradition that comes from epic and lyric in which characters -or poetic subjects- are portrayed reflecting. The tragic Aeschylean characters are in a direct and open deliberative internal dialogue and in conversation with other characters before they make their final decision.[91]

Thus, the tragic view of man in Aeschylus has a double motivation: the necessary-decision. Because we are incomplete we need completion, and in the search for completion we have to decide, to act. Then to what extent are human beings their own source of action? Let us see: the hero of the drama is confronted by a superior necessity that is imposed on him and that addresses him, at least initially (destiny), but the internal movement of

[91] The ethical orientation of Greek tragedies is shown in the feature that dramatic characters act with will and responsibility. The tragic character is based in a permanent and problematic tension: he has to debate between decision and destiny.

his character assumes this necessity and confronts it (freedom). It is in this space that human beings find a degree or margin of free decision; without it, it would be impossible to talk about responsibilities and acts attributable to a subject. In that sense the Aeschylean hero is a conscious individual and therefore, executor and guarantor of his acts.

Tragic consciousness is for Aeschylus an upshot of human dialogic experience. That implies an understanding, through suffering, of our own limitations and possibilities. We cannot avoid the weight of necessity, but we can confront necessity with the measure fixed by the gods: good decisions centred in moderate actions.

Sophocles

Turning now to Sophocles, we will see that he has many similarities to Aeschylus. The pathos of Sophoclean tragedy is presented by the poet -as in Aeschylus- through a permanent game of contrast. Self-consciousness is achieved insofar as human beings become aware of their essential insufficiency and the possibility of becoming better. For Sophocles any possibility of completion implies a good self-knowledge, that is, knowing yourself in all your different aspects. In Sophocles and Aeschylus the respect that human beings have to keep for gods' laws continues to be a key for a virtuous life.

In Sophocles -as in Aeschylus- you cannot, of course, avoid your fate because it is a matter of necessity, but at the same time he introduces some different elements in seeking to show what the tragic consciousness is. Sophocles' characters are presented as stronger and with more margin for action than in Aeschylus when they have to confront fate and take a personal and risky decision.

Sophocles develops the idea that experience gives moderation. The latter is understood as prudence and temperance. A moderate life is the key to getting fortitude, courage and self-control. The ideal of moderation is for Sophocles an upshot of a permanent human tension between the experience of living extremes, basically, suffering and happiness. That is the reason that Sophocles portrays human nature through the experience of the heroic condition. To become a hero is a process of humanisation, that is, of self-consciousness. In fact, the most tragic feature of the Sophoclean tragedy resides in the recognition of the impossibility of avoiding suffering. Sophocles is not talking about a suffering masochistically self-inflicted or looked for, but a suffering which is inevitable and recognised as such in light of our human limited condition. For Sophocles suffering with wisdom dignifies the sufferer and improves him as a human being: to become aware of ourselves requires wisdom that comes from experience, particularly, painful experiences. Tragic consciousness is mainly in Sophocles an upshot of intensive dialogues among his characters:

Another fundamental source of experience comes from human verbal interchanges. A sound dialogue requires a person capable of giving good advice and a patient interlocutor who listens to this and acquires a good disposition to direct or correct his life in a reasonable way.

Euripides

Euripides' characters are shown many times in internal debates and legal debates. That will be central for the origins of rhetoric and dialectic.[92]

The Euripidean pathos puts in tension two human forces: the rational and the irrational - the last one is sometimes adjacenct to horror.

[92] We will develop this idea in part III below.

Euripides' tragedies put into question many values that were thought immutable: what prevail are deceitful decisions among men, faith in gods begins to teeter, women's condition will be transformed since they will get good fame and prestige.[93]

Euripides is an inquisitive explorer of the human soul in its most contradictory feelings and passions. He combines these preoccupations with the influences that he receives from philosophy as a rational knowledge of reality and the study of the human being as a subject-matter.

Euripides likes to put in contrast and to emphasise -like the majority of the epic, lyric and tragic poets- human happiness and misfortunes. He has the peculiarity of portraying characters skilful in criticism, who manifest the intrinsically and problematic nature of human beings and the questioning of everything that was conventionally accepted.

The understanding of tragic consciousness in Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides will reveal us a simple truth: we are limited beings. We get self-knowledge through experience and preeminently through living dialogic relationships. Tragic heroism and self-awareness are united as a permanent human adventure of rediscovering what a human being is and what human possibilities are.

II. Examples of dialogic activity in the three tragedians:

Aeschylus

Aeschylus presents in the *Oresteia* his conception of the meaning of human suffering. The way of prudence is given to men through a "beneficial violence" from the gods. Hence:

[93] See *Medea*, 410-420.

"Zeus has led us on to know,
the Helmsman lays it down as law
That we must suffer, suffer into truth.
We cannot sleep, and drop by drop at the heart
the pain of pain remembered comes again,
and we resist, but ripeness comes as well.
From the gods enthroned on the awesome rowing-bench
there comes a violent love."[94]

The key to interpretation is in verse 178: τῷ πάθει μάθος. The pathos as a deeply passive-active experience -that is, of testing, suffering- is the source of knowledge, education and learning. This understanding implies prudence and good sense. The result of that "beneficial violence" of the gods causes human beings to learn to examine themselves -as a result of unhappy experiences- and learn how to act with prudence and wisdom as a result of a better self-knowledge. Suffering illuminates reflection; thinking illuminates active experience. Aeschylus shows in an incipient mode a clear process towards self-knowledge. Let me make myself clear. Human tragic consciousness is recognised and internalised as such through the act of conversation among his characters. The way that one becomes aware about one's human condition is because of and through the act of talking with other human beings. Human consciousness is pre-eminently expressive.

Human experience and learning are linked in Aeschylus with the virtue of justice. The virtue of justice gives understanding to those who have suffered and at the same time a kind of state of self-alert about yourself and the state of things.[95] The man who acts according to justice achieves honest aims.[96]

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[94] Aeschylus, *The Oresteia. Agamemnon*, 177-184 (translated by R. Fagles, Penguin, reprint, 1979).

[95] See *ibid.*, 248-257.

[96] See *ibid.*, 761-766.

In the *Choephoroi* Aeschylus will be explicit in relation to the contrast between prudence and lack of moderation. It is worth noticing that he defines prudence in oral terms. He states that the "prudent tongue" is the one who knows when he must keep quiet and says the right word at the right moment.[97] The role of language shows us how human verbal interchanges can enrich us as human beings when we pronounce or we listen to the appropriate word. The acquisition of tragic consciousness is a dialogic matter which implies learning how to speak and how to listen to our interlocutors. Lack of moderation is defined as a transgression of justice and disdain of divine will.[98] That is, excess is understood as a lack of knowledge of our limited condition. Dialogue is again central because verbal interchanges become a fundamental source of self-knowlege and in general of knowledge of the human condition. Aeschylus glimpses that a sound conversation with a suitable interlocutor might be the way *par excellence* to transform a human being. That will be central for the Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic as the best mode of communication and teaching.

The *Eumenides* is a play dedicated to justice. The latter is personified in Athena's character. The goddess scolds the Furies because they pretended to be just without being just.[99] Aeschylus shows us too that terror is dreadful, but healthy, because it helps us to be cautious in our intentions and it is like a warning against evil. One must never vilify justice:

FURIES:

"There is a time when terror helps,
the watchman must stand guard upon the heart.

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[97] See *Choephoroi*, 568-571.

[98] See ibid., 579-588; 614-633.

[99] See *Eumenides*, 419-445.

It helps, at times, to suffer into truth.
Is there a man who knows no fear
in the brightness of his heart,
or a man's city, both are one,
that still reveres the rights?[100]

The tragedy concludes with an important moral lesson:[101] one must not praise any extreme. The gods have fixed a norm for any right action which is the just mean (μέσον). Every excess (ὕβρις) is a result of arrogant impiety. The man who follows firm reason achieves happiness which is the deepest human yearning. In accordance with the main tenor of his dramas Aeschylus insists that the recognition of our tragic condition involves the acceptance of our limited nature, constrained to change and to the gods. The key to good or positive free decisions is in the permanent awareness of the need to keep a reasonable measure in everything. *The Eumenides* stresses particularly how men may come to understand their human condition through their relationship with the gods. Even if divinities send suffering to human beings, this is beneficial insofar as it is an excellent way to self-knowledge and therefore of completion. It is in the confrontation of individual and collective suffering and in the act of sharing feelings of compassion with others and understanding the reasons for the suffering of human beings that drama portrays vividly what we are and what we can be.

Sophocles

We turn now to Sophocles' tragedies. The *Ajax* suggests repeatedly that human beings are ghosts or mere shadows. When the gods warn us, we

[100] *Ibid.*, 529-535 (translated by R. Fagles, Penguin, reprint, 1979).

[101] See *ibid.*, 536-545.

must contemplate our own condition and how to live a moderate life. A moderate life is for Sophocles a clear expression of prudence. Furthermore, the gods love men who are not arrogant.[102]

Ajax is recognised as a hero or as a man of excellence -even by his enemies- because of his greatness that permits him to stand out among other people. Greatness implies that the hero is not captivated by futile hopes; he lives and dies with honour. Nevertheless, ὕβρις has been developing in Ajax after his success as a warrior. He thinks that he does not need the gods' help any more.[103] Ajax lost this "healthy" fear of gods; he forgot that human beings succeed when they think carefully, with intelligence and in dialogue with the gods. In short: Sophocles shows us through the figure of Ajax that any form of excess goes against justice. Dubious victories just give ephemeral happiness. But again, as in Aeschylus, it is only through experience that mortals know how everyday events will be, not before that.[104] In *Ajax* human self-consciousness is, first and foremost, a recognition of our dependence on the gods and therefore of our contingent nature and the requirement of completion.

In the *Women of Trachis* tragic consciousness is acquired through the experience of the man who knows how to take a risk -even if he has to suffer- with the aim of achieving his purposes. This daring has its grounds in human self-consciousness: our mortal destiny keeps changing -sometimes we get bad fortune, but sometimes we get good fortune. That is the reason that human beings can see an optimistic side to life. The Chorus addresses Deianeira:

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[102] See *Ajax*, 121-133.

[103] See *ibid.*, 748-783.

[104] See *ibid.*, 1418-1420.

"When you complain of this fortune, I feel with you, but I shall oppose you; for I say that you should not wear away all hopefulness. Not even the son of Kronos, who ordains all things, has given mortals a fate free from pain; but as it were the revolving paths of the Bear bring to all suffering and joy in turn."[105]

Equally the Chorus points out to Deianeira that to achieve knowledge, experience is necessary. From this experience we learn that we are fallible beings. From here Sophocles drawns a moral lesson: there is a fundamental difference between the error voluntarily made and the one made involuntarily. The latter does not have to cause us any sort of worry or uneasiness; the former is impossible to redeem, that is, there is no hope that can give us strength to carry on. Sophocles is demanding in relation to the moral importance of each of his characters: each personal condition and nature require the fulfilment of certain requirements of the dignity that they involve. We are responsible beings. Because of that we have to struggle and to try to search for the best way towards personal completion despite the fact that we will make mistakes.

Antigone and Oedipus are, in my judgement, the tragic heroes *par excellence* in Sophocles' dramas.

Antigone displays in her character a series of attributes that make her deeply human, but at the same time heroic. She confronts her destiny with responsibility. Let me make myself clear.

First of all, Sophocles introduces the tragedy by showing us that the inherited *fate* of the Oedipal lineage holds in those on whom falls great suffering.[106] Secondly, Antigone does not let herself be influenced by human customs or human laws because they are changeable. Honourably

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[105] *The Women of Trachis* (translated by H. Lloyd-Jones, Harvard University Press, Reprint, Cambridge Mass./London, 1998).

[106] See *Antigone*, 1-10.

and piously, she *decides* to follow the divine law, despite the fact that that will be seen as a crime by everybody and, because it breaks the relevant human law, she will be condemned to death.[107] It is worth noticing that for Sophocles the weight of fate is less strong than in Aeschylus.

Sophocles presents -through the Chorus- his conception of human beings that summarises what the tragic consciousness is for him: man is the most formidable thing on earth, but at the same time he is terrible. Sometimes he addressess his intelligence and his skill to the good, sometimes to bad things. There are two things that human beings cannot avoid taking into consideration: death is impassible and divine justice inviolable.[108]

Sophocles carries out a game of contrasts personified on the one side by Antigone and Haemon and on the other by Creon and Ismene. In the well-defined character of Antigone, Sophocles shows us -through intense dialogues- the tension that any serious human decision implies. Antigone clarifies her decisions through the different dialogues that she has with herself and with others. Sophocles presents dialogues in action as central for achieving a clear understanding of your personal human condition. It is through different interchanges with other characters in the drama that Antigone is envisaged as being able to achieve an appropriate view of her complex personal situation. Sophocles represents in Antigone the human condition: we are complex beings, with plenty of determining and conditioning factors, but we are at the same time capable of seeing our way through to free decisions. Let us see. Antigone rebukes Creon because he does and says with impunity whatever he pleases; and despite the fact that he has called her a crazy woman, she knows that she governs herself in

[107] See *ibid.*, 69-77.

[108] See *ibid.*, 332-375.

accordance with a superior law: her own conscience that follows the gods, and supervenes human laws and customs.[109] Antigone personifies human authenticity in the sense that she is consistent: she acts according to her thoughts. That is worth noticing because Sophocles portrays -as do the epic and lyric poets- reflective and independent characters who are aware of and responsible for their actions.

The young Haemon tries to make his old and experienced father see that reason is the greatest good that the gods have given to men. Haemon insists to him that his obstinacy has blinded him into keeping his own point of view as the only sensible one on the basis that he is an old man with experience. Because:

Haemon.- "... It is not shameful for a man, even if he is wise, often to learn things and not to resist too much."[110]

Haemon's conclusion is that whoever speaks with moderation is somebody worth listening to. Whoever thinks rightly, it is because he is "full of knowledge"; but it is good too to learn from those who can give you a good counsel . For Sophocles what keeps human acts in a reasonable measure is consistency between thoughts and actions. This consistency is achieved through the light that conversations provide. That is, for Sophocles a well balanced moral life comes from the capacity to listen to sound interlocutors, to think and to assimilate the content of what you have listened to and to act in accordance with that.

The tragedy closes with Antigone's final dilemma of consciousness: she admits -in dialogue with the Chorus- that she goes to Hades, freely and

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[109] See *ibid.*, 450-473; 506-507.

[110] *Ibid.*, 710-711 (H. Lloyd-Jones' translation, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1998).

by her own will, but she questions the gods: why does this process involve so much suffering, and why with her pious attitude does she pass as godless? Were her actions are correct or not? Finally, and after conversations with other characters and internal dialogues with herself she concludes that despite everything, she is acting correctly, that is, devoutly.[111]

Tiresias provides the final balance to Creon, because he makes Creon see -in a key conversation of the tragedy- that making mistakes is common to human beings; that obstinacy is even worse, because it always implies senselessness. Tiresias adds that the misfortunes that the gods send to mortals affect the foolish very easily. In spite of everything, Creon has to give up, since he realises that it is vain to fight against fate. Sophocles' lesson is that human fortune fluctuates, but the truth always prevails because it is the right thing and we should listen to it.[112]

Thus good sense is the first step towards achieving a happy life. The secret resides in not challenging the gods, because any excess exacts its cost. Boasters only learn and could acquire wisdom after they suffer themselves the negative consequences of their arrogance.[113]

Oedipus is the archetype of human suffering and experience. This negative experience is for Sophocles -as for Aeschylus- the master *par excellence.* Furthermore: the possibility of understanding misfortunes is only opened when one has suffered reversals of fortune and one has experienced the mysterious and secret determinations of divinities.[114]

Sophocles presents a clear contrast between fate and freedom in Oedipus' character. On the one side he is not responsible for his

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[111] See *ibid.*, 891-928.

[112] See *ibid.*, 1155-1171; 1192-1195.

[113] See *ibid.*, 1348 ff.

[114] See *Oedipus Tyrannus*, 35-46.

misfortunes, but the victim who suffers the consequences of what is imposed on him. Nevertheless, he takes the initiative and responsibility of knowing this destiny.

The tragic situation of the Oedipal crossroads allows Sophocles to present, through a very strong opposition, the irregularity and contingency of the human condition. Oedipus changed his conditon from being the most distinguished king, excellent man and favoured by the gods, to an individual with the most onerous load of misfortunes. He becomes torture for himself and for those around himself.[115]

The *pathos* with which the tragedy concludes is deeply tender and instructive: Oedipus acknowledges the enormous extent of human limitations and he tells his daughters that they have to implore the gods for a moderate way of living in the sake of avoiding the same unhappy destiny that he had. Sophocles' conclusion is the variability and inevitability human destiny.

Oedipus' character is central for defining Sophocles' idea of the tragic consciousness. On the one hand tragic consciousness is a process of recognition of our deep human limitations, that is, that there are many determinations that we cannot change. But on the other hand tragic consciousness is a learning process, one of discovering our possibilities. That is, as long as we recognise our contingency, there are still many constructive paths to be built. In fact, real and positive human life is a permanent challenge to decide and to build for ourselves. We are responsible beings.

In *Electra,* Sophocles has the purpose of showing us a woman with character; Electra is totally decided to act with full knowledge of the final consequences. Her dilemma of consciousness resides in how to achieve an action in accordance with wisdom. Sophocles contrasts Electra's character

[115] See *ibid.*, 1188-1285; 1347-1355.

with Chrysothemis'. The latter is indecisive about revenging her father. Electra represents the authentic person who proceeds in accordance with justice and without giving in before temptations to transgress it, despite the fact that it might be more convenient. Furthermore, Sophocles shows in his characters that insofar as one tackles something that is just one has to will the means for its execution. Electra herself declares that

"... There is no success without hard work."[116]

With this declaration Electra shows her single-mindedness, but at the same time it is a sample of the human condition: because of our inherent limitation we have to win completion, and in the search for achieving that completion we must make a constant effort.

In the plot of the tragedy Electra insists to Chrysothemis that she should follow her good advice, since she will gain the reputation of a pious and free woman. Furthermore, acting virtuously will give one the reputation of being a wise person.[117]

Despite the fact of the tragic destiny that constrains Electra, she knows how to face up to it in such a way that she will achieve the best prizes in the eyes of gods: she abides by divine rules which are the highest - *i.e.*, more important than human rules.

Like Antigone, Electra is presented by Sophocles as a strong character who understands her tragic human condition and tries to confront it by taking wise decisions. The tragedy of *Electra* gathers together a moral message of wisdom that is achieved through dialogues and sometimes

[116] *Electra*, 945 (H. Lloyd-Jones' translation).

[117] It is worth noticing that the heroic epic idea that good reputation is a matter of public recognition continues to have its echo in tragedy. The difference is that Sophocles' characters are independent and defined through conversations and individual free actions.

confrontations: as human beings we must struggle to get sound decisions that involve foresight and wise thinking.

In *Philoctetes* Sophocles again portrays his main thesis in relation to tragic human consciousness: the life of mortals is a matter of constant rise and fall, a permanent tension of opposite situations. The good man has a deep moral sense, since he searches for good things and rejects the bad.

There are two contrasts in the play. The first contrast is between two characters: Neoptolemus and Odysseus. Neoptolemus prefers to fail as a consequence of his right action than to achieve a boastful triumph accompanied by falsity and as a result of trickery. Sophocles points out, indirectly, that fair actions are preferable to merely crafty ones. Moreover:

Neoptolemus.- "Everything is distasteful, when a man has abandoned his own nature (αὐτοῦ φύσιν) and is doing what is unlike him (μὴ προσεικότα)."[118]

Sophocles presents in this way a hint about what an appropriate human nature must be. From this moral position he will derive a notion of what a good and a bad man must be. That is, any human act that involves a clear transgression or surpasses the human condition will be considered bad.

Odysseus is portrayed as particularly crafty, tricky in a negative sense, because he makes use of these resorts to be openly cruel.

The second contrast is presented between the pair Chorus-Neoptolemus and Philoctetes. The Chorus makes Philoctetes see that it is up to him to avoid his tragic destiny. The Chorus insist to him that the sort of pain to which he has been born goes beyond human limits.

Achilles' son repeats to Philoctetes that the person who bears misfortunes that are voluntarily self-inflicted -as Philoctetes does- does not deserve any compassion. Neoptolemus also reproaches him for his inability

[118] *Philoctetes*, 902-3 (H. Lloyd-Jones' translation).

to listen to good advice and sound warning. The only way that Neoptolemus can persuade Philoctetes to change his decision is by swearing by Zeus that if he goes with them he will be judged as the best of the Greeks and furthermore he will recover his health and he will achieve the highest glory.[119] Sophocles, like Homer, portrays the idea of honour and heroism in a communitarian context.

Philoctetes is particularly important for our purposes because this drama portrays the central role that dialogue and persuasion have in changing or supporting personal and difficult decisions. If Philoctetes changes his mind, it is finally after the process of persuasion that the Chorus and Neoptolemus exert over him.

The *pathos* of the tragic heroism in *Oedipus at Colonus* shows us an old and great man who knows how to suffer patiently all adversities that have come from an ill-fated destiny.

Sophocles contrasts Oedipus' character with the figure of Creon. Creon is also an old man, but lacking in authenticity; excellent in his words, terrible in his acts. Oedipus makes Creon, the tyrant, see that he is skilful with his tongue, but that it is not enough to talk about justice to be just. Furthermore, Oedipus tells Creon that he cannot reproach him fairly for his sad destiny and actual condition. What Oedipus did, was involuntary damage, because he was in ignorance of many facts and circumstances.

Sophocles praises, in Oedipus' words, the figure of Theseus, a young, honest and moderate man:

Oedipus.- "... And may the gods grant you what I desire, for yourself and for this country, since I have found in you alone among mankind piety and fairness and the absence of lying speech."[120]

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[119] See *ibid.*, 1314-1347.

[120] *Oedipus at Colonus*, 1124-1127 (H. Lloyd-Jones' translation).

Oedipus is convinced totally that the worthiest things are only to be entrusted to the best people. That is the reason why Oedipus talks to Theseus. His last advice addressed to the young leader is that he must not be led into the temptation to look down on divine laws because that attitude is the origin of all sort of madness.[121]

Oedipus at Colonus is a tragedy that summarises some central ideas in Sophocles. Because of our limited condition we have to learn through the passing of time to possess the humility to listen to sound advice about how to confront wisely the different sorts of adversities that life involves. To keep the right or reasonable measure in our thoughts, words and actions is equivalent always to respecting the divine law.

Euripides

Finally we turn to Euripides' dramas. We start with *Medea.* The character of Medea is portrayed as that of a woman who holds a series of misfortunes. Her character combines also an arrogant and impulsive nature. Euripides contrasts Medea's character to that of the Nursemaid. The latter tries to advise Medea of the great importance of the difference between moderation and excess:

Nurse.- "... For moderate fortune has a name that is fairest on the tongue, and in practice it is by far the most beneficial thing for mortals. But excessive riches mean no advantage for mortals, and when god is angry at a house they make the ruin greater."[122]

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[121] See *ibid.*, 1533-1539.

[122] *Medea,* 125-130 (D. Kovacs' translation, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass./London, 1994).

Medea launches a capital moral question: why did not Zeus give to mortals the clear means to distinguish -as by a sort of fingerprint- the good man from the bad one? Both the Nurse and Medea stress the point that the key to a good and moderate life resides in the consistency between your thoughts, your words and your acts. The weight of each word is central and that is the reason why Euripides makes us notice that a moderate tongue reveals one's internal personal condition as a harmonious one.[123]

In the last soliloquy[124] Medea is aware that her misfortune comes from her pride; she knows the sort of crimes that she will commit, but her wrath is more powerful and seductive because it surpasses her calculations. Euripides shows us, in accordance with the tradition, that any sort of blinding passion is the main cause of bad things for mortals. Again the final motive of her crime is a matter of public honour: she cannot accept being mocked by her enemies.

After Medea executes her crimes she concludes with a final sentence in relation to the human tragic condition: our mortal nature and our life is sometimes fortunate, but never happy. Thus, for Medea the gods always lead human beings on inexplicable paths.

Hecuba contains the dilemma of a woman who sees her status lost, her past and happy times and her painful present. Her moral dilemma is put in terms of status: how can she continue to keep her honour despite the fact that she is involved in misfortune? In different speeches the character of Hecuba in intensive conversations with other characters portrays the instability of human fortune, the tragic human condition and the different ways that human beings are dependable on many things that are beyond their own control and limits:

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[123] See *ibid.*, 465-519.

[124] See *ibid.*, 1019-1080.

Hecuba.- O grief! It seems there is a great struggle at hand, one full of groans and with no lack of tears! I did not die, it now appears, when I ought to have died, and Zeus did not kill me but keeps me alive, poor wretch, only to see new misfortunes still greater than the old![125]

In this tragedy human nature is opposed to education. One was born good or evil, and it is impossible to change this fact. Nevertheless, to become well and correctly educated involves a learning of what is good. That lesson allows us to distinguish what is dishonourable from what is not.[126]

There is nothing safe for mortals. The gods send us fluctuations, instability and change with the aim that, aware of our ignorance, we respect them.

Euripides stresses in *Hecuba* that the cautious man must search always harmony between his words and his acts. The final message of Euripides' *Hecuba* is related to the prudent man. He is the one who does not mix the just with the injust and who is taught by time that reflection is superior than haste. Thus, the wise and the courageous man is the cautious one who keeps calm at the right moment:

Hecuba.- Agamemnon, men's tongues ought never to have more force than their doings: if a man has done good deeds, his speech ought to be good, if bad, then his words should ring false, and he should never be able to give injustice a fair name. Clever are the men who have mastered this art, yet their cleverness cannot endure to the end. They die a wretched death: not one has yet escaped."[127]

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[125] *Hecuba,* 229-233 (Kovacs' translation). See also 282-285; 583-584; 721-722; 956-960.

[126] See *Hecuba,* 592-600.

[127] *Ibid.*, 1187-1194 (Kovacs' translantion).

Tragic consciousness is in *Hecuba* a matter of personal equilibrium in our relationships. Despite the fact that human life is subject to many external factors that constrain it, it is possible for human beings to keep harmony in our way of acting. The key is found in deliberation and reflection before talking and acting.

Despite the fact that Euripides introduces many new elements in his tragedies he keeps the view of epic and lyric tradition in relation to human beings: we are contingent and dependable beings; the best way to maintain a worthy life resides in the recognition of our limitations and in the free decision to make an effort to mantain a moderate behavior.

Hecuba is a tragedy that shows that, because it gathers together this idea that is common in epic and lyric: Euripides shows us through his reflective characters in dialogues that despite the fact that we are constrained in many ways we are able to keep a virtuous life that is focused on moderation. Moderation and harmony are a result of deep thinking and talking.

In the *Suppliant Women* Theseus puts forward to Adrastus that the argument that human life has more bad things than good ones is false. Theseus thinks that if that were true, human life on earth would be impossible. He thanks Prometheus for providing us with understanding and with the means to live. He thinks that human problems start because men themselves break the equilibrium with an arrogant attitude: we dare immortals because we think that we are wiser than them. Also Theseus strongly criticises senselessness, because he considers that if human beings know their miseries, at the same time we should know that our life is struggle. The gods play in a fickle way with mortals: sometimes they give us success; sometimes, misfortune. Nevertheless, the lucky man gives honours to immortals with the aim of keeping fortune; the unlucky with the

aim of getting it. Insofar as we become aware of these fluctuations we can address our lifes in a temperate way.[128]

Regarding the point of the central role of words in human life, Adrastus tells us:

> **Adrastus.-** "O Zeus, why do men say that hapless mortals have any wisdom? We are dependent upon you and do whatever is your will. [...] O foolish mortals, who shoot beyond the mark and justly suffer much calamity, you do not learn from your friends but only from events! Cities, you could bring your misfortunes to an end by speech, but you carry out your affairs by bloodletting, not words![129]

We can appreciate that Euripides gives an important weight to the role of words and human language to solve human problems. Euripides reveals human nature as conflictive and violent, but at the same time as capable of recovering peace and equilibrium. If human conversations are finally important it is because they provide us with something positive: self-improvement and individual and communal completion. Dialogue is a way of self-understanding and of reciprocal understanding.

In the *Trojan Women* Euripides presents a great variety of dialogues and debates that show us the different features of human nature. That is central because it is a way that Euripides grasps what tragic consciousness is: a permanent dialogic process of self-knowledge and discovery of our limitations and possibilities of becoming better or worse. He insists repeatedly, that nobody can oppose fate.[130]

In a long debate -between Hecabe and Helen and before Menelaus when Helen is arguing for her life- Hecuba tries to show Helen that not

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[128] See *Suppliant Women*, 195-249; 419-510.

[129] *Ibid.*, 734-736, 745-749 (D. Kovacs' translation).

[130] See *Trojan Women*, 636-683.

everything in life is an upshot of chance. Hecuba states that it is not the same to follow the steps of fortune, just as they are, as to follow the steps of a reflexive and decisive virtue before changeable fortune.[131] In spite of the reversals of fortune, we should keep intelligence and measure as the most honest masters. In that way we act in accordance with Zeus, because he leads human matters fairly.

The conclusion of this tragedy -a conclusion similar to Aeschylus' and Sophocles' general views- is that the honest man is the one who assumes his tragic condition, that is, his mortal and contingent nature with the possibilities and limitations that it involves. The honest man loves moderation that implies discretion, modesty and justice; likewise, he recognises the power of the gods and the necessity of human submission to the full rigour of destiny.

III. The dialogic form in Euripides:

Drama pictures in an artistic way the real human dilemmas derived from the tragedy of human insufficiency and the permanent search for completion. Drama portrays -among other sorts of conversations- agonistic interchanges, picturing different sorts of dialogues. Sometimes conversations are between opposite characters in conflict -as when Euripides mimics legal arguments in his tragedies. That is, the main aim of any debate is to win. The interlocutor that shows more skilfulness and persuasiveness to convince his audience about any particular case wins regardless of its truth or falsehood.

To debate has polemical means and aims; sometimes justified, sometimes not. To debate may involve personal or mere subjective motivations or interests that will be defended at any price.

[131] See *ibid.*, 860-1059.

Tragedy is going to play a key role in the explanation of the antecedents of philosophy and rhetoric and also their birth. Tragedy tries to picture the different sorts of conversations that human beings have from the mere fact of being human and yearning for self-completion. Different sorts of conversations develop in the context of different human activities. Ordinary conversations can be about trivial things and just about them and have no wider repercusions. But there is a sort of common philosophical awareness that all human beings have, in the sense that ordinary men ask fundamental questions about themselves and the world. The point is that philosophy takes these fundamental questions and tries to give them methodical and rational answers. Philosophy starts as a self-conscious activity. It receives and undertakes, rationally, the ordinary, the poetic (epic, lyric and tragic), religious and political legacy of human consciousness forged over a long time and gives it a systematic direction that crystallises first, in philosophy itself, and later in an ethics particularly constituted as a moral consciousness in the figure of Socrates.[132] The aim of philosophy -and of any philosophical search- is to have a more careful look at ordinary things and try to give a rational explanation of them.

Tragedy pictures another sort of conversations. Ordinary people tend to debate as well. In these conversations the interlocutors are likely to be convinced that their motives are right. The aim of these debates is simply to win them. Sophocles and Euripides picture quasi-legal debates. Again, the aim of this sort of debate is agonistic: the interlocutor that shows more persuasiveness, craftiness and skilfulness to convince his audience will win

[132] Religion gives another perspective on human consciousness. It provides us a clear distinction and contrast between an independent and differentiated human subject who establishes a link and a relationship with a deity. The contrast between divine majesty and human smallness is another source of human consciousness. This religious awareness is again a recognition of insufficiency. Politics contributes also in this process of constitution of rational consciousness. Human beings start living as individuals in a community organised with laws and in consequence with personal and social responsibilities and aims. This individual-social contrast and interaction is another source of man's understanding of himself as a relative entity, that is, as an individual in and with relationships and responsibilities.

the debate or the case in dispute.[133] This is the origin of rhetoric. Sophocles' introduction of debates is natural and in accordance with the normal development of the tragedy. But it is important to notice that Euripides' tragedies contain, in this picture of legal debates, a *formal* dialogic structure: his characters try to explain through a process of question and answer the motives of their actions, the consideration of the pros and cons. Euripides' characters tend to expose their cases through a process of rationalisation and deliberate consideration of their actions. All this process of giving an explanation involves a parallel between Euripides' characters and Socratic-Platonic dialectic. It is not a matter of coincidence that Euripides' characters frequently use expressions which seem much more to portray a rational argument than a mere drama.[134] In fact, Euripides has been highly criticised for this practice because his critics think that he breaks the natural development of tragedy and just wants to make use of these digressions as a sort of rhetorical display to the detriment of the essence or real charm of the drama.[135] The very characteristic feature of Euripides' formal debates is that they are emotional in their motives, combative in their premises and one of the characters sometimes proposes an open challenge to argument.[136] Despite this agonistic aim, the majority of Euripides' tragedies end in agreement, but there is always a winner of the debate. That is crucial, because Euripides' aim is that his audience should become sympathetic with the winner because normally the victory involves a matter either of political or moral honour or reputation.

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[133] In relation to this topic it is worth consulting C. Collard, "Formal debates in Euripides' drama", in I. McAuslan and P. Walcot (edd.), *Greek Tragedy*, Oxford, 1993, pp. 153-166.

[134] A good example of this is shown in *Trojan Women* (900 ff.) in the conversation between Hecuba, Menelaus and Helen and the exposition of Helen's case.

[135] In relation to this criticism addressed to Euripides see J. P. Vernant et P. Vidal-Naquet, *Mythe et tragedie en Grèce ancienne*, Volume I, Maspero, 1981, Chapter III, p. 74.

[136] See C. Collard, *art. cit.*, p. 155.

In addition: legal debates[137] in Euripides represent the key for connecting tragedy as a formal antecedent of dialectic in the sense of a dialogic method which implies the argumentation of a point -*i.e.*, a case- through questions and answers between at least two interlocutors. As Collard states:

"... In trial-debates the speeches are shot through, exactly as they were in the law-courts of contemporary Athens, with all manner of emotional colour and narrative, or special pleading; and they are carefully organized with calculated switches from attack to defence, pre-emptions of the opponent's argument, appeals to probability, sententious or self-righteous recourse to moral truths. The imagination of transfer from δικαστήριον to σκηνή is completed by the accompanying dialogue, carefully phased, where it precedes the long speeches, in its range from methodical question and answer to sudden accelerations in pace as a crack in the defence is widened, or, after the main speeches, impassioned charge and rebuttal, recrimination, hostility and defiance, which are the regular stuff to end formal debates, gain theatricality from the forensic ambience."[138]

Tragedy and Philosophy

Let me clarify some points. The direct *roots* and beginning of philosophy as dialectic in a Platonic sense are: 1. in the birth of philosophy itself with Thales who was the first philosopher insofar as he asked questions and answered some of them rigorously and methodically, that is independently of pragmatic motivations and 2. in Socrates' conversations, particularly, which show us the way that philosophical conversations have to be developed.

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[137] Some examples of legal-debates in Euripides' tragedies can be found in *Hippolytus*, 902-1089; *Heracles*, 111-287; *Phoenician*, 435-637; *Andromache*, 547-765.

[138] C. Collard, *art. cit.*, pp. 157-158.

The direct literary *antecedents* of philosophy as dialectic are in Greek poetry, that is, in epic, lyric and tragic poetry -and particularly in the form of actual legal debates and the representation of them. Philosophy starts as self-conscious activity; it assumes and develops rationally the "poetic awareness" of its literary antecedents. Philosophical conversations are methodical and with the aim of searching for the truth.

Rhetorical debates are an answer to pragmatic human necessities: to win an ordinary conversation, a formal discussion, or a case. Socratic conversations and the permanent inquiry that they involve have no constraints at all. It is a free and dialogic search for the truth.

In other words, Euripides' tragedies dramatise debates with literary resources, motivations and purposes.[139] Plato writes philosophical dialogues

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[139] There are different opinions in relation to the real origins and literary purposes of Euripides' formal debates. Collard shares Duchemin's view: "Jacqueline Duchemin has claimed that tragedy's agonistic character and particularly its formal debates -are in part its natural inheritance from a long popular or pastoral tradition of dramatic poetry- a primitive mimetic poetry, she means, of alternating or amoibaic form, which represents two contrasted characters or interests. She notes that debates as an established dramatic form, the *agon* of tragedy, appear first in Sophocles and Euripides (that is, in the surviving plays, the earliest of which, the *Ajax*, is generally put at c.450B.C.); but they are absent from Aeschylus. Earlier, she had drawn attention to two other literary forms strongly reliant on the formal opposition of characters or forces. One of these, comedy, developed its idiosyncratic *agon* well before the formal debate became established in tragedy; Duchemin's other analogy, the historians' use of contrast as mode in dramatic narrative or reported argument, is less cogent from the point of synchronism but indicative in a general way of her truth. The spoken word, and especially the reported argument, is as natural to Greek historiography as it is to Greek poetry, let alone poetic drama, when we consider the chief place of oral epic in time and influence in the Greek literary tradition. Duchemin therefore sees Aeschylus' use of alternating and pointed dialogue, especially stichomythia, as the linear ancestor of the more stylized exchanges in Sophocles and Euripides; she suggests that, while the sudden appearance of formal debates in Sophocles an Euripides around 450 is chiefly through the influence of contemporary developments in sophistic argument and rhetorical technique, it is certainly not due entirely to the sophists or rhetors. Rather, tragedy owes much to the sophists, but may itself have influenced them, from the time of its own sudden growth in Aeschylus' lifetime; it may actually have provided some kind of model for their agonistic discourses or ἀντιλογίαι" (pp. 153-154).

Desmond Conacher in his *Euripides and the Sophists* (Duckworth, London, 1998), states: "... The influence of Sophistic rhetoric on Euripides is almost a cliché of literary studies of his plays. This influence is clearly discernible in the structure and the rhetorical devices of the speeches *(rhêseis)*, but it is particularly true of the markedly 'agonistic' ones, *i.e.*, those in which leading characters indulge in the set speeches of formal debate, involving, for example, political ideologies (as at *Supplices* 409-62), dynastic rivalry (as at *Heraclidae* 134 ff.) or personal animosity (as at *Medea* 446 ff.).

... we need to remember that the influence of Sophistic ideas on Euripides' dramaturgy was part of a larger whole, involving style, language and rhetorical technique. Moreover, since rhetoric formed so large part of the Sophist's training for 'the good life' (itself associated with political succes), it would be surprising if there were not some overlap between their views on rhetoric and their views on 'values' (political and ethical)" (p. 50). We agree with C. Collard because we find his explanation more plausible and because we think that if it is undeniable that there is a Sophistic influence on Euripides, it is less strong than it is normally thought. In my judgement Euripides' motives are still and mainly literary, that is, he is a

with literary mastery, but his motivations and aims are strictly philosophical. That is, the form and content of his writing are an inseparable dialectical whole. That does not mean that the form in which Euripides pictures his dramas -and particularly his law-debates- do not present clear similarities and might represent a formal model and literary antecedent of Plato's style of writing.

Many things have been said about the question why Plato wrote in a dialogic form. To clarify this question, which leads to the original one in my whole argument, -that is, the question about the origins of dialectic- it is necessary to put another question which complements and clarifies it: why did Socrates not write anything? The first answer might be, because Socrates embodies the ideal philosopher and the ideal way of doing philosophy, that is, the *live*, methodical conversation which puts everything to the test. Socrates' life and work are an indistinguishable whole. What characterised Socrates' attitude was his direct dialogue and doubting and rational approach to things.

Socrates' personality and lifestyle must have been extremely attractive to many of his contemporaries -as it is for many scholars nowadays. The proof of that is that he had many followers, imitators and parodists throughout history.[140] Many ancient authors have portrayed Socratic conversations in writing. It is clear that Plato was not the first person who wrote and imitated Socratic conversations. But as Diogenes Laertius states:

"They say that Zeno of Elea was first to write dialogues. But, according to Favorinus in his *Memorabilia*, Aristotle in the first book of his dialogue *On Poets*

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dramatist who has the aim of creating and developing a tragedy with all the artistic resources and influences that he might consider appropriate to introduce for achieving his literary purposes.

[140] In relation to the topic of the figure of Socrates see D. Clay, "The origins of the Socratic dialogue", in P. A. Vander Waerdt (ed.), *The Socratic Movement*, Cornell, 1994, pp. 23-47.

asserts that it was Alexamenus of Styra or Teos. In my opinion Plato, who brought this form of writing to perfection, ought to be adjudged the prize for its invention as well as for its embellishment."[141]

It is clear too that Plato was not the creator of philosophy,[142] but the foundation of what philosophy must be crystallises and consolidates in his project of philosophy as dialectic. In this Platonic idea of philosophy as dialectic the figure of Socrates is central. To put it better: the Platonic project of philosophy is incomprehensible without the presence of Socrates. Socrates was aware of the Presocratic philosophy and the appearance of this new and differentiated activity that was focused on a rational, unselfish approach to things. He develops and crystallises this new activity as a methodical way of life. Plato, for his part, had witnessed the origins and development of philosophy and the Socratic philosophical project. Plato's philosophical greatness consists in pouring out in form and content the essence of the philosophical act. That is the reason that Plato defines his philosophical project as dialectic (philosophical dialogue): because he grasps the essence of philosophy as an unavoidably dialectical act, one of living by thinking by ourselves or preferably, in dialogue with others, past and present, and examining everything.

It is not surprising that Socrates' questions and life style were so annoying. Philosophy started as a preeminent activity of inquiry that will call everything into question. Socrates was so annoying with his interrogation because despite the fact that everybody asks these fundamental questions just in virtue of their humanity, the majority of ordinary people tend to avoid them because there are many urgent, pragmatic problems and

[141] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, III, 48 (R. D. Hicks' translation, Vol. I, Heinemann and Harvard University Press, London/Cambridge, Mass, reprint, 1995).

[142] *Cf.* A. Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue. Plato and the construct of philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 1-12.

priorities to solve first. These people delay such philosophical questions and Socrates' insistence disturbs their daily life. Another group of people think that they really know the answers to these fundamental questions, but when they are tested by Socrates they realise that they do not possess the knowledge of the things that they pretend to know. Other people give "interested" answers to these basic questions according to their particular motivations regardless the truth. People resist, but Socrates persists. Socrates and Plato consolidate philosophy as a methodical inquiry, as an activity that put into question everything that was taken for granted or was considered certain. Philosophy starts as a disturbing activity.

How does Plato characterise dialectic and the dialectician? Does the Platonic idea of dialectic remain in form and content throughout the history of philosophy? It is to these questions that we will dedicate the following part.

PART II. PHILOSOPHICAL ROOTS OF DIALECTIC: GENESIS AND EVOLUTION

This second part aims to give an account of the philosophical genesis, evolution and crisis of dialectic through its philosophical roots and history.

The main thesis of the chapter is as follows: philosophy as an essentially dialectical activity has its literary antecedents in Greek epic, lyric and tragic poetry, but when it appears as itself it is born as a different, new and independent activity.

The second thesis of the chapter: Plato's idea of dialectic as a philosophical conversation permeates all possible forms of philosophy but it is important to trace the variations of the idea throughout the history of philosophy to appreciate the different concepts of it.

These changes can range from simple historical variations of the idea of what dialectic is to fundamentally and different conceptual philosophical approaches and developments. Philosophy, as a dialectical task, was explicitly and beautifully grasped by Plato. Philosophy has its internal crises. Plato was trying to advise us about them: without the aim of an unselfish or loving search for the truth philosophy is transmuted into mere antilogic, Sophistry or eristic. Without an ethical principle philosophy is no longer philosophy.

We think that throughout the history of philosophy there have been three main conceptual approaches to dialectic: 1) the Socratic-Platonic,[1] that is, dialectic as equivalent to philosophy -*i.e.*, philosophical conversations involving exchange and challenge in a methodical approach to things. Dialectic is a method, a rational disposition of subjects in relation to things

[1] There are some Stoic approaches to the idea of dialectic that are close to the Socratic-Platonic approach, but for none of the Stoics will dialectic be the philosophical method *par excellence* for searching for the truth. Dialectic is not going to provide the final criterion of truth.

and with the aim of searching for the truth. The Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic is going to play a pivotal role and provide a point of reference for previous notions of similar activities and any possible sort of future dialectic. 2) The Aristotelian, some Stoic approaches and Medieval: dialectic as a logical tool or an instrument for finding erroneous arguments. With Aristotle dialectic becomes an instrumental device for education. With the Stoics dialectic acquires a complex logical and ethical meaning that is organic to their whole system. In this section there will be many central figures: Zeno and the Sophists, Aristotle and the Stoics. Zeno and the Sophists are rather important because they represent the bone of contention between the Platonic idea of dialectic and the Aristotelian one. For Plato they were only impostors and not authentic philosophers because they started the first distortion of what philosophy has to be. For Aristotle, Zeno is the inventor of dialectic, *i.e.,* according to Aristotle's understanding of the concept. If Zeno and the Sophists were not dialecticians, what were they? If Zeno was a dialectician, why was he? Aristotle is central because he makes a break with the Platonic idea of dialectic and he will exert a predominant influence on some of the Stoics and on the majority of the Medieval philosophers. Aristotle concedes that Socrates made some contributions to philosophy, but he abandons the idea of dialectic as central and as a synonym for the whole philosophical process of searching for the truth through methodical conversation. Dialectic as a live dialogue is not essential any more, because it only deals with probable reasonings regardless of the truth. The Stoic idea of dialectic is complex and it needs to be understood as part of the Stoic system, as we will see. 3) The Hegelian and Marxist: the idea of dialectic changes in form and in content. Dialectic inheres in reality: reality is dynamic, through a perpetual movement of synthesis of opposites. We will show the particular differences between

Hegel and Marx and the transitional role that Kant plays in the history of dialectic. [2]

Let's take these three ideas of dialectic one by one.

§4. THE ANCIENT IDEA OF DIALECTIC AND OTHER RELATED ACTIVITIES

a) Plato

Dialectic does not have a linear history. Philosophically speaking, Plato was the first to develop a concept of dialectic.

Dialectic is for Plato first and foremost the highest science.[3] Dialectic in Platonic terms has three main aspects: 1. it is equivalent to philosophy itself insofar as philosophy is identical to/co-extensive with "the art of dialectic" (ἡ τέχνη διαλεκτική). 2. it is a particular way of pursuing inquiry (whatever is currently regarded as the most fruitful procedure for doing it), and therefore a particular method of philosophy. 3. Dialectic for Plato means *philosophical dialogue*. The person who is able to carry out this philosophical dialogue is the dialectician. How does Plato characterise dialectic and the dialectician?

We will support a unitarian approach to Platonic dialectic. It is nowadays an unusual approach, because the most common one is the developmentalist.

First of all, Plato characterises the dialectician as the man who knows how to ask and answer questions.[4] This definition is central for grasping

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[2] The Kantian idea of dialectic represents a transition between the Ancient and Medieval models of dialectic and the Hegelian one.

[3] See *e.g. Philebus*, 57 e7.

[4] See *e.g. Cratylus*, 390c.

what philosophy must be for Plato. One clear point is that the Socratic-Platonic method is an inquisitive procedure. To ask philosophical questions implies an act of recovering innocence in our relationship with things. Philosophical inquiry involves an ability to become surprised about ordinary things and to ask about them as they are themselves. Socrates' call is mainly addressed to the point of recovering a state of alert in relation to things and of contemplating them as they really are. Socrates and Plato reinforce the Presocratic philosophical approach to things, which involved objectivity and the purpose of aiming at truth. In that sense philosophy is a methodical, conscious way of asking questions about what things are in themselves.[5]

That is the reason that Plato identifies the man who has the mastery of dialectic with the lover of wisdom:

> **Socrates.-** "And the only person, I imagine, to whom you would allow this mastery of Dialectic is the pure and rightful lover of wisdom.
>
> **Theaetetus.-** To whom else could it be allowed?"[6]

Plato stresses the dialectician's attitude as that of "the pure and rightful lover of wisdom" (τῷ καθαρῶς τε καὶ δικαίως φιλοσοφοῦντι). In this statement Plato defines the ethical essence of philosophy: an unselfish search for the truth. Real love is always disinterested. A lover of wisdom needs a catharsis from any extra motive, apart from the truth. A lover of wisdom needs an initial humility to accept that he is just an aspirant or searcher for the truth, not a possessor or a manipulator of it.

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[5] Plato portrays Socrates as a man who causes perplexity in his interlocutors by the sort of questions that he asks of them and because he sows a seed of philosophical doubt in ordinary and sometimes cultivated people's certainties; see *Meno*, 80 a-d and 84 b-c.

[6] *Sophist*, 254 e4-5 (F. M Cornford's translation).

The dialectician is also the man who knows how to answer questions scientifically.[7] What is it, according to Plato, that characterises a philosophical answer to a question? To give a philosophical answer implies, first and foremost, to give a reasoned account (διδόναι λόγον) of the object or item in question. Moreover, Plato writes:

> **Socrates.-** "... And do you not also give the name dialectician to the man who is able to exact and account of the essence of each thing? And will you not say that the one who is unable to do this, in so far as he is incapable of rendering an account to himself and others, does not possess full reason and intelligence about the matter?"[8]

In this passage Plato expresses the nature and aim of his method: because philosophical questions are about what things are, philosophical answers imply that a philosopher is able to provide a precise explanation or rational account of the matter in question:[9] an explanation which will satisfy not just himself but also others. The role of the interlocutor (even if the conversation is fictional, and consists in a silent philosophical dialogue with ourselves) is central for Plato.[10] The person or persons who participate in the conversation represent the challenge and exchange necessary to test our thoughts. Ontologically and epistemologically speaking, the philosophical act is not completed until we utter verbally and coherently to others our thoughts, exposing them to testing. Or, indeed, until we have had the other person's response. In that sense, for Plato the search for the truth is not an act that is just within the competence of one subject in front of an object,

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[7] See *Republic* VII, 534 d-535a.

[8] *Republic* VII, 534 b1-7 (P. Shorey's translation).

[9] See *Statesman*, 286 a4-5.

[10] See *supra*, Introduction, note 27.

but a communicative act: it is an act of *giving* and *receiving* a reasoned account of each thing.[11]

When Plato states that dialecticians are men who know how to ask and answer questions he is giving us the key to the dynamics of his method: dialectic is fundamentally a matter of philosophical conversations (διαλέγεσθαι).[12] Socrates always insists that the act of conversing philosophically implies -at least initially- a pleasure because it is an opportunity to talk, to keep company, and to examine your interlocutors in talking about things.[13] Plato many times in his dialogues portrays either Socrates or his interlocutors goading sombody else into conversation.[14] Socrates is typically described by his friends as the man who will not let you go until he has tested you and your way of living in detail.[15]

Plato also emphasises that his philosophical method is fundamentally a direct conversation because dialectic is a preferably a matter of a joint, live investigation with the aim of testing truth and our own ideas.[16]

Plato thinks that the talk that the soul has with itself in the act of thinking is also a dialectical act. This internal conversation implies a kind of talking about one's theses in which one develops a fictional conversation and asks and answers questions oneself, affirms and denies, and challenges oneself with possible difficulties.[17] The culmination of this silent dialogue

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[11] See *ibid.*, 287 a2-4.

[12] It is not surprising that the word διαλέγεσθαι and its cognates recur throughout Plato's dialogues because it describes the essence of dialectic as philosophical conversation.

[13] See *Apology*, 41 c3 ff., *Charmides*, 154 e7.

[14] An example of interlocutors goading Socrates into conversation is in *Lesser Hippias* 373 a7.

[15] An example of Socrates goading others into conversation is in *Laches*, 187 e-188d.

[16] See *Protagoras*, 347 c-348a.

[17] *Supra*, Introduction, note 27.

is a judgement (δόξα), that is, when you can arrive at something definite and apparently self-consistent.[18]

The role of the interlocutor in Plato's dialectic is central. Throughout his dialogues Plato portrays different sorts of interlocutors. Some are more passive than others, some are more challenging, some are even combative. The latter can destroy or twist the aim of real philosophical conversation, that is, dialectic as a cooperative and rational search for the truth. The mere presence of an interlocutor is, at least, an initial challenge for the person who is testing a thesis to express himself and communicate his thoughts clearly and consistently to his audience.

Plato also claims that philosophical conversations are a matter of talking not a matter of arguing. This is important, because a clear difference between philosophy and eristics is that the former does not have polemical aims and does not use polemical means while the latter does.[19] Socrates insists that the main difference between the philosopher and the orator is that the latter does not know how to answer a specific question and to address a point by means of serious conversation and the former does.[20] Furthermore: Socrates defines real philosophical conversation as that in which the participants -however difficult it may be- propose to define or criticise jointly any subject of conversation in an atmosphere of willingness to have a sound interchange, that is, to teach and to learn from each other with the aim of examining and clarifying the subject. When by contrast the aim is merely to dispute, the result is that interlocutors get irritated with each other, and become involved in mutual recriminations: one just stresses to the other that he is not right and he is not clear at all; and the other one thinks that he is just speaking out of spite. As we can appreciate there is

[18] See *Theaetetus*, 189 e-190a.

[19] See *Euthydemus*, 304 a-b, 305 a-b.

[20] See *Gorgias*, 448c-d; *Lysis*, 211 c.

just an anxiety and desire to win instead of researching the topic in conversation. Eristics are also characterised for their lack of consistency throughout a discussion. The upshot is that even spectators of the conversation become upset with eristics because it is not worth listening to them.[21] The condition for any philosophical conversation is a complete willingness to be tested and to examine other's people ideas.

Another important condition for the development of a sound and serious philosophical conversation is the capacity to know how to listen to your interlocutor. A dialogue is a matter of talking, but it is also a matter of patient listening, understanding and desiring to learn from your interlocutor.[22]

Plato's Socrates insists that open-minded interlocutors have a sort of natural inclination to companionship in the search for the truth: there is a good disposition towards talk with each other and towards developing a dialogue in which the answerer tries to provide true answers, clearly formulated in terms that are understandable to the questioner. Eristics are just lovers of disputations, debates, and mere contradictions, and they are not open to a sound conversation; they just require answers with the aim of refuting them, no matter what.[23] Dialectic is a question of friendly conversation that has its roots in the love of finding things out.[24]

Socrates advises us of the danger of falling into disputation against our will. There is great power involved in the ability to dispute, but disputers tend to think, wrongly, that they are having a proper philosophical conversation and not just a mere quarrel. Eristics show their inability to keep up a philosophical conversation because they are unable to conduct an

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[21] See *ibid.*, 457 c-458b.

[22] See *Alcibiades* I, 105 c8-106d9; 129 b7-13.

[23] See *Meno*, 75 c-d; *Republic* VII, 539 b-d, pseudo-Platonic *Sisyphus*, 388 d.

[24] See *Theaetetus*, 146 a.

examination of the subject. Their real aims are reduced to catching verbal contradictions in what has been said and nothing else.[25]

In short: if Plato stresses a clear boundary between quarrels and philosophical conversations it is because the latter require good faith or willingness from the interlocutors to carry out a constructive process of searching and not of mere refutation. The final concern of dialectic is not a subjective or individual one, but finding an impersonal, objective truth through a process of questioning and challenge.

Indeed, Plato's dialectic involves always an elenctic process because the essence of his method resides in the act of co-examination, summoning one to test and justifying rationally one's thoughts through an interchange of questioning and answering. If sometimes the process involves refutation, it has to be emphasised that that is not the kernel of the matter. Socrates always says that he is not concerned with mere refutation, but with finding the truth.[26] The motivating and final aim is to put things to the test with the purpose of finding its truth or falsity. Plato's dialectic as a scientific process involves too the setting out and developing of a thesis. That is central because the process shows us that sometimes the search for the truth cannot culminate in the final formulation of a definition or clear description of the subject-matter in dialogue. But it shows also that the real dynamism of Plato's philosophy hinges on the idea that any problem or hypothesis can be taken up again and submitted to the test either to continue to explore the same topic or to find new possible routes or problems related to it. That confirms also the essence of Plato's philosophy as a perpetual search for the truth that is never completely satisfied. [27]

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[25] See *Republic* V, 454 a.

[26] See *Philebus,* 58 c-d.

[27] See *Lysis,* 222-223, *Gorgias,* 84 ff., *Sophist,* 250 c-251a.

Dialectic, and therefore the dialectician's task -in our judgement- has a second ethical aspect in Plato inseparable from the previous one that we indicated, *i.e.*, the dialectician as the person who knows how to lead a philosophical conversation insofar as he knows how to ask and answer questions. Ethically speaking dialectic is also an educative process of acquiring self-knowledge through dialogue and therefore, of self-improvement:

"... In education, [...] what we have to do is to change a worse state into a better state; only whereas the doctor brings about the change by the use of drugs, the professional teacher (σοφιστὴς) does it by the use of words."[28]

Plato is convinced that the power of words is extremely great. That is the reason that he thinks that the best method for doing philosophy and teaching is by questions and answers. This method requires fairness from the person who asks the questions. That is central because Plato emphasises that it is the greatest inconsistency for a real educator who cares for virtue to be unfair in a conversation. The unfairness consists in the behaviour of a man who does not distinguish between mere controversy and a real discussion. Eristics just try to play and trip up his opponent as much as possible. In a real conversation the person who asks the questions must be serious and helpful with the interlocutor, pointing out to him just those mistakes and slips which come from himself or from pre-existing social prejudices. In that way one can realise that one's mistakes, confusions and difficulties come from oneself and not from the person who is asking questions. It is through this conversation that the interlocutor will recognise the benefit of the method, the change that he experiences in himself, the great quality of the interlocutor that he had and he will be back to take refuge and liberation

[28] Theaetetus, 167 a4-6 (M. J. Levett's translation, revised by M. F. Burnyeat).

in this philosophical process and in the person who carries it out. But whoever follows the common and opposite practice, as most teachers do, will get the opposite result. Instead of like-minded philosophers you will produce people who hate philosophy because of the hostile and combative attitude of the teacher.[29]

If Plato insists on this positive mode of leading the conversation it is because learning and knowing are preeminently dialogic acts, and eventually because his main concern resides in the point that this cooperative work of a teacher and a pupil who are testing a given thesis should culminate in a rational clarification of the object in question:

"... In short, neither quicknesss of learning nor a good memory can make a man see when his nature is not akin to the object, for this knowledge never takes root in an alien nature; so that no man who is not naturally inclined and akin to justice and all other forms of excellence, even though he may be quick at learning and remembering this and that and other things, nor any man who, though akin to justice, is slow at learning and forgetful, will ever attain the truth that is attainable about virtue. Nor about vice, either, for these must be learned together, just as the truth and error about any part of being must be learned together, through long and earnest labor, [...] Only when all of these things -names, definitions, and visual and other perceptions- have been rubbed against one another and tested, pupil and teacher asking and answering questions in good will and without envy- only then, when reason and knowledge are at the very extremity of human effort, can they illuminate the nature of any object."[30]

Live dialogue is the best way of communication and teaching because dialectic -in Platonic terms- is a ψυχαγωγία. Making use of the science of dialectic is to cultivate the seed of knowledge by means of words in your

[29] See *ibid.*, 167 d6-168b4.

[30] *Letter* VII, 344a-b (G. R. Morrow's translation). Despite the fact that it is unlikely that Letter VII comes from Plato's own hand, it probable contains important information about Plato's final ideas on philosophy and other topics.

pupils and cause through them an internal transformation of their souls. This change is presented as self-consciousness and consciousness of the world. Philosophy as a dialogic search of the truth causes an "internal purification" and a rational understanding of the world.[31]

Dialectic in this pedagogic and ethical sense is also a propaideutic that prepares pupils to develop a critical attitude in relation to ways of thinking and living and to address their thoughts systematically to what things really are. The search for the truth through dialogue requires education that implies: a) a disposition to learn[32] how to mantain a serious conversation; b) courage to be tested and to test other people's beliefs and thoughts and to accept the need for getting rid of personal or social assumptions and prejudices. It is worth pointing out that to identify dialectic with teaching in Plato involves different possibilities. We can appreciate in the early dialogues that in the elenctic process it is Socrates or the dialectician who is asking questions and challenging somebody else. In the *Phaedrus* and in the *Seventh Letter* the younger interlocutor is challenging the older person. In the late dialogues and also in the *Phaedo* we see other people challenging Socrates, or even the development of mutual challenges among the interlocutors. All these different possibilities show that what is essential to dialectic is an open willingness in the interlocutors to develop an active conversation which results in a mutual education. What dialectic provides is a new methodical, rational and systematic approach to inquiry, via conversation, into the essence of things. It is also -according to Plato- dialectic that is the only science that can provide a confirmation and a complete explanation of any hypothesis

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[31] See *Phaedrus*, 248 d3 ff., 276 e5-277a5.

[32] Plato also stresses that there are some characteristics that are distinguishable in the philosophical nature, mainly, quickness to learn and the capacity to retain and to see relationships in what is learned, love and disposition for virtue; see *Charmides* 159 e; *Meno;* 88 b; *Republic* VI, 486 c-487a and 494 a-b; *Laws* IV, 709 e-710a; for a parallel view *cf.* Xenophon, *Memorabilia* IV, 1, 2-3.

because, at least in principle, it ascends to the first principles of things.[33] This last point connects us and passes on to a third aspect of Socratic-Platonic dialectic, as a particular method.

Socrates calls experts in dialectic: those who have the natural capacity to look at the one and the many.[34] This dialectical process of looking at and relating the one and the many was developed in different ways. 1. The search for a definition. 2. The setting out of an hypothesis. 3. The process of collections and divisions. Let's take this step by step.

Plato's ontological starting point is that in reality we can distinguish unity and multiplicity. The difference between the eristic and the dialectician resides in the fact that the latter searches for and knows how to articulate this unitary and multiple structure that is inherent in things. The eristic just proceeds haphazardly, straight to the one, omitting the intermediate steps that are essential in the process.[35]

1. Mainly in the early dialogues,[36] it seems that the dialectical process takes place in a search for a definition that can provide a unitary, systematic account of the different elements that are related among each other but that are spread in a multiplicity of entities. The task of the dialectician is to find the common denominator of these different elements that despite their individual differences share a common factor.

2. In some early and middle dialogues the dialectical process implies the setting out of an hypothesis. This process shows something that is inherent to the researching process: when we are searching for the truth, it is

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[33] See *Republic* VI, 511b -c3; VII, 514 a-517c, 518 b-519b, 531 c-535a, 537 b-539d.

[34] See *Phaedrus*, 266 b3-c1.

[35] See *Philebus*, 14 b-17a.

[36] For the sake of convinience we will treat these dialogues as early: *Apology, Crito, Laches, Charmides, Hippias Major, Euthyphro, Protagoras, Gorgias* and *Ion;* these as middle: *Meno, Phaedo, Republic, Symposium, Phaedrus, Euthydemus, Menexemus,* and *Cratylus;* these as late: *Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, Politicus, Timaeus, Critias, Philebus,* and *Laws.*

rather frequent that the original hypothesis will not lead to a final and clear defintion or formula. It can lead either to a mere problematic solution that can be taken up again for a further analysis or to an hypothesis that is just probable but not completely and satisfactorily tested in this first attempt. It is also true that sometimes the expounding of an hypothesis can lead to problematic or aporetic results that could be the beginning of a new treatment or approach to the same subject-matter. Furthermore: sometimes the setting out of an hypothesis can lead us to error. But insofar as we detect it, that can be a new beginning for positive conclusions. That is the reason that Plato insists on the idea that philosophical conversations can be taken up again many times: philosophy is a perpetual search. Dialectic is necessary for philosophising because we need to talk since it is the only means that we have to gain access to things. In other words philosophy is a dialectical search because we are humans and we need completion of our limited human nature, and because language gives us a rational access to things. Despite the fact that language is not reducible to things it provides us with elements for representing things objectively.[37]

3. In the late dialogues Plato inisists on his constant and fundamental idea that the dialectician is the man who grasps reality in a scientific way. Reality has structures and the expert in διαλεκτική τέχνη tries to find where the articulations of kinds are through division (genera and species) and the search for similarities and distinctions between things.

Dialectic here has to be seen as a process and as a crowning of a process. Dialectic aims at a complete understanding of the being and essence of things themselves through rational discourse.[38] Dialectic is a rational exercise that has the aim of achieving such an account.

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[37] Regarding this topic is worth consulting E. Nicol, *Metafísica de la expresion, ed. cit.*, pp. 59-60.

[38] See *Republic* VII, 532 a-b5.

The dialectician is the man who knows how to distinguish the constitutive and characteristic form of each thing and how to address his thoughts to them.[39] A particular way of finding similarities and dissimilarities in Plato is through a process of grouping into kinds which involves too a process of collection and division. This process of grouping into kinds permit us to see to what extent a group of things exhibit and share certain characteristics. Kinds exhibit a network of relationships. Kinds are a unity and a multiplicity at the same time. They are a unity because they bring together in a whole different things that otherwise are spread and isolated in a disconnected multiplicity. They are a multiplicity because kinds can be interconnected among each other. Dialectic implies a discriminatory process. The dialectician has to discover which of them are combinable among each other, and which are not. In this sense kinds that combine among each other are interconnected wholes that group multiple parts.[40]

When the dialectician can establish which combinations among kinds are possible and which are not possible he also establishes relationships of truth among things. The dialectician is capable of grasping a clear map of reality insofar as he can discern similarities and differences among things.

As we have said, Plato makes Socrates say that dialecticians are lovers of collections and divisions. If the final aim of dialectic is to know what things are and state it in a clear formula, the dialectical process starts with the attempt to grasp from reality an initial kind that could describe or throw some light on things or a group of things. Any attempt to define something implies making explicit different notions of one particular object or group of objects, starting from the general and moving to the particular.

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[39] See *Parmenides,* 135 b5-c3.

[40] In the earlier dialogues, kinds that do not combine among each other are differentiated wholes, that is, a plurality of unities.

Socrates.- "... there is perceiving together and bringing into one form items that are scattered in many places, in order that one can define each thing and make clear whatever it is that one wishes to instruct one's audience about on any occasion."[41]

This is the process of collection. One cannot start a process of division if one does not collect first. Once the dialectician collects and groups according to kinds he can start a process of division into genera and subgenera until he achieves and expresses verbally a clear definition which shows his process of thinking and clarifies in a whole system what sort of connections and inerconnections there are among things and what a specific object is. In this process of division the dialectician has to follow a principle that implies the ability to cut up -as much as is necessary- kind by kind, in accordance with its natural joints.[42]

In this unitarian approach to what dialectic is in the Platonic dialogues, we should emphasise that the three different meanings -or perhaps "modes": defining, hypothesising, articulating- of dialectic that we have been describing are compatible with each other.

b) Aristotle

As the good student he is, Aristotle rejects Plato's idea of dialectic, as we will see.

It is a fact that Aristotle presents different approaches to what dialectic is.[43] He says different things about dialectic and the dialectician throughout his work. For Aristotle dialectic is: a) an art of questioning:

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[41] *Phaedrus*, 265 d3-5 (C. J. Rowe's translation).

[42] See *ibid.*, 265 e-266b2. See also *Republic* VII, 537 c5-8.

[43] See *supra*, Introduction, §1, b) Aristotle's objection.

"... Dialectic, however, does proceed by interrogation, whereas, if it aimed at showing something, it would refrain from questions, if not about everything, at any rate about primary things and particular principles ..."[44]

b) The man:

"... who can make propositions and objections is the skilled dialectician."[45]

c) Dialectic is the power of concluding contrary things, because -like rhetoric- it is the art of upholding the pros and cons of one given thesis:

"... Rhetoric and Dialectic alone of all the arts prove opposites; for both are equally concerned with them."[46]

These three general features of dialectic are connected with two further general features, that is, that d) dialectic has a universal character in its fields and aims and e) that dialectic begins from generally accepted opinion:

"The purpose of the present treatise is to discover a method by which we shall be able to reason from generally accepted opinion about any problem set before us and shall ourselves, when sustaining an argument, avoid saying anything self-contradictory.[47]

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[44] *On Sophistical Refutations* XI, 172 a18-20 (translated by E. S. Forster and D. J. Furley).

[45] *Topica,* VIII, 14, 164 b3-5.

[46] *Rhetoric,* I, 1, 1355 a12 (translated by J. H. Freese).

[47] *Topica,* I, 1, 100 a 18-21(E. S. Forster's translation).

Aristotle says that the name of this kind of argument is "dialectical reasoning" (ὁ διαλεκτικὸς συλλογισμός) and researching on it will be the central aim of his *Topics*.[48]

It is in these two latter points, that is, the universality of dialectic and the nature of its starting points *(endoxa)*, that dialectic is opposed to special sciences. For Aristotle any branch of science refers to a specific kind of objects and only one; dialectic does not refer to specific things in this way, that is, to a specific kind. Nevertheless dialectic gives access to the common principles[49] of all sciences, but does not have any demonstrative power because it proceeds by interrogation. While every science is based on its own axioms, dialectic tries to find and to explain the universal common principles of all sciences. That is the reason why, for Aristotle, the dialectician can move independently of any particular scientific consideration. For Aristotle also, the dialectician works in the field of probabilities and verisimilitudes, not in the field of truths. But dialectic is important in Aristotle's work because it is the means by which we acquire the principles of science. Dialectic must be distinguished from the sciences because it does not involve any particular approach to reality.[50]

What are the similarities and differences between Plato's and Aristotle's ideas of dialectic?

The first point that is clear and obvious is that Plato's and Aristotle's ideas of dialectic are radically different. The main reason is that Aristotle is not interested in the idea of dialectic as a scientific activity.

Nevertheless, we can find a common feature in Socratic-Platonic dialectic and in Aristotelian dialectic as an activity that the *word itself*

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[48] See *ibid.*, I, 1, 100 a22-24.

[49] Aristotle makes clear that he will understand by common principles of sciences "... what they use for the purpose of demonstration, not the subjects about which they conduct their proof, nor the connections which they prove" (*Posterior Analytics*, I, 11, 77 a 26-28 translated by H. Tredennick).

[50] See *ibid.*, I, 11, 77 a26-35 and *On Sophistical Refutations*, I, 165 b1-12.

designates: the method of question and answer.[51] For Plato the central value of dialectic resides in the verbal interchange between interlocutors that gives us the means to provide and to receive a reason for each thing and to show in words what things are. That is the reason that dialectic is the ideal form of communication and teaching. The dialectician is the philosopher who tries to grasp reality in a scientific way. For Aristotle the principal worth of dialectic resides -as Evans calls it- in its "*prescientific*"[52] nature, in its ability to discuss any thesis without the pressure or imposition of any specific approach or interpretation about objects.

For Plato the dialectician and the philosopher are the same, whereas Aristotle rejects this identification.[53]

For Plato dialectic is a synonym of philosophy and it can provide us with the highest and most complete rational account of things. For Aristotle dialectic and philosophy are different. They are different in their outcomes. For Aristotle dialectic is merely tentative where philosophy is scientific: in a negative sense dialectic can destroy claims of knowledge, but positively it is incapable itself of producing knowledge. According to Aristotle's idea about what philosophy must be, it has to study the essence and attributes of things and the nature of substance that is prior to these attributes. Dialectic, basing its enquiry merely upon popular opinions, tries to find general common principles of science, but it cannot scientifically study causes, concepts and attributes related to these principles.[54]

For Plato dialectic is the highest way of knowledge, the science of reality which studies reality as it really is. For Aristotle, dialectic is only *a particular form* of intellectual activity, but lacking in scientific status.

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[51] See Plato, *Statesman,* 287 a2-4; Aristotle, *Topica,* VIII, 1, 155 b1-16.

[52] See J. D. G. Evans, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic*, Cambridge University Press, 1977, p. 29.

[53] See Plato, *Sophist,* 253c-e; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, IV, 2, 10004 b16 ff.; *Topica,* I, 1, 101 a30b4.

[54] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics,* III, 1, 995 b20 ff., IV, 2,1003 b1-19, 1004 a 31-b25.

For Plato and Aristotle the objects of dialectic are the same, but dialectic does not tackle these objects in the same way. Let me explain. For Plato dialectic is the highest form of scientific and intellectual activity and universal in its application in the sense that he suggests that dialectic could, in principle, tackle any complex item and ultimately "the finest and greatest".[55] For Aristotle, despite the fact that dialectic is universal in its application, the way that it tackles its objects is not scientific.

For both dialectic implies an art of examination through questions and answers. In that sense Plato and Aristotle recognise a pedagogic worth and progress in the question and answer process.[56] Equally both are aware that without method in the way of conducting the dialogue, dialectic can degrade into eristic. While for Plato it is evident that scientific progress could be got by dialogue if it is conducted according to dialectical rules (and according to reality), for Aristotle the fact of the educational worth of dialogue and these preventive rules are not themselves sufficient guarantee of intellectual advance beyond an improving capacity of arguing. Moreover: Aristotle considers that with dialogue we are more susceptible to making mistakes than when we just deal directly, face to face, with things on our own. That is the reason too that for Aristotle the definitive criterion of truth has its grounds in the examination of particular objects.[57] As Evans remarks:

"... Aristotle distinguished things which are more intelligible absolutely from things which are more intelligible to us, and this distinction represents a recognition of two senses in which something can be said to increase our understanding. The explanation may include elements which are absolutely more intelligible than that which is to be explained, or elements which are only intelligible to some person or group of people.

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[55] See *Statesman*, 285c-286b.

[56] See Plato, *Meno*, 80-86; Aristotle, *Topica*, I, 2, 101 a.

[57] See *supra*, Introduction, §1, b) Aristotle's objection, pp. 11, 13-14, and 16.

Consequently Aristotle has the means of contrasting genuinely and absolutely explanatory with what *people may find* explanatory; and the complexity of the situation can be seen from the fact that, according to the Aristotelian distinction between the two forms of intelligibility, one could speak of someone's, indeed of most's people's, understanding being advanced by explanations which nevertheless are not genuinely explanatory."[58]

In short: Aristotle does not see in dialectic an objective and secure method for searching for the truth.

For Plato and Aristotle dialectic is a method. For Plato it is the scientific method *par excellence* which provides us with the ideal rational means for arriving at the truth and the final foundation of it, via dialogue. For Aristotle -despite the fact that it can sound contradictory- dialectic is a non-scientific method or a neutral capacity of reasoning that just provides us with a possible access to the discovery of general scientific common principles. Dialectic is still important for Aristotle, but not essential, because it refers to the ultimate, general foundation of science and opens a firm beginning to particular sciences since the latter are incapable of providing these final foundations.

For Plato dialectic involves essentially a search for definitions or at least for explanations, in a scientific way. For Plato the work of dialectic implies a double way that leads up from assumptions to a beginning or principle that permits us to go beyond these assumptions and to work with forms and to interconnect them and another one that leads down from a principle to a conclusion.[59] Because Aristotle demotes the range of dialectic it acquires an instrumental role as a discriminatory process. But Aristotle is still interested -as is Plato- in the scientific search for the truth. He will transfer the role that Plato assigns to dialectic -*mutatis mutandis*- to what he

[58] J. D. G. Evans, *op. cit.*, Chapter II, p. 8.

[59] See *Republic* VI, 510 b and 522 b.

calls first philosophy. First philosophy will study everything (everything, that is, *in a way*) in a scientific way.

Both try to find a unifying and supreme scientific knowledge in their philosophical systems: Plato with his idea of dialectic; Aristotle with his first philosophy.[60]

Aristotle makes it the aim of dialectic to test the correctness of opinions. For Plato dialectic is the highest science which we have to liberate us from the realm of opinion. Aristotle says that dialectic belongs to the realm of "general culture" (παιδεία) which is empty because of its generality. The scientific person is the person who knows because he possesses knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).[61] For Plato dialectic is a leading of the soul (ψυχαγωγία),[62] and is education (παιδεία) *par excellence*. The original ethical purpose of using dialectic is to find the objective truth because one pursues knowledge of reality, self-knowledge and in that way the improvement of one's life. This is also the core of Socratic-Platonic humanism as an active reflection on what a human being must be and the project of improving and transforming oneself through perpetual self-examination and general examination of any object given.

Plato makes a clear distinction between rhetoric and dialectic and he opposes each to the other. Rhetoric has -in general- a negative role that puts in serious jeopardy the dialectician's task. Rhetoric is for Plato a skill of talking with persuasive arguments, but one that does not care for the objective truth. Aristotle relates dialectic and rhetoric as arts that can prove opposites.[63] He considers Zeno as the founder of dialectic. With this statement he introduces a definitive break with the Platonic idea of dialectic

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[60] See Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I, 1 and 2.

[61] See Aristotle, *Politics* III, 11, 1282 a6, *Eudemian Ethics*, I, 8, 1217 b21.

[62] See *Phaedrus*, 271 c10.

[63] See footnote 46.

and a new beginning that could provide a historical background to his own idea of dialectic. That is why it is not surprising that Aristotle assigns to the dialectician the ability to make propositions and objections.[64]

Our next step is to clarify the role of Zeno in the history of dialectic in order to tackle Plato's rejection of certain practices as part of dialectic and Aristotle's assertion that he was the founder of dialectic.

c) Zeno and Co.

Plato's objection against any sort of anti-dialectic -*i.e.*, eristic, Sophistry or antilogic- is very strong. The reasons that he gives are clear: they put in serious danger the idea of the essence of philosophy as a scientific and noble activity. The fruits of these anti-dialectical practices are such approaches as relativism, subjectivism and scepticism. As examples of such antidialectical practices, we propose to examine Zeno, Protagoras and Gorgias in turn.

We will start with Zeno. If we consider the philosophical verdicts of Plato and Aristotle on Zeno's method, we can see that they are contrary. Plato writes in the *Phaedrus*

Socrates.- "So do we not recognise that the Eleatic Palamedes speaks scientifically, so as to make the same things appear to his hearers to be like and unlike, one and many, at rest and in motion?

Phaedrus.- Yes indeed.

Socrates.- Then the science of antilogic is not only concerned with law-courts and public addresses, but, so it seems, there will be this one science -if indeed it is one- in relation to everything that is said, by which a man will be able to make everything which is capable of being made to resemble something else resemble everything which

[64] See footnote 45.

it is capable of being made to resemble, and to bring it to light when someone else makes one thing resemble another and disguises it."[65]

And concludes:

Socrates.- "In that case, my friend, anyone who does not know the truth, but has made it his business to hunt down appearances, will give us a science of speech which is, so it seems, ridiculously unscientific."[66]

Aristotle said in his *Sophist:*

"... that Empedocles was the first to discover rhetoric and Zeno dialectic."[67]

Plato does not think that Zeno is a serious philosopher. Why does Plato suppose that Zeno is not serious? Why does he imply that the things that Zeno is doing are what an eristic does -where eristics as the name of the "expertise" in question is a kind of Sophistry? Why does Aristotle say that Zeno is the founder of dialectic? Why is Zeno not a Sophist for Aristotle? What is a Sophist? Why did Aristotle abandon the word "dialectic" for "the science of the most important things"?

If we follow the method that Zeno uses, to judge from his fragments, we can conclude that: 1. He tries to demonstrate logically certain propositions based on a thesis; 2. sometimes he reaches contradictory conclusions;[68] 3. sometimes we have to accept certain assumptions or make concessions in relation to his inferences and conclusions;[69] 4. sometimes he

[65] *Phaedrus*, 261 d = DK 29A13 (C. J. Rowe's translation).

[66] *Ibid.*, 262 c (C. Rowe's translation).

[67] Diogenes Laertius, VIII, 57 = DK29A10.

[68] See *Frg.* 3 and 29A13 (DK).

[69] See 29A25, *Frg.* 4 (DK) and Aristotle, *Physics,* Z9, 239bII.

likes to start from hypotheses that are probable and to develop the reasoning to its last consequences.[70]

What are the criteria in Plato for identifying a philosophical discourse? The criteria are that the discourse has to be dialectical, that is, the philosopher has to show his *capacity* to defend it; his *intention* has to be teaching rather than merely persuading;[71] and his *aim* to pursue the truth. For Plato dialectic is the method *par excellence*; dialectic is dialogue; dialectic is the synoptic science of reality which studies it as it really is, through questions and answers.

Why does Plato reject Zeno's procedure? Probably because Zeno carries out his reasonings without any serious dialogue and human interchange, and above all, because at the end of his logical exercises, he does not compare his results with primary evidences. One can also "play" with arguments that are formally correct, but not really (truly) correct because they do not represent anything real. For Plato this is metaphysically and ethically a serious mistake.

Antilogic can be useful as long as you are permanently confronted with reality; otherwise it can be the first step to eristic and Sophistical procedures and conclusions. It is no accident that Protagoras and Gorgias took their source of inspiration from Zeno. Plato calls Sophists people like Protagoras or Hippias. The key to defining a Sophist, in the pejorative sense, is, according to Plato, to analyse the different forms in which he appears and acts[72]. A "Sophist" was originally an expert. Zeno is not normally treated as a Sophist, but sometimes he does things like a Sophist

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[70] See *Frg.* 3 and Aristotle *Physics* Θ8, 263 a15-18, b3-9.

[71] See A. Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue. Plato and the construct of philosophy*, Cambridge University Press, Chapter 4, V, p. 165. See also C. Rowe, "The Unity of the Phaedrus: a reply to Heath", *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, Vol. 7 (1989), pp. 180-183.

[72] In fact that is the starting point of the *Sophist*, that is, the six preliminary definitions of the Sophist as he appears provide us with the initial and fundamental light to enable us to hunt him down in a clear formula.

(e.g. reaching contradictory conclusions, treating hypotheses as firm starting points). Plato claims that Sophists were not philosophers because they did not pursue the truth. In this sense Zeno is an eristic for Plato because he does not care about truth and he only operates on a conceptual level.

Plato's rejection of Zeno in the *Parmenides*[73] is because he really thinks that Zeno is an eristic. Zeno claims, in accordance with Parmenides' thesis, that there is only one thing in the universe. Plato considers that Parmenides is serious because he addresses real problems such as being and not-being. The really interesting questions are for Socrates those that Zeno ignores. Zeno is not interested in questions like how something could be like and unlike. Equally, Plato's Socrates thinks that the problem is not with particular forms, as Zeno thinks,[74] but with forms and their relationships of similarities and dissimilarities.

Plato has an extraordinary ability to construct arguments. In that sense he is very pragmatic: he uses arguments at the moment that he needs them, but always with dialectical means and aims. We cannot deny that Plato introduces Zeno in the *Parmenides* in order to put his own philosophical problems, that is, to show us what *elenchos* is and what the development of an hypothesis can be when the aim of the conversation is philosophical, that is, to help in the search for the truth, and to put this into contrast with Zeno's way of proceeding.[75] That is, Plato wants to contrast dialectic and eristic by resorting to Zeno's case. According to Plato, Zeno only uses his antinomies for establishing paradoxes, just like a mere first attempt -one that never reaches anything clear and concrete-, but he does not go further. In that sense Plato treats Zeno as a contradiction-monger.

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[73] See *Parmenides*, 127 d-130c.

[74] Parmenides is interested in questions like this, at any rate, but at least his approach is open to discussion and he is not taking anything for granted as Zeno does.

[75] See *Parmenides*, 136-137.

Parmenides' and Zeno's starting points come from the perceptions of other people or the majority of people. Both are trying to convince us that our perceptions are wrong and deceptive. Plato accepts primary evidences as a starting point and he does not demote or deny their ontological status, but he does not think that the final criterion of truth will be provided by mere perceptions.

Plato rejects Zeno radically from the beginning, and finally he commits parricide against Parmenides,[76] because at the end both are denying primary evidences and facts -the existence of unity and multiplicity, change and difference in real things and in their relationships- that are the starting point and the *conditio sine qua non* of Plato's dialectical method.

If finally Plato rejects both it is because he seeks to demonstrate and to test his own theses and ideas, giving them a stronger historical and theoretical foundation through a dialogue with eminent figures like Parmenides and Zeno.

Methodologically speaking, Plato rejects Zeno's contentious procedure for achieving puzzling aims. His arguments hinge on logical assumptions that make them, sometimes, look logically possible, but physically impossible. That is, they can be premises that look possible, but are really puzzling. But Plato accepts Parmenides' method as a philosophical one -insofar as Parmenides is really concerned with the truth- despite the fact that finally Plato will reject his conclusions.

Zeno, according to Plato, has merely partial aims: he wants to show us that *he* is personally right regardless of the objective truth. Parmenides' search is for Plato too a real one: his aim is to prevent *human* confusion and error. He really thinks that human ways of perceiving are unreliable. The truth, according to him, requires a different path and that is what he is trying to show us in his poem.

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[76] See *Sophist*, 241 d5-7.

As we have said, the concept of dialectic in Aristotle involves three main ideas: [77] 1. it is an art of questioning; 2. it is the power of reaching contradictory conclusions, insofar as the dialectician is the man who has the ability to make propositions and objections. 3. it is the method of reasoning from generally accepted opinion.

We can grasp the similarities between Zeno and Aristotle in relation to dialectic: 1. The ability to reach contradictory conclusions; 2. the use of *endoxa:* for Aristotle the dialectician works in the field of probabilities and verisimilitudes, not in the field of truths;[78] 3. for both it involves an art of questioning

Aristotle accepts the value of the Socratic elenchos, but rejects the idea of dialectic as a science -in the Platonic sense. When Aristotle says that Zeno was the founder of dialectic, it is obvious that he is referring to dialectic in the Aristotelian sense. For Aristotle antilogic can be a step to dialectic (and in this sense he supports Zeno's method), but dialectic is only a first attempt or preliminary and neutral capacity of reasoning that requires discipline so as not to degenerate into eristic -and he does agree with Plato in relation to the risk that antilogic implies.

If Aristotle does not accept any historical affiliation with Platonic dialectic, he has to change the meaning and scope of his idea of dialectic in accordance with its Zenonian origins. Dialectic will not be any longer a form of *episteme*, and Aristotle has to create a new path to study "the most important things": first philosophy.

Conclusion: Zeno was an ambiguous figure. We only have fragments of his work, and that is a kind of hermeneutical restriction when we try to give an accurate account of his thought. Zeno will continue to produce many controversial reactions among scholars. Probably, most of the time he

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[77] *Supra*, pp. 127-129.

[78] See J. D G. Evans, *op. cit.*, Chapter II, pp. 26-27.

could not offer us conclusive reasonings, but he gives us with his antinomies enough elements to make us hesitate about what other philosophers take for granted.[79] Also, his "logical plays" have given enough work for lovers of formal logic and mathematics.

Gorgias and Protagoras are very controversial figures too. Nowadays some contemporary interpreters and champions of the Sophists' activities and practices have expressed their rejection of Plato's portrayal of them in his dialogues.[80] The reasons that they exhibit for that rejection are as follows: 1. Plato's idea of philosophy is so narrow and inflexible that it does not allow him to include in it anything that involves ways of thinking that do not show clear boundaries between true and false reasonings; 2. Plato suggests that he portrays the Sophists fairly; nevertheless their defenders say that this is not necessarily true because what the Sophists support does not always represent their own doctrine.

These champions of the Sophists also argue that Plato just ridicules the Sophists' activity, but that he really did not know what their purposes were.

What should we respond to this?

Plato's idea of philosophy is an organic dialectical project with a complete and linking set of means and aims, form and content.[81] If he insists throughout his works on this idea of philosophy as methodical conversation with the aim of discovering the truth in reality it is because he saw clearly the serious risks involved in including as philosophy personal opinions or personal points of view. Even if it is true that, for example,

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[79] See D. J. Furley, "Zeno and indivisible magnitudes" in A. P. D. Mourelatos (ed.), *The* Presocratics, Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1993, pp. 365-366.

[80] See G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement,* Cambridge University Press, reprint, 1993, Chapter 6, pp. 59-67; A. Nehamas, "Eristic, antilogic, sophistic, dialectic: Plato's demarcation of philosophy from sophistry", *History of Philosophy Quarterly* 7 (1990), 3-16; and G. Striker, "Methods of sophistry" in *Essays on Hellenistic Epistemology and Ethics,* Cambridge University Press, 1996, pp. 3-21.

[81] *Cf.* A. Nehamas, *art. cit.*, pp. 8-9.

Protagoras in his *Truth* was just trying to defend the validity of personal opinion and beliefs, that does not mean that we can go a step further and assert that philosophy can be reduced to a collection of them.[82] It is one thing to say that everybody should be allowed to support or to express his (her) personal opinion, view or belief about anything and it is another completely different thing to hold that these opinions, views and beliefs should be granted philosophical status for themselves. That is the reason that Plato insisted that dialectic involves an elenctic process, that is, that everything has to be put to the test and its truth or falsity demonstrated.

In other words, if it was Protagoras or somebody else who was trying to vindicate individual perception, it does not follow that it can be automatically set up as an epistemological and universal criterion of truth; and if it represents his position, Plato was trying to show us the serious consequences that follow from it: subjectivism and relativism.[83]

Moreover: let us suppose that whatever Protagoras in his *Truth* and Gorgias in his *What is not* were saying were not their own theses. That is, let us suppose that they were just trying to address themselves against Parmenides' theses, or theses like Parmenides', with the aim of showing us four main points: 1. that his reasonings do not lead to anything; 2. to demonstrate other possibilities of reasoning; 3. to vindicate the status and validity of opinion -Protagoras; and 4. that nothingness permeates everything and from there, that there follows the impossibility of the cognition and communication of anything -Gorgias. But what happens if -as Plato did- we follow them out to their *last* philosophical consequences, independently of who supports them? Immediately we notice that they are deeply antidialectical -in the Platonic sense of the term. If we take personal perceptions as the measure of everything it will be impossible to get any sort

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[82] *Cf.* G. Striker, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

[83] See Plato, *Theaetetus*, 154b-155d.

of agreement. Philosophically speaking, it implies the destruction of any ontological, epistemological or ethical criterion of truth. In that sense it would imply also the atomisation of philosophy, which would be just a collection of isolated opinions, views and beliefs about existent or non-existent "things".

If we take absolute nothingness as the comprehensive category that includes everything, obviously there is no step further to go. Even if we make a concession and we provide nothingness with concrete characteristics or attributes we are, first of all, contradicting ourselves, and secondly we can just conclude that because of this dominance of nothingness, knowledge and communication are impossible. But facts contradict us; we communicate with each other despite the fact that there is always the possibility of having misunderstandings.

To broaden the discussion: in relation to other Sophists, it is not valid either to say that Socrates and the Sophists have the same method, but different aims, because what Socrates was doing finally was just "refuting" other people's beliefs and "winning discussions" according to what he and his interlocutors consider true.[84]

This is radically wrong. To reduce the elenctic process that Socratic-Platonic dialectic includes to mere refutation is just to oversimplify and misunderstand its essence and aims. Dialectic -in the Platonic sense- involves an *elenchos* which implies also a dialogic process of testing and examining ideas with the aim of searching for the truth.[85] Plato does not define philosophy in polemical terms. Socrates does not want to seek or to get any *victory* through *discussion,* he wants -in accordance Plato's dialectical purposes- to search jointly -via conversation- and objectively for the truth that is present in a common reality that all of us share.

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[84] *Cf.* A. Nehamas, *ibid.*, pp. 10-13.

[85] *Cf.* G. Striker, *ibid.*, p. 9.

We would insist that it is not valid to split the means and aims of Platonic dialectic because they constitute an inseparable whole.

It is not true either to say that because of the limited scope of Plato's notion of what philosophy is, he could not understand the value of rhetoric and probable reasonings that the Sophists use to exhibit in their practices, while Aristotle does.[86] We proceed point by point.

It is true that, in general terms, Plato uses the word rhetoric in a negative and therefore pejorative sense. It is not until Plato's maturity that he conceives the possibility of a positive practice of rhetoric.[87] Rhetoric in its negative sense is for Plato -broadly speaking- an art of speaking with merely persuasive[88] or false reasonings making use of fallacious arguments that do not correspond to any reality. Plato's main concern continues to be the same: the objective truth. That is the reason that Plato rejects probable reasonings and conclusions: because while they can be useful in many other human activities and practices they do not show us directly what is true or false.[89] Furthermore: Plato has in mind the serious risks that rhetoric would involve when reason is used as an instrument of power.

It is also true that Aristotle builds a very detailed idea of what the art of rhetoric must be and he posits it as a "counterpart of dialectic". He also considers that both can construct arguments that lead to opposite conclusions.[90] But Aristotle was concerned with truth, proof of which is that he considers -as Plato did- that philosophy and the particular sciences ultimately aim at the truth. The difference from Plato is that Aristotle does

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[86] *Cf.* A. Nehamas, *ibid.*, p. 14 and G. Striker, *ibid.*, p. 10.

[87] We are referring to the *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman,* especially.

[88] See *Gorgias,* 455 a ff. and *Philebus,* 58 a ff.

[89] There is no harm in remembering Benjamin Disraeli's famous phrase: "There are lies, damned lies and statistics."

[90] We are borrowing this expression from J. Brunschwig, "Aristotle's rhetoric as a 'counterpart' of dialectic", in A. Oksenberg Rorty (ed.), *Essays on Aristotle's Rhetoric*, University of California Press, 1996, pp. 34-55. See Aristotle, *Rhetoric,* I, 1355 a33-36.

not think that the way to search for the truth is through dialectical means -in the sense that Aristotle understands the term. Dialectic for Aristotle is not part of philosophy. It is true that Aristotle gives some value and recognition to the process that the Sophists use to achieve their probable reasoning. But it is false to say that because Aristotle has "no such pious reservations"[91] -as Plato has, according to these contemporary critics- or a more flexible idea about what philosophy is than Plato, that Aristotle considers that dialectic deals with similar objects and methods to philosophy. For Aristotle dialectic does not have any demonstrative power and it is neutral in relation to truth because it does not deal with any particular subject-matter as philosophy and the particular sciences do.

If finally Plato disqualifies the Sophists' way of proceeding it is because this practice can lead to a mere love of contradictions and to our becoming misologues.[92] This state reveals a very anti-philosophical attitude in relation to objective truth

Socrates.- "It would be pitiable, Phaedo, (...) when there is a true and reliable argument and one that can be understood, if a man who has dealt with such arguments as appear at one time true, at another time untrue, should not blame himself or his own lack of skill but, because of his distress, in the end gladly shift blame away from himself to the arguments, and spend the rest of his life hating and reviling reasonable arguments and so deprived of truth and knowledge of reality.[93]"

We suspect that Plato would not have been concerned at all if his idea of philosophy as a dialectical project -with all the ontological, epistemological, methodological and ethical implications that it necessarily

[91] See G. Striker, *art. cit.*, p. 9.

[92] See *Phaedo*, 89 d.

[93] *Phaedo*, 90 c8-d7 (G. M. A. Grube's translation with modification).

involves- had a "limited appeal",[94] because finally, as he states, repeatedly, unanimity is not a criterion of truth and what the essence of the science of philosophy and the philosophers disposition must involve is

> "... to love the truth and to do everything for its sake."[95]

d) Stoics[96]

For the Stoics dialectic is part of logic. By logic they will mean "the science of rational discourse".[97] For the Stoics, as with Plato and in opposition to Aristotle, dialectic is a science and its subject-matter is things. With the Stoics the idea of dialectic makes reference to the science of correct discussions and implies a method of conducting arguments by questions and answers in different ways. [98] It can be used: 1. In a Platonic way, that is, testing hypotheses through a quest for true definitions. 2. It can be used in the Aristotelian style as a method of probable reasoning and as a tool that can provide the general foundation of science.[99].

For the Stoics dialectic -as question and answer -is one possible method, but it is not the proper method for doing philosophy. According to

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[94] *Cf.* A. Nehamas, *art. cit.*, p. 14.

[95] *Philebus,* 58 d5.

[96] Our account on the Stoics is heavily dependent on A. A. Long, "Dialectic and the Stoic Sage", in J. M. Rist, *The Stoics* (ed.), University of California Press, 1978, pp. 101-124 = A. A. Long, *Stoic Studies,* Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1999, pp. 85-106.

[97] A. A. Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy. Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics,* Duckworth, 2nd. edition, London, 1096, p. 122.

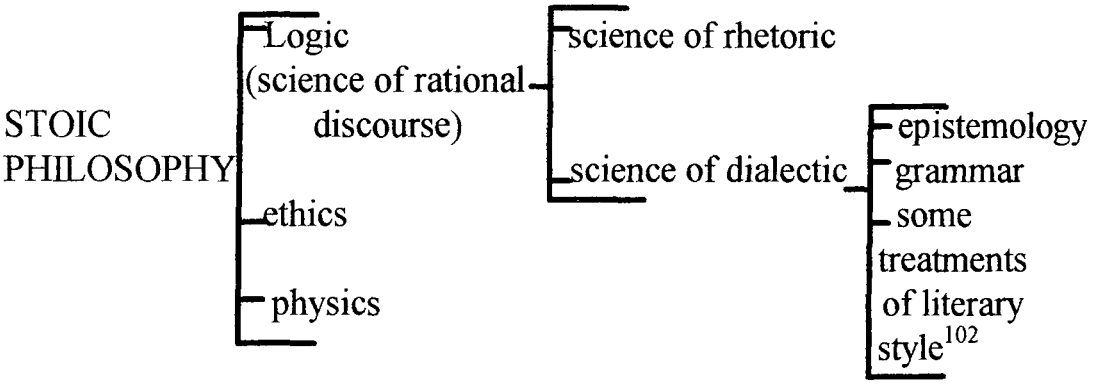
[98] See A. A. Long and D. N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic Philosophers,* Volume I, Cambridge University Press, 1997, pp. 183 ff.

[99] For Diodorus Cronus the Megarian -and the teacher of Zeno the Stoic- dialectic is associated with the idea of eristic. For the Sceptical Academy dialectic is an instrument that provides us with knowledge to answer arguments equally strong on the opposite side.

Diogenes Laertius[100] dialectic in Stoicism is an expertise (ἐπιστήμη) that has a discriminatory role because it permits one to distinguish what is true, false or neither true or false. Philosophers must possess this dialectic, understood as such a discriminatory faculty. Stoics think also that a wise man must be a dialectician because the content of dialectical studies is words and things and the relationships between them.

The idea of dialectic in the Stoics is difficult, because it is an organic part of the Stoic philosophical system as a whole and because its role varies throughout the history of Stoicism .

I. The place of dialectic in Stoic philosophy, according to Diogenes Laertius,[101] can be presented as follows:



Diogenes says also that, for the Stoics, dialectic is the general science of rational discourse and language and rhetoric's task is the organization and construction of arguments for political, forensic, and panegyric speeches.[103]

[100] Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers,* VII, 42.

[101] See Diogenes Laertius, *op. cit.,* VII, 41 and ff.

[102] *I.e.,* λέξεις.

[103] See *ibid,* VII, 42.

II. Some ideas of dialectic among the Stoics:

This is what of Alexander of Aphrodisias attributes to certain Stoics. The Stoics held that:

a) Dialectic is the "science of speaking well".

b) "Speaking well consists in saying things that are true and fitting".

He says also that:

c) "Dialectic is a peculiar property to the philosopher of the most perfect philosophy."

d) Therefore, only the wise man is a dialectician.[104]

At the beginning of the Stoa around 300 B.C it was a time of great philosophical activity. A number of different schools were active: Academics, Peripatetics, Cynics, Megarians, and the new schools of Zeno and Epicurus. They differ in their conceptions of dialectic but the common denominator of all of them is that dialectic

"... undertook the posing and solving of logical paradoxes and also the provision of relatively formal techniques of argument between a questioner and respondent on a variety of subjects."[105]

If we follow Diogenes Laertius' account of Stoic logic, we find him remarking that the difference between dialectic and rhetoric for the Stoics is that:

Dialectic: is "the science of discoursing correctly on arguments in question and answer form, hence the Stoics also define it as the science of things true and false and neither true nor false" and

[104] See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, 124 = Alexander of Aphrodisias, p. 1, 8 Wallies.

[105] A. A. Long, "Dialectic and the Stoic Sage", p. 102.

Rhetoric: is "the science of speaking well on matters which are set forth by plain narrative."[106]

According to Sextus Empiricus[107] the principal differences between dialectical and rhetorical arguments are in method and the style: dialectic operates by means of brief discourse and rhetoric operates through long discourse. Theoretically speaking both are sciences appropriate to the wise man. Both are part of Stoic logic, both are scientific activities and they belong to the Stoic sage insofar as they involve the ability to distinguish truth from falsehood.[108]

Further on Diogenes[109] starts a very detailed description of Stoic dialectic and he includes in it the following topics:

DIALECTIC
- voice
- elements of speech
- types of style
- genus
- species
- division
- amphibology
- sign function of language
- language as meaningful ("things signified")
  - *lekta* (things are said or meant)
  - propositions and arguments
  - logical paradoxes

It is generally accepted that Chrysippus was the creator of Stoic logic -logic in the wider Stoic sense.[110] He was very well known for his highly

[106] Diognes Laertius, VII, 42 (translated by R. D. Hicks), Volume II, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass./London, Reprint, 1995.

[107] See *Adv.* Math II, 7 = Stoicorum *Veterum Fragmenta* I, 75.

[108] Diogenes Laertius gives us an alternative definition of dialectic (VII, 62) as "the science of discoursing correctly on arguments in question and answer form." A. A. Long (*art. cit.*, p. 104) considers that this definition is not distinctively Stoic because it just describes dialectic as a way that is consistent with the general conception of the term in the early Hellenistic period. We can notice also that the Socratic and Sophistic influences in this definition are clear. When Diogenes gives a detailed summary of Stoic logic he does not refer to this definition at all. He addressed the topic as the "science of things true" or what Chrysippus calls "signs and things signified" (VII, 63).

[109] VII, 55-83.

[110] See Diogenes Laertius, VII, 50-82.

elaborated logical theory,[111] but Long suggests -and it seems reasonable- that Chrysippus has to be seen much more as:

"... the first Stoic to develop dialectic beyond argument by question and answer into a science that made epistemology, language and logic together an integral part of Stoic philosophy as a whole." [112]

But what about his predecessors? According to Plutarch,[113] Zeno the Stoic had a very restricted interest in dialectic as the necessary tool for any good philosopher to solve paradoxes. Diogenes says that Zeno defines dialectic as the science

"... of correctly discussing subjects by question and answer ..."[114]

Cleanthes is seen as the man who prepared the ground for Chrysippus' focus on dialectic because of his interests in subjects such as sophisms, forms of arguments and dialectic, and because Cleanthes gave a systematic form to Stoic logic.[115]

There is a clear Platonic influence in Chrysippus' idea of dialectic because the latter is closely related to the idea that the dialectician is the wise man who possesses the knowledge to research the essence and name of each thing.[116] The concrete association is with one passage of Plato's

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[111] See W. Kneale and M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic*, Oxford University Press, 1984, pp. 113-176.

[112] A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, p. 105 and see also his *Hellenistic Philosophy. Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics*, ed. cit., p. 121.

[113] See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, I, 50 = *De Stoicorum repugnantiis*, 1034 ff.

[114] Diogenes Laertius, VII, 42 (R. D. Hicks' translation): "... καί τὴν διαλεκτικὴν τοῦ ὀρθῶς διαλέγεσθαι περὶ τῶν ἐν ἐρωτήσει καὶ ἀποκρίσει λόγων·...".

[115] See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta*, I, 489 and Diogenes Laertius, VII, 175.

[116] See A. A. Long, art. cit., pp. 106-107.

Cratylus[117] and another one in the *Republic.*[118] In *Cratylus* Plato associates the job of the dialectician with the man who knows how to ask and answer questions and how to look to the natural name of each thing. Because of that the dialectician must be the ideal man to supervise "the giver of names". The passage in the *Republic* conveys the general tenor of Platonic dialectic, as the correct method of research as a systematic attempt to grasp the essence of each thing itself.

That is crucial because from here we can state some similarities between Plato and Chrysippus and a distance from Aristotle.[119] Despite the fact that Chrysippus does not recognise the same importance that Plato gives to dialectic as a synonym of philosophy and as a philosophical conversation in the search of the truth via questions and answers, he admits that dialectic is still a kind of knowledge and a sort of wisdom necessary for any sort of philosophical research that involves the aim of "knowledge of demonstrative procedures".[120] The Stoics do not follow Aristotle's idea of dialectic as a mere instrument and they refuse to use the term *organon* for describing the second order task of logic and dialectic. [121]

Diogenes Laertius[122] stresses the ethical value of dialectic insofar as dialectic is a virtue itself when it is associated to the Stoic sage. These virtues involve human excellence and are indispensable for a good life. The virtues that dialectic includes -and which are fairly attributed to Chrysippus- according to Diogenes are:[123] 1. ἀπροπτωσία: that is, a sort of

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[117] See *Cratylus,* 390 c-391a.

[118] See *Republic,* 533 b.

[119] See A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, p. 107.

[120] See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, 49, 31.

[121] See *ibid.*, II, 49, *supra,* pp. 132-134.

[122] See Diogenes Laertius, VII, 46-47.

[123] For the following descriptions we are using Hicks' translation, but with some modifications.

moral sense that provides us with a discriminatory and reflective knowledge that permits us to distinguish "when we should give assent and when not"; 2. ἀνεικαιοτής: that is, wariness that is understood as a determination that permits us to resist what at the first instance seems probable and not to grasp at it; 3. ἀνελεγξία: "irrefutability" which means "strength in argument", that is not being led to the opposite side and 4. ἀματαιότης: "seriousness", that is, a complete determination or a habit that opens up the possibility of referring presentations (φαντασίαι) to right account or reason (ὀρθὸς λόγος).

It is interesting to notice that for the Stoics without dialectic knowlege is impossible:

"... Knowledge itself they define either as unerring apprehension or as a habit or state which in reception of presentations cannot be shaken by argument. Without the study of dialectic, they say, the wise man cannot guard himself in argument so as never to fall; for it enables him to distinguish between truth and falsehood, and to discriminate what is merely plausible and what is ambiguously expressed, and without it he cannot methodically put questions and give answers."[124]

There are many similarities between Stoic dialectic and the elenctic process that Socratic-Platonic dialectic implies. For Plato you possess knowledge of any given object insofar as you can give a complete, rational account of it in a question and answer process. This epistemological process implies an act of being tested. The Stoics consider that dialectic is a necessary condition for progress because dialectic is a study that provides a discriminatory capacity to the sage that permits him to distiguish truth and falsehood; and arguments that are just plausible or that involve any ambiguity. For Plato, the dialectician is finally concerned with the truth, and in that sense,

[124] Diogenes Laertius, VII, 47 (R. D. Hicks' translation, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, London/Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, Volume II, 1995).

dialectic implies also a discriminatory and intellectual progress. At the same time the Stoic role of dialectic is associated with Aristotle insofar as the dialectician is the man that has the ability to deal with arguments for and against any given thesis and because the role of the dialectician is still associated with debates as an expertise in discussion -but is not a science.[125]

In short: dialectic in the Stoics plays a very important pivotal role, one which allows the connection of ethics with logic in their whole system. To act wisely requires dialectical knowledge. That enables us to understand also the meaning of a "good life" for the Stoics. A good life implies living in accordance with nature or the universal *logos* that pervades everything; it requires a dialectical wisdom to grasp, to reflect, to make correct judgements related to facts and to moral actions. Dialectic is the necessary knowledge that permits us, as human beings, to develop our rational abilities and to realise our human nature. That is again related to the Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic as the method of achieving general knowledge and self-knowledge.

It is very important to emphasise that for Chrysippus[126] the main aim of dialectic is constructive, that is, to produce knowledge and to search for the truth. The act of arguing the opposite sides of the question has to be handled very carefully and as a educational tool, but avoiding its misuse, that is, an abusive practice of mere refutation.[127]

To sum up: Chrysippus' idea of dialectic has some similarities with Plato's and some others with Aristotle's. Like Plato and Aristotle, he thinks that just by rational means and argumentation we will achieve philosophical

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[125] Chrysippus probably shows a direct Aristotelian influence from the *Topics* insofar as in his logical works he dedicates long sections to techniques of argument and the treatment of sophisms.

[126] Nevertheless, Plutarch in his treatise *On the Contradictions of the Stoics* considers that Chrysippus' position shows inconsistency because when he was under the influence of Arcesilaus he used to practise the two sides of the question to the detriment of a sound use of reason.

[127] See A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, pp. 110-111.

progress. Like Plato, for Chrysippus the dialectician is not merely a logician, but the man who has the task of achieving knowledge of reality. In that sense, Plato and Chrysippus differ from Aristotle, because dialectic for him does not provide us with any specific knowledge. However, Plato and Chrysippus differ with each other in relation to the epistemological means to carry out dialectic. For Plato philosophical dialogue through questions and answers is essential for establishing relationships between kinds *i.e.*, connections among things in reality. Chrysippus is mainly interested in demonstrating the necessary conditions of the correct sense-impressions and propositions that correspond to material objects.[128]

The reach of dialectic is for Aristotle too limited and for him it is impossible through dialectical procedures to search for the truth. Dialectic has a logical value as a necessary discriminatory tool that permits us to distinguish erroneous arguments and an ontological and epistemological importance insofar as it provides a means of access to the general, universal foundation of science. In that sense Chrysippus is closer to Aristotle's idea of dialectic as an educational means, but dialectic is not a method for discovering truths. We can say that for Chrysippus dialectic is very important logically speaking -logic as a science of rational discourse- but it has a very restricted epistemological scope. The dialectician is a wise man who has an excellent ability in the business of question and answering in live formal "discussions", but these dialectical encounters do not provide anything of cognitive value and even less do they have a constructive role for the demonstration of truths. That is, dialectic is a *knowledge* that is particularly useful for the conduction of question and answer arguments, but it is not a *science* that searches for or discovers truths.

But, is dialectic -according to the Stoics- completely hopeless for discovering the truth? Here the Stoics make a very subtle distinction. The

[128] See A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, p. 112.

dialectician is a wise man, but not the only sort of wise man. All wise men are dialecticians, but not conversely. The wise man possesses real knowledge because he articulates it in a whole consistent system that enables him to discover the truth:

"... The fact that dialectician, in Stoic usage, falls into the category of predicates peculiar to the wise man tells us something about the Stoic view of dialectic. Moreover, as we have seen, Stoic statements about dialectic lay great emphasis upon the wise man's unique competence.

He instantiates what dialectic is, the science of things true and false, and he is distinguished from other men, including would-be dialecticians, by his possession of truth (*aletheia*). According to strict Stoic usage, truth is knowledge, a disposition of the wise man's *logos*, and it differs from '*the true*' in various ways. Above all, truth is something compound or complex whereas the true is uniform and simple. Dialectic, whether treating of assent to sense-impressions or to methods of inference, deals with the conditions that make particular propositions true or false. But a man can learn to formulate true propositions without grasping a complete structure of logical relationships, an ordered system of true propositions, which constitutes dialectic as such and therefore truth as a whole. The distinction between truth and the true helps to show the systematic character of the wise man's knowledge. He represents an ideal of language and rationality at one with reality, of truth discovered."[129]

Diogenes Laertius points out that logic deals too with canons and criteria of truth, that is, with the formulation of rules that permit us to discriminate different φαντασίαι that we have with the aim of discovering the truth.[130] According to him also there is no general agreement among the Stoics in relation to the criteria or standards of truth.[131] For Chrysippus, Antipater and Apollodorus the standard of truth is the apprehending

[129] A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, pp. 113-114.

[130] See Diogenes Laertius, VII, 42.

[131] See *ibid.*, VII, 54.

presentation (καταληπτικὴ φαντασία) that comes from a real object. Boethus considers that there is a plurality of criteria: intelligence, sense-perception, desire and knowledge. Chrysippus contradicts himself in another of his books because he considers that sensation and preconception are the only criteria of truth. Other older Stoics and Posidonius make right reason the standard.

Epictetus in several of his discourses[132] attacks Epicureans and Academics for their sceptical attitude in relation to truth. He represents the general Stoic attitude as regards dialectic because he considers that as human beings we are naturally endowed to achieve the truth with our intellect and sensory faculties. The only explicit remark he makes about intellect and sensory faculties is that both require logical training through dialectical method.

Epictetus is very representative of the general, orthodox Stoic idea of the discovery of the truth. This point connects us to Diogenes' testimony on the topic. The elements that he mentions constitute the key that permits us to reconstruct the Stoic epistemology which is part of the dialectical science: to assent correctly and to grasp the correct content of a sense impression or a sentence is a discriminatory process which implies the ability and the criterion to distinguish φαντασίαι. The wise man who possesses the dialectical virtue has this ability. Going further: the act of assenting and grasping has its origins in the human rational governing principle *(logos)*. This *logos* is defined as "a collection of general concepts and preconceptions."[133] Definitions are essential because the way that we grasp things is through general concepts. For the Stoics to know what each thing is implies an inseparable link between καταληπτικὴ φαντασία and *logos* that allows us to associate the particular object of perception or a

[132] See 1.7; 1.17; 2.12; 2.25.

[133] See *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* II, 841.

proposition with a valid general concept that is based on sense experience and it is organised coherently by intellect.

The wise man who possesses an ὀρθὸς λόγος is capable of reasoning correctly and acting according to the right reason. The active principle of the universe is for the Stoics right reason and the same as god. Dialectic plays an interconnective role in the Stoic system insofar as it provides the theoretical means of tackling facts and reason correctly and the practical means that permits us to live in harmony with nature. In that sense, because dialectic deals with language, and is the property of the wise man, it inter-relates the three main fields of Stoic philosophy, that is, logic, ethics and physics.[134]

With these considerations it is possible to infer that dialectic might be seen in the Stoic system -perhaps mainly in Chrysippus- as an ethical attempt at self-discovery.[135] The correct application of the *logos* with the aim of discovering the truth is in accordance with human nature. This sound dialectical exercise of the *logos* provides us with a high logical technique of theoretical discernment and practical understanding of human nature and the rationality of the universe. Dialectic is a means to knowledge and truth. This ethical projection of Stoic dialectic has many similarities with the elenctic-dialectical Socratic-Platonic idea, because finally what a philosopher pursues through the dialectical method is the knowledge of reality. Knowledge of reality is a permanent process of examination of any object given, of human nature and of self-examination.[136]

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[134] See A. A. Long, *art. cit.*, p. 118.

[135] See A. A. Long, *ibid.*, pp. 116-117; Diogenes Laertius, VII, 189-202.

[136] A. A. Long (*art. cit.*, pp. 119-121) remarks that the figure of Epictetus is important insofar as he represents a good equilibrium between two extreme Stoic positions in relation to logic -*i.e.*, to consider logic in a dismissive way as mere pedantic exercise that does not help at all for the development of a good life (Seneca and Musonius Rufus) and the other extreme that considers that logical techniques themselves are enough for a good philosopher- and the understanding of philosophy as a whole practice that involves a refining of our reasoning powers and a correct channelling of them into our conduct. That is also the reason that for Epictetus the role of dialectic is identified with the knowledge proper of the wise man.

The Stoic, and Aristotelian, ideas of dialectic will exert a definitive impact on the Medieval idea of dialectic.

§5. THE MEDIEVAL IDEA OF DIALECTIC[137]

Dialectic is for the scholastics the instrument *par excellence* with which all philosophical argumentation works. The term dialectic in the Middle Ages refers to two main things: 1. the legitimacy of the use of reason to investigate and clarify revealed truths, and 2. the display of a logical technique for disputing probable questions or persuasive arguments in the Universities and among philosophers.

The Middle Ages are strongly influenced by the Aristotelian and Stoic ideas of dialectic. Dialectic has in the Middle Ages a very Aristotelian sense: a tentative and probable reasoning, and a very Stoic tincture: as formal logic. Dialectic in the Middle Ages acquires an instrumental role: as a logical tool. From the patristic period to the end of the 12th century dialectic was identified with logic and considered one of the liberal arts of the trivium with grammar and rhetoric. One of the main problems was the validity or invalidity of using rational dialectic in the theological field, that is, in a domain of divine revelation, a domain that, in that time, could be tackled by religious faith.

Some ecclesiastical writers, such as Tatian and Tertullian, assumed an anti-dialectical position. They called dialectic "the father of heresy". Some others, including Saint Augustine, approved the use of dialectic in Christian doctrine as a means to getting a deeper appreciation of the

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Dialectic permits him to reason correctly by question and answer, to distinguish good logic from bad logic and to conduct his life along good paths.

[137] Our account of Medieval Dialectic is mainly based on Eleanor Stump -*Dialectic and its Place in the Development of Medieval Logic*, Cornell University Press, Ithaca and London, 1989- which we find the clearest and most explanatory.

doctrine of divine revelation and as a means of detecting and refuting heresy.[138] This controversy for and against the use of dialectic in religious contexts reached its climax in the 11th and the 12th century. The tension exploded between dialecticians and grammarians in the Eucharistic controversy, and in the 12th century, between dialecticians and the monks in the Trinitarian controversies. In the thirteenth century dialectic consolidates a positive place in theology. That explains the height of development of the scholastic method in *quaestiones disputatae, quodlibetales, summae,* and commentaries, in which new scholastic syntheses were made. But then the abuse of dialectic in theology and philosophy led to its decline in the late period of Medieval scholasticism.

Dialectic in the Medieval period is understood fundamentally as logic. The ways that the dialectical tradition changed throughout the Meddle Ages had clear repercussions in the different logical concerns of medieval philosophers. It is not surprising that because dialectic involves the idea of a logical tool, it played a central role in the late scholastic theories of consequences[139] and obligations.[140] In the first case dialectic is central for the rise of the theory of consequences and in the second case dialectic is a necessay resource in disputation.[141]

We start with Boethius. It is undeniable that the figure of Boethius and his attention to the subject of dialectic exerted a fundamental influence on the understanding of scholastic treatments of dialectic in Medieval

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[138] See *De Doctrina Christiana,* 2.3; *De Civitate Dei,* 8.10.

[139] The word *consequentia* is mainly used in the Medieval period with the sense of "conditional proposition"; see W. Kneale and M. Kneale *op. cit.*, pp. 274 and ff.

[140] W. Kneale and M. Kneale -*op. cit.*, p. 234- define *obligationes* as follows: "*Obligationes* are obligations assumed by a party to a disputation, or conditions within which such a discussion must be conducted. The logicians of the period considered in detail what was involved in making this or that concession for the purposes of argument, e.g. that a certain proposition was doubtful, and insisted on maintaining consistency betweeen the principles assumed during any discussion. Little, if any, modern work has been devoted so far to the investigation of this part of medieval logic, but it may perhaps be compared with Aristotle's treatment of debate in his *Topics* and *De Sophisticis Elenchis.*"

[141] See E. Stump, *op. cit.*, Introduction, pp. 1-2.

philosophy. For Boethius dialectic is part of metaphysics and a necessary consequence of it. Because the nature of the world involves a series of regular connections among things, it is possible to know these interconnections and state certain true propositions and make true inferences.

The case of Abelard is different because he established a partial division between certain parts of logic and metaphysics. The reason for his doing this is because he considers that certain inferences do not contain any dialectical relationship and that they are true exclusively because of their form. The terminists make the next step and fix a clear distancing between dialectic and metaphysics: they formalise logic. They consider that dialectical inferences are theoretically reducible to syllogisms and that their validity depends just on their form.

Ockham attempted to broaden the field of dialectic again to inferences logically possible and to include the discussion of *obligationes* in his treatments of inferences. For Ockham dialectic and demonstration are equivalent.

As we have said, the main roots of the scholastic tradition on dialectic come from Aristotle, and particularly from his *Topics.*[142] Aristotle says at the beginning of his *Topics* that the main aim of his treatise is to find a method -he calls it dialectical reasoning- that allows us to reason from generally accepted opinions about any problem given and permits us to distinguish contradictions in our arguments. What is clear is that the Aristotelian idea of dialectic is characterised as a skillfulness in reasoning and not as an integral method for searching for the truth as in Plato.[143] That will be central in Boethius and in the rest of the Medieval philosophers'

[142] See *ibid.*, Introduction, p. 3.

[143] See *supra* my treatment of Aristotle §4, c.

practice of dialectic: dialectic is a matter of logical relations. As Stump says:

"... an Aristotelian Topic is primarily a strategy of argumentation and secondarily a principle supporting the crucial inference in the argument generated by such a strategy. The method for using the Topics is tied to Aristotle's predicables (accidens, genus, property, and definition). In Aristotle's view, every dialectical argument consists in showing that a predicate is or is not predicated of the subject at issue, and every predicate is subsumed under one of the four predicables. Aristotle's Topics are grouped according to the four predicables; and within each group associated with a predicable, the Topics are ordered by the degree to which they have to do with the nature of the predicable for that group. Aristotle's *Topics*, then, is a system that teaches the essence and accidents of each of the predicable in order to make a person deft at finding arguments."[144]

Despite the fact that Boethius is clearly influenced by Aristotle's idea of dialectic, his method presents particular obvious differences. For Boethius there are two different kinds of Topics: maximal propositions (principles) and differentiae. By differentiae he understands broad headings that cover maximal propositions. By maximal propositions Boethius understands self-evident truths that work as guarantors of validity in argumentation. They are general premisses that are fundamental to the validity of predicative arguments and a key in hypothetical arguments that permits us to make a valid transition from the antecedent to consequent in the conditional premiss of the argument. Differentiae constitute the main tool for giving an affirmative sense to arguments. The process consists in proposing a kind of term that would be the ideal intermediate between the subject and the predicate in a dialectical question.

[144] *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 4.

As we have seen, dialectic implies a process of logical relationships and it is an essential tool, but not a philosophical aim in itself. Boethius' influence is clear in Garland the Computist who dedicates much of his attention to Boethius' dialectic. Garland is historically central for the study of the earliest medieval logic insofar as his text on logic remains intact and because he built a complete logical system.

In the case of Abelard it is clear that he will focus his logical concerns on categorical syllogisms with the aim of separating them from the Topics and in that way cutting their links with Topical inferences. Abelard agrees with Garland that the Topics are still central for the study of hypothetical syllogisms because the adequacy of conditional propositions depends on them. Nevertheless, Abelard's logic is original and it represents a change in the scholastic approach. He considers that the validity of categorical syllogisms resides exclusively in their form. They are perfect inferences and therefore unlike Topic inferences which are imperfect just because dependent on Topics. These perfect inferences are perfect or sound because their soundness comes from what things are. Differentia[145] for Abelard is to be understood in terms of logical relations, that is, as the relational link that provides solidity to an inference.

In the thirteenth Century there is a flowering of logic and the Topics (dialectical arguments). Peter of Spain is very representative of the terminists. He considers that Topical inferences are dialectical syllogisms. Like Aristotle he makes a clear distinction between dialectical and demonstrative syllogisms. Through the premisses of dialectical syllogisms that are merely probable we will just achieve opinion, not knowledge. The study of Topical or dialectical arguments is just an art not a science and they depend on demonstrative syllogisms. Peter of Spain's logical method has the aim of justifying dialectical arguments. Nonetheless his logical method

[145] "The main instrument for findng arguments is the Differentia"; *ibid.*, Introduction, p. 4.

has its grounds in a whole metaphysical system and is not merely dependent on syllogistical movements.

Despite the fact that the terminists have at the beginning of the movement a definite Aristotelian influence their logic experiences some gradual changes in accordance to the tendency of the thirteenth-century: the Aristotelian influence on the treatment of dialectical arguments is undermined and the new tenor consists in treating all syllogisms as dependent on Topics (probable syllogisms) and in giving a necessary logical status to both demonstrative and dialectical arguments.[146]

Another Medieval development that shows an undeniable Aristotelian influence in the treatment of dialectic is the theory and practice of *obligationes:*

"... Obligations in scholastic treatises from the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is a complicated set of rules for inferences set in a disputational context, where the disputational context makes a difference to the evaluation of the inferences. Frequently, complications for the evaluations of an obligations inference arise because there is a reference in the premisses themselves to the evaluator of those premisses or to an action by the evaluator within the disputation."[147]

Some of the most representative figures in the field of *obligationes* are William of Sherwood, Walter Burley, Richard Kilvington and Roger Swyneshed. The figure of Burley is interesting because in his treatise he shows us how certain paradoxical arguments can appear in the context of dialectical disputation despite the fact that the way of proceeding - monitoring of formal logical rules- seems to be impeccable. The ludicrous results appear when the background of the discussion is not taken into account. In that way Burley shows that the basic rules of obligations have

[146] See *ibid.*, Introduction, pp. 6-7.

[147] *Ibid.*, Introduction, p. 7.

no consistency, if one inserts the real context and nature of things in the disputation.[148]

The figure of Ockham is attractive because he intertwines syllogisms, dialectical arguments, obligations and insolubles in a whole and more open system that provides an account of inferences that is more flexible that the terminists' approach. Ockham's account accepts the possibility that there is a range of non-syllogistic inferences and he includes among them dialectical and obligational inferences. Syllogisms are just one species of consequences.

Dialectic during the Middle Ages -and under the Aristotelian influence of the *Topics* and Sophistici *Elenchi,* Cicero and Boethius- is also understood as the scholastic method of teaching in the cathedral schools and in the recently founded Universities. Dialectic in this sense is a discipline of reasoning that tries to find a conclusion on the face of two possible and contrary propositions. The *disputatio* as the art *opponendi et respondendi* was a compulsory subject in which the dialectical technique was the rigorous instrument for dealing with and for solving it. This disputatious dialectic took place between a student who presented objections and a bachelor who responded to them. The master was the person who presided over the disputation and who mediated and resolved it.

Dialectic is in that sense an art of discussion that was mainly applied to teaching with the aim of providing a skill for the students in the art of controversy and with the aim of defending a religious faith. The dialectical technique was included in the the *lectio* of the "divine page". The idea of

[148] E. Stump (see *op. cit.*, p. 8) indicates that Swyneshed, Kilvington and Heytesbury try to deal with the inconsistencies that Burley shows in the Theory of Obligations and try to solve them by resorting to what they call epistemic logic that implies the recognition of the content and context of discussions and the possibility that some fundamental logical laws are not applicable and do not fit with some rules for dialectical disputation.

this reading aloud was that the students should réact to the text read and to promote in them capacities for thinking and discussing.[149]

Dialectic as an art of discussion was associated with the appropriateness of terms. That explains why dialectical "discussions" in the Middle Age were focused on the arguments for and against any thesis given and in the elimination of sophisms. That is the reason that for Abelard dialectic is mainly an instrument for discussing controversial theses. The process consists in putting arguments for and against the thesis given with the aim of getting a reasoned *consensus*.[150]

It is worth noticing that dialectic as a technique of discussion will deal with probable arguments accepted by the majority. In the case of John of Salisbury, for example, dialectic is an ability that does not consider that the truth is as important as the persuasive ability to convince the opponent. He also makes a clear distinction between the philosopher who resorts to demonstrations and has the truth as his aim and the dialectician who resorts to hypothetical premises and whose target is in the field of opinion.

In the thirteenth century Lambert of Auxerre defines dialectic in terms of a reasoning or conversation between two people: one who is called the opponent and leads the conversation and another one that answers in the discussion.

What is clear is that dialectic in the thirteenth century is understood in terms of a live discussion, as an art of disputation in which two people present opposite probable theses. The job of the dialectician is understood as the one that has to resolve the dispute. It is worth noticing that this idea

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[149] The practice of this academic and religious debates can provide us with an explanation and gives the reason why written *Scholastic Summae* and *Commentaries* took the form of dialectical debate.

[150] In the same line as Abelard is the Catalan philosopher Ramon Llull who also states a systematic idea of dialectic. He considers that natural reason is the best art that human beings possess for resolving disputation and avoiding mistakes. His efforts were focused on the task of achieving an *ars inveniendi* that could provide a complete and systematic explanation of probable and valid arguments. He sees in dialectic this inventive art that could provide us with a whole system that would exclude any possible indetermination.

of dialectic involves some similarities in form to the Platonic idea as a live conversation, but at the same time the content, method of achieving and aims of Medieval dialectic are clearly Aristotelian.

Through the fifteenth and the sixteenth centuries an anti-dialectical polemic took place. On the one hand it is possible to distinguish a clear opposition to reducing grammar to logic. The reason for mantaining them as independent subjects resides in the fact that the defenders of grammar consider that it is important to keep the study of language in relation to its historical reality and evolution. On the other hand there is a tendency to separate dialectic from metaphysics and logic. In that way dialectic was understood again as a persuasive and probable reasoning that remains in the field of opinion. Therefore, dialectic will be closely associated to rhetoric.[151]

For example, Petrarch criticises the "dialectics". He considers that dialectic is a very useful tool, but that is just a mere technique of discussion and that dialectic does not exhaust all philosophy.

According to Garin[152] the humanists of the Renaissance reduce dialectic either to logic or to rhetoric. They were very keen on double reasonings that show both sides of a question. To start from non-necessary premises and the defence of the thesis and to do exactly the same with the antithesis was a typical training in the Schools. This new understanding of dialectic was represented by figures such as Valla, Agricola, Poliziano, Vives, Melanchthon and Ramus. The main tendency of the majority of the humanists in relation to dialectic is strongly Aristotelian insofar as they understand it in the same terms as did Aristotle, that is, as an instrument that resorts to probable and persuasive reasonings, but one that does not deal or

[151] See E. Garin, "La dialéctica desde el siglo XII a principios de la Edad Moderna", en N. Abbagnano *et al.*, *La evolución de la dialéctica*, p. 151.

[152] See *ibid.*, pp. 158-163.

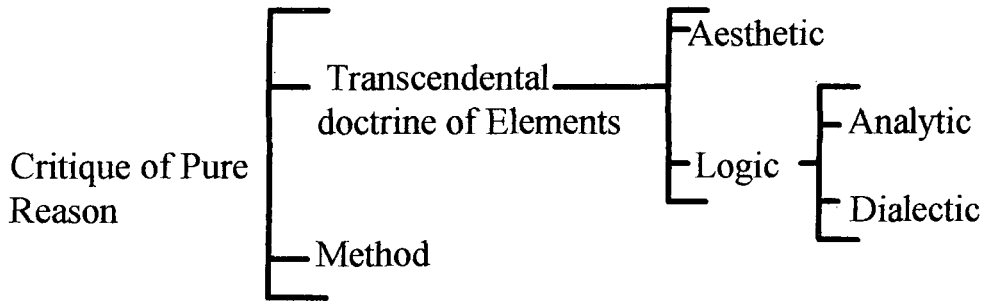
pursue the truth. Vives -like Aristotle- also considers that dialectic provides the general grounds for all sciences. Ramus was the exception because he considers that dialectic is the method *par excellence*, the theory and art of invention that is practised through the analysis of reasonings. As an art of invention dialectic must be displayed with the habit of observing carefully the form in which nature expresses itself as a concrete and creative process. Nizolio appeals to Cicero and reduces dialectic to rhetoric.

All these historical movements during the Renaissance prepare the way for the modern idea of dialectic.

§6. THE MODERN IDEA OF DIALECTIC

a) Kant and German Idealism

Dialectic in Kant falls within his philosophical system. It occupies the following place in his *Critique of Pure Reason:*



In the *Critique of Pure Reason,* Kant divides the material of the book into two sections: Analytic and Dialectic. The analytic represents negative criterion of truth. It divides the tasks of the understanding and reason into their primary components. Kant defines his dialectic as follows:

"... So great is this temptation that this general logic, which is merely a *canon* for judging, has been used -like an *organon,* as it were- for the actual production of at least

deceptive objective assertions, and thus has in fact been misused. Now general logic, when used as supposed organon, is called *dialectic.*"[153]

In short, for Kant dialectic has at the beginning a negative role. It is first a *logic of illusion* which is part of critical philosophy and acquires its positive role by a "*critique of dialectical illusion*".[154] In Kant's works, dialectic as the critique of dialectical illusion is always present after the analytic in each of his three major *Critiques.* The figure of Kant is central because his idea of dialectic permits us to connect the ancient and modern understanding of it. Kant explains his uses of dialectic with a reference to the different senses that the term has among the ancient philosophers, that is, as a τέχνη.[155] Kant's definition of dialectic has both a pejorative sense which is identified with the Aristotelian sense and a positive or critical sense. Let me explain. For Aristotle dialectic is a probable reasoning that works with opinions that are generally accepted in contrast to the demonstrative or scientific reasoning that arises from primary and true premises.[156] Aristotle thought that there is in principle a similarity between rhetoric and dialectic because dialectic uses syllogistic and inductive premises admitted by a given audience with the aim of persuading and convincing. Kant calls this dialectic the "logic of illusion". But there is a positive sense of dialectic in Kant. Kant divides his logic into analytic (invention)[157] and dialectic (judgement). Kant's dialectic teaches how to distinguish and disclose judgements which seem to have a similarity to truth, but are in fact false. In fact the criticism that Plato will make in the *Sophist* of the sophists as

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[153] *Critique of Pure Reason,* A62/B85 (translated by W. Pluhar, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1996).

[154] See *ibid,* A61/B85.

[155] See *ibid.*, A61/B86.

[156] See *Topics,* 100 a 28-30; see *supra* my treatment of Aristotle §4, c.

[157] Kant explains that the task of a critical analytics consists in discovering through a process of analysis all the different movements of reason that we make in the act of thinking.

"jugglers of words"[158] has some similarities -*mutatis mutandis*- to the criticism which Kant makes against the "metaphysical jugglers".[159] The job of the philosopher is to make a critique of dialectical illusion and not to generate an art of producing these sort of illusions dogmatically as "metaphysical jugglers" use to do.

Kant's criticism is not only addressed to the sophism that just pursues a "blind desire", that is to persuade. At the same time he is criticising sophisms that are a result of the natural and unavoidable illusion (misdirection) of human reason. This transcendental illusion emerges from the basic rules and maxims that we consider valid as objective and rational principles.[160] The fundamental source of illusion comes from reason's search for unity and completeness with the appearance of progressing in the direction of completeness, going upwards, to wider conditions and

"... to bring into our cognition the highest unity of reason ..."[161]

Reason searches for the ideal conditions -or absolute totality- for a given thing. But instead of considering this process of searching as a pursuit of a mere approximative and regulative principle, reason, by means of transcendent and dialectical inferences, gives a concrete existence to this provisional process and it creates an illusion of completeness through transcendent concepts of pure reason.[162] These will be the object of Kant's criticism in the two books dedicated to dialectic in the *Critique of Pure Reason.*

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[158] See *Sophist,* 268d.

[159] See *CPR,* A309/B366.

[160] See *ibid.,* 297/B353

[161] *Ibid.,* A309/B365 (Pluhar's translation).

[162] See *ibid.,* A309/B366.

In the first book of the *Dialectic* Kant focuses his criticism on the transcendent concepts of God, the world and the subject (soul). The second book addresses its criticism to the inferences of the sciences. Theology, the science of God, employs and takes refuge in ideals in its reasoning; cosmology falls into insuperable antinomies; and psychology falls into paralogisms. In each case, the mistake consists in the deceptive attempt to generate unity and completeness in relation to God, the world and the soul which is revealed as "dialectical illusion" because it rests on erroneous premises and invalid inferences. [163]

The Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic as a philosophical method of searching for the truth in conversation and of approaching things implies the following equivalence: to philosophise is to be a dialectician. After Plato, - and before him with Zeno and the Sophists- the practice that Aristotle rebaptises as "dialectic" aquires an instrumental role: it is going to be an auxiliary that deals with reasonings and with logical arguments, but not with reality. Aristotle took out the ontological content (reality) and the epistemological matter (truths that correspond to something) and the ethical aim (unselfish and dialogic search for the truth) of Socratic-Platonic dialectic. The Aristotelian influence, with regarding to the idea of dialectic, was much more definitive in the history of philosophy than the Socratic-Platonic one.

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[163] According to H. Caygill, (*A Kant Dictionary*, Blackwell, Cambridge Mass, 1995, pp. 77-78) the *Critique of Practical Reason* and the *Critique of Judgement* are also structured in terms of analytic and dialectic. The dialectic of practical reason emerges from the endeavour to define the "highest good", which leads to the "antinomy of practical reason". The practical antinomy consists in the opposed assertions that " the desire for happiness must be the motive to maxims of virtue" and "the maxim of virtue must be the efficient cause of happiness." Both positions are shown to be untenable. Kant proposes a "critical resolution" of this antinomy by resorting to the conclusions achieved in the analytic of pure practical reason. To solve this antinomy, Kant resorts to his previous theoretical antinomy of freedom and natural causation, and makes a distinction between freedom in the noumenal and natural causality in the sensible world.

The interesting thing to notice is that Kant thinks that Plato was wrong when he did not give any credit to Zeno's way of proceeding and following Aristotle's line he qualifies him as a dialectician:

"The *Eleatic philosopher Zeno,* a subtle dialectician, was severely rebuked as a mischievous sophist already by *Plato* because -to show his artistry- he sought to prove a proposition by plausible arguments and soon after to overturn the same proposition again by other arguments equally strong. Zeno asserted that God (this God presumably was for him nothing but the world), is neither finite nor infinite, neither in motion nor at rest, neither similar nor dissimilar to any other thing. I believe, however, that he cannot rightly be charged with this. [...] If two judgments that are opposed to each other presuppose an inadmissible condition, then despite the conflict between them (which, however, is not a contradiction proper) both of them drop out, because the condition drops out under which alone each of these propositions was to hold."[164]

And some lines further on he concludes:

"... Permit me to call this sort of opposition *dialectical* but that of contradiction *analytical opposition.* Thus of two dialectically opposed judgments both can be false, because one judgment not merely contradicts the other but says something more than is required for contradiction."[165]

What is clear is that Kant makes use of his idea of dialectical opposition with the aim of providing logical foundations for his metaphysical thesis concerning the distinction between noumena (reality) and phenomena (appearance) and to remove in that way the antinomies of pure reason. He resorts to Zeno's method and expresses his affiliation with him with the aim

[164] *CPR,* A503/B531 (Pluhar's translation).

[165] Ibid., A504/B532.

of having a historical support for his own ideas and for proving in an indirect way the "transcendental ideality of appearances".[166]

The positive role of Kant's dialectic consists in developing a method that permits us to correct our judgements and to promote a permanent critical attitude that was, finally, the similar aim -*mutatis mutandis*- of the Socratic-Platonic elenctic dialectic. Nevertheless, dialogue and human interchanges do not figure at all in Kant's agenda to achieve these purposes:

"... Hence the dialectic by no means promotes skepticism. But it does promote the skeptical method, which can display the dialectic as an example of the method's great benefit: viz., when we let the arguments of reason come forward against each other in their greatest freedom; for although these argument sultimately do not supply what we were searching for, yet they will always supply something beneficial and useful for correcting our judgments."[167]

After Kant, Fichte and Schelling provide a kind of bridge to Hegel's dialectic. Fichte and Schelling contribute some elements to the modern idea of dialectic. Fichte, in his *Doctrine of Science,* defines dialectic as a synthesis of opposites by means of their reciprocal determination.[168] Fichte is making reference to the opposition and mutual determination of the "I" and "Not-I" that leads to a representation in the "I". Fichte's idealism is called subjective . Schelling took Fichte's dialectical method and applied it to things, because he thought that nature itself has always an internal movement. These subjective and objective idealisms will exert a definitive influence on Hegel's idea of dialectic.[169]

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[166] See *ibid.*, A507/B535.

[167] *Loc. cit.*

[168] See Fichte, *Doctrine of Science,* §4 E.

[169] Despite the fact that Schleiermacher (1768-1834) was a contemporary of Hegel (1770-1831), his idea of dialectic did not have the same echo. Schleiermacher wrote a book called *Dialectic or, The Art of Doing Philosophy* in which he goes back to the Platonic idea of dialectic and tries to build again an

Hegel accepts in his *Lectures on History of Philosophy* his great debt to Ancient Philosophy. He called Heraclitus the first dialectician -in the sense that Hegel will understand the term- because Hegel thinks that Heraclitus' philosophy involves the idea of internal dynamism and unity of opposites in reality. Hegel admits also that his logic as a whole was conceived taking into account all Heraclitus' fragments. Hegel indicates that the Socratic-Platonic dialectical procedure of testing everything and the philosophical necessity to demonstrate any assumption constitute one of the pillars of his philosophy. The limitation that he found in Ancient Philosophy in general terms was that it dealt with forms or abstractions; ancient philosophers had not discovered the transcendental philosophy. Hegel thought that modern philosophy could make the great synthesis. This synthesis -according to him- consists in a real philosophical approach that involves the actualisation of the universal. Hegel thought that with this approach he would surpass the ancient speculative formal-dialectic.

Hegel mentions that Proclus discovered for him the triadic nature of the dialectical procedure, considering this procedure as a derivation of emanation of things from the One and its return to the One. Hegel thought that Proclus' merit resided in giving not only an abstract shape to the triad as a whole, but to each and every one of the three abstract determinations of the triad. In this way Proclus achieved a real triad. These are the remote influences on Hegel's idea of dialectic.

As for the proximate influences, Hegel saw in Descartes' philosophy and particularly in his "methodical doubt" a healthy sceptical approach to reality. It is clear also that Hegel took Kant's transcendental dialectic and applied it without restrictions. Fichte's and Schelling's influences are clear

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omnicomprehensive dialectical project as philosophy itself. His idea -rejecting Kant- is that if philosophy contains something real, transcendental and formal philosophy must be the same because the principles for doing philosophy and the highest and most general elements of knowing are the same.

because Hegel saw in his philosophy the real synthesis of Fichte's subjective idealism and of Schelling's objective idealism in an absolute idealism.

Now, the question is: what did Hegel understood by dialectic? In his *Enyyclopaedia of Philosophical Sciences* Hegel defines his dialectic as a scientific application of the laws which inhere in the nature of thought:[170]

"The insight that the very nature of thinking is the dialectic, that, as understanding, it must fall into the negative of itself, into contradictions, is an aspect of capital importance in the Logic. When thinking despairs of being able to bring about, *from its own resources,* the resolution of the contradiction in which it has put itself, then it returns to the solutions and appeasements in which the spirit has participated in its other modes and forms. But it was not necessary to let this return degenerate into *misology,* an experience which *Plato* already confronted; thinking does not need to conduct itself polemically against itself; which is what happens when a so-called *immediate knowing* is asserted to be the *exclusive* form of the consciousness of truth."[171]

But this dynamism of the thought which follows its own laws is in conformity with the development of being itself. So the dialectical movement is generalised and it is the true nature and real property of the determinations of understanding and of things themselves, as it is spread in all finite things.[172] That is the reason that Hegel calls dialectic the immanent transcending principle of coherence and necessity in which the determinations of understanding display themselves as what they are, that is, as their negation.[173]

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[170] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia, Logic. Part I of the Encyclopaiedia of Philosophical Sciences with the Zusätze*, Translated with Introduction and notes by T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting, H. S. Harris, Hackett, Cambridge/Indianapolis, 1991, §48.

[171] *Ibid.*, §11.

[172] See *ibid.*, §81.

[173] See *ibid.*

Hegel considers that it is crucial to have the correct approach and to recognise the importance of dialectical movement: it is the principle of all motion, all life, and all activation in the actual world, and the "soul" of all proper scientific cognition. Every finite thing contains, in its own nature, its opposite.

It is worth noticing that Hegel insists on the idea that dialectic should not be confused with mere *sophistry*. He says that the essence of sophistry resides in the fact that it just takes into account partial and abstract determinations which are valid in isolation and according to particular interests and circumstances:

"... The dialectic diverges essentially from that procedure, since it is concerned precisely with considering things [as they are] in and for themselves, so that the finitude of the one-sided determinations of the understanding becomes evident."[174]

In that sense Plato and Hegel are similar since both reject the practice of sophistry mainly because it implies a distancing from a direct and objective approach to things.

Historically speaking Hegel considers that Plato, among the ancients, was the inventor of dialectic in an objective and scientific way. Hegel thinks also that with Socrates, dialectical thinking still remains subjective because the main feature which he attributes to Socratic philosophy is irony. For him, Socrates addresses his dialectic to ordinary consciousness and particularly against the Sophists. According to Hegel, the Socratic method could be described as the one in which he pretends in his conversations to be longing for instruction about the subject-matter under discussion. In this process of conversation Socrates brings up all different sorts of questions in such a way that the interlocutors are led to hold up the opposite thesis that at

[174] *Ibid.* (Geraets', Suchting's, Harris' translation).

the beginning seemed to be the correct one. In the case of Plato, Hegel portrays his dialectic as follows:

> "And by means of a dialectical treatment, Plato shows in his strictly scientific dialogues the general finitude of all fixed determinations of the understanding. Thus, for example, in the *Parmenides*, he deduces the Many from the One, and, notwithstanding that, he shows that the nature of the Many is simply to determine itself as the One. This was the grand manner in which Plato handled the dialectic."[175]

Hegel holds Plato's dialectic in high regard. He qualifies Plato's writings as "scientific" because of the dialectical method that they involve. Obviously Hegel infers from this that Plato represents a good starting point for his own understanding of dialectic as a omnicomprehensive category that pervades everything.

Hegel considers that in modern times Kant was the philosopher that mainly put dialectic back in its position of primacy. According to Hegel, Kant performed this task with his exposition of the antinomies of reason which recognises that all determinations of understanding themselves involve and turn into their opposite. But Hegel thinks also that Kant just displays the negative part of the antinomies which has to be completed by a positive one that recognises that everything contains in itself opposed determinations within it. That is the reason that for Hegel the act of cognition implies a comprehension or an act of being aware of the presence of this concrete unity of opposed determinations.[176]

In short, dialectic affirms itself in all the particular fields and structures of the natural and spiritual world.

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[175] *Ibid.* (Geraets', Suchting's, Harris' translation).

[176] See *ibid.*, §§48 and 81. Hegel remarks -§80- that understanding must be considered as what is involved in the notion of the *goodness* of God. Related to this he added that the principle of dialectic in an objective sense is equivalent to the notion of God's *might*.

The application of Hegel's dialectic involves three steps: 1. The step of understanding: one or more concepts (categories) are taken as perfectly defined and differentiated from each other. 2. The proper dialectical step or the stage of negative reason: when we start the process of reflection about these categories, many contradictions arise from them. 3. The stage of speculation or positive reason: the product of this dialectic is an independent, omnicomprehensive and higher category, which involves the previous categories and the contradiction implied in them. This new category is a descriptive "unity of opposites" that is more easily discernible in some cases easily than others.[177] In relation to opposites, Hegel thought that both in the case of thoughts and in things they are interchangeable when the opposition is stronger or reveals itself.

This last speculative movement of dialectic is affirmative or positively rational. The reason is that it grasps the unity of the determinations in their contradiction and in a determinate content. The rational result is a concrete unity of distinct determinations. That is the reason that, for Hegel, philosophy deals with concrete thoughts.[178]

Hegel makes a distinction between nature and spirit. The dialectic of natural things and events evolves in a different way from the dialectic of our thoughts about them. On the one hand, the dialectic of our thoughts advances from lower to higher stages of nature. On the other hand, the decomposition of a natural entity ends in another entity of the same or similar type and not in a change of state to a higher degree of nature. Spirit has a progressive history; that is the reason that its evolution frequently, but not invariably, fits with the advance of our thought about it.

In Hegel dialectic is a method, but he never understood the method as an instrument or way to grasp the objects of knowledge. For Hegel the

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[177] See *ibid.*, §§79-82.

[178] See *ibid.*, §82.

method is the procedure of scientific explanation and it is understood as the path that the thing has to display itself. For Hegel the method is not a set pattern of interpretation which is applied from outside to things in order to analyse and understand them. Hegel thought that this idea of conceiving the method is subjective and merely accidental. In Hegel the method is the movement of the thing itself that is spread out in its particularities and returns to the starting point as a "concrete universal". If we really want to grasp this movement it is essential to submerge ourselves in the thing itself. Dialectic pervades all reality, and it implies a dynamical, historical, and perpetual synthesis of opposites. Hegelian dialectic is a view of reality as historical; it is an intrinsic movement of things and processes, and the philosopher only discovers them because he is immersed and is part of this omnicomprehensive movement. In other words: this spiritual movement is the absolute method of knowledege and, at the same time the immanent "soul" of the container itself.

"... For Hegel dialectic does not involve a dialogue either between two thinkers or between a thinker and his subject-matter. It is conceived as the autonomous self-criticism and self-development of the subject-matter, of, e.g. a form of consciousnees or a concept."[179]

In Hegel's philosophy dialectic explains all sorts of movement and change, in the world and in our thought about it. That is, dialectic gives a reason for the systematic understanding between things and thoughts.[180]

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[179] M. Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary*, Blackwell, 1997, p. 81.

[180] Hegel gives us some examples to illustrate the way that his dialectical method operates. In the *Phenomenology of the Spirit,* he says that this work represents an example of his method when it is applied to a more concrete object, *i.e.,* consciousness. But maybe in his *Philosophy of History* he provides us with a more accessible example of how the omnicomprehensive dialectical method permeates the entire world history. In his *Logic* his method is applied in a more complicated way to the process and categories of human thinking. Related to this topic see P. Singer, *Hegel,* Oxford University Press, 1980, pp 75-83.

In short: Hegel represents the clearest proposition of a new idea of dialectic. Despite the fact that he recognises many merits in the ancient idea of dialectic, he considers that as merely formal. For him, dialectic does not involve a particular form of approach to things. Dialectic does not involve either any kind of dialogue, art of discussion or ability in the use of language. Dialectic is the natural property that characterises and explains everything as a dynamic synthesis of opposites.

Hegel's idea of dialectic has been definitively the most well known and spread among philosophers. Maybe his success was due to the fact that Marx took the Hegelian method of contrapositions and applied it to his particular developments about the topic.

b) Marx and Engels

The idea of dialectic in Marx contains two main aspects in its exposition: 1. a criticism addressed to Hegel, but at the same time the acknowledgment of his idea of dialectic as a synthesis of opposites, and 2. the conviction that philosophical thought has to be addressed to practical things in order to transform the world.

Marx's dialectic recognises its Hegelian influence, but at the same time it is built on a very strong criticism against it. Marx's main criticism of Hegel's dialectic is that he develops a process simply on the level of ideas and that he does not touch reality at all. In that way Marx thinks that Hegel reduces everything to logic and to the development of ideas. Therefore Hegel does not provide us with a proper approach to reality, men and nature. For Marx, Hegel's dialectic is illusory and merely fictional because at the end he justs transfers the conservative religious, social and political views to an idealistic philosophical level. Instead of that, Marx proposes a radical change: dialectic implies the recognition of the fact that the real

principle of nature resides in the material conditions. The revolution must be radical: the starting point requires the annihilation of religion, private property and the State because they represent the alienation of man, his work and his social relationships respectively.[181]

Marx applies his conception of dialectic in his system in different ways, but dialectic always refers to the idea of movement. According to him the main task of dialectic is to provide us with an explanation and understanding of history because dialectic shows us the real historical rhythm and historical movement and because dialectic is at the same time the method for understanding and grasping history. The general historical dialectical movement involves and explains other dialectical processes. That is the reason that Marx talks about the dialectic of alienation, the dialectic of revolution and the dialectic of knowledge among others.

Marx considers that the historical phenomenon of alienation is subject to a dialectical process, that is, to a movement of thesis, antithesis and "surpassing". In Marx the proletarians have to tolerate the main effects of this alienation. According to him the communitarian nature of men splits them in antagonistic parts. This splitting is the beginning that leads to the surpassing to a new society in which antagonisms among social classes disappear an any human alienation to external powers too. That is the point of arrival at communism.

The dialectic of revolution implies the dialectical movement of history which is developed in the antithesis between the dynamic basis (development of workforces) and the static social and mental superstructures. This opposition between the dynamic nature of the basis and the mainly static superstructures produces a gulf which is expressed in a

[181] See K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Third Manuscript: Private Property and Labour. Political Economy as a Product of the Movement of Private Property; Private Property and Communism; Human Requirements and Division of Labour Under the Rule of Private Property; The Power of Money and Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole.

clear antagonism: a revolution. With the revolution the gap between forces is broken with a new way of production and the out dating of social and mental relationships. Marx proves his conclusions insofar as he shows how the new way of production derives from the invention of the machine and the industrial revolution collides with medieval superstructures. Equally Marx shows that within capitalism the development of modern productive forces have started a collision with the social and mental superstructures of the bourgeoisie.

In relation to the dialectic of knowledge, Marx is again close to Hegel. Marx says that reality, as it is now, does not give us the truth in history. What history really is will appear in the future. That is the thesis that provides the dynamism of the revolutionary mind: the dialectical movement that projects to the future. Marx applies the same dialectical idea to knowledge. Truth is a matter of movement which involves a process of birth, disappearing, rebirth of different beings, forms and institutions in the world. That is the reason that natural and historical reality and the knowledge of them are dialectical. Truth is understood in Marx in the tendency and final result of the process: truth is in the dialectical mediation.

Marx and his followers continue to use the Hegelian idea of dialectic, but with some modifications. Hegel's dialectic is an idealistic one; Marx's dialectic is a materialistic one. Marx considered that it was necessary to refine Hegel's dialectic which he saw as a mere idealistic concept. Marx thought that Hegelian dialectic is self-consciousness and remains at this level; it reaches the object, nature or reality, in thought, nature or reality, not as themselves. According to Marx, Hegel's philosophy remains at the level of abstraction and therefore, it just describes reality and history as an abstract image. This abstract image is put as a supreme truth in the Absolute Spirit. Marx claims the necessity of a dialectical transformation from abstraction to reality, that is, from the closed world of self-

consciousness to the open world of nature and history.[182] In short: Marx thought that Hegel's methodological discovery was a real discovery, but not his way of applying it. The point is that for Marx, Hegelian dialectic was merely speculative and he proposes to set up in opposition to it a scientific dialectic.

Marx asserts in his *Poverty of Philosophy* -explaining the Hegelian dialectic- that the dialectical movement consists in the existence of two contradictory sides, in their struggle and their fusion in a new category.

"Just as from the dialectic movement of the simple categories is born the group, so from the dialectic movement of the groups is born the series, and from the dialectic movement of the series is born the entire system.

Apply this method to the categories of political economy, and you have the logic and metaphysics of political economy, or, in other words, you have the economic categories that everybody knows, translated into a little-known language which makes them look as if they had newly blossomed forth in an intellect of pure reason; so much do these categories seem to engender one another, to be linked up and interwined with one another by the very working of the dialectic movement."[183]

Furthermore: in this same book, when speaking of his criticism of Proudhon, Marx stresses that the essence of dialectic resides in the "force" of negativity. That is, for Marx, if we try to eliminate the negative side of history we simply annul all the elements that constitute the dialectical movement, and therefore we would eliminate history itself.[184]

Marx recognises that Hegel's greatest philosophical merit was his dialectical method, in the sense that its essence resides in the opposition of determinations as a starting point. But he thinks that in order to provide a

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[182] See Marx, *Capital,* I, 1, Afterword to the Second Edition.

[183] See *The Poverty of Philosophy. With an introduction by Frederick Engels,* translation into English International Publishers, International Publishers Co. Inc., Fourth Printing, New York, 1971, p. 108.

[184] See *ibid.*, p. 111 and Appendices, p. 179 ff.

concrete foundation to dialectic, it has to be understood in terms of social and economic relations:

"The same men who establish their social relations in conformity with their material productivity, produce also principles, ideas and categories, in conformity with their social relations."[185]

In the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* Marx dedicates some parts to the problem of Hegel's dialectic.[186] According to Marx, Feuerbach is the only one who has adopted a serious and critical attitude in relation to Hegel's dialectic and at the same time he has made real discoveries in this field. We can summarise these discoveries -according to Marx- as follows: 1. Philosophy has been nothing else but religion insofar as it has been understood and expounded as mere thought. It has to be condemned as a form of alienation or estrangement of the essence of man. 2. The basic theoretical principle of the true materialism and of real science resides in the social relationship of *man to man.* 3. The denial of the absolute spirit, positively based on itself and self-supportive, is possible as a result of the negation of the negation.

For Feuerbach, Hegel's starting point was the true one, that is, the positive facts that we know from our senses. But Hegel's problem was the ascent to mere idealistic and theological abstractions that do not correspond to any real object. That is the reason too that Hegel -according to Marx- just provides the abstract, logical, speculative manifestation for the movement of history, *i.e.,* not the real one.

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[185] *Ibid.*, p. 109.

[186] See K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* Third Manuscript, Critique of the Hegelian Dialectic and Philosophy as a Whole.

For Marx the speculative Hegelian spirit displays itself in three superposed and interrelated planes that result in a dialectic of pure thought. The one-sidedness and limitations of Hegel's philosophy involve the following: 1. The Hegelian *Phenomenology* describes a historical "movement" which does not correspond to real human beings. In this way Hegel transfers the movement of real history to a level of self-consciousness. 2. Marx thinks that this transference is a mistaken approach which has its origin in a false idea of human being as the self-consciousness, and not as a sensible (perceptive) entity, as a spiritual being and not as natural, and as theoretical man and not practical. That is the reason that any possibility of achieving objectivity is totally removed because Hegel's philosophy is a philosophy of the subject and not of the object, that is, it is a form of idealism. 3. For Hegel, the highest way of self-consciousness is knowlege. In Marx's opinion this is the origin of the most serious distortion, which consists in replacing real problems that require real solutions with theoretical problems which just offer solutions that are purely theoretical.[187] However, Marx considers that Hegel's *Phenomenology* contains the following merits:

"The outstanding achievement of Hegel's *Phänomenologie* and of its final outcome, the dialectic of negativity as the moving and generating principle, is thus first that Hegel conceives the self-creation of man as a process, conceives objectification as loss of the object, as alienation and as transcendence of this alienation; that he thus grasps the essence of *labour* and comprehends objective man -true, because real man- the outcome of man's *own labour*. The *real, active* orientation of man to himself as a species-being, or his manifestation as a real species-being (i.e., as a human being), is only possible if he really brings out all his *species-powers* -something which in turn is only possible through the co-operative action of all of mankind, only as the result of

[187] See Norberto Bobbio, "La dialéctica en Marx", en N. Abbagnano *et al.*, *op. cit.*, p. 265.

history- and treats these powers as objects: and this, to begin with, is again only possible in the form of estrangement."[188]

Marx thinks that the way of surpassing Hegel's mistakes is simply to show the material essence of men: because human beings are living, natural beings invested with objective inherent powers, by their essence they are capable of dealing and grasping real natural objects. The human awareness of the self-alienation of the external world should lead to the assumption of a real, and objective world that is independent from our human entity but that can be grasped in its real dimension:[189]

"... We see also how only naturalism is capable of comprehending the action of world history."[190]

Marx thinks that the positive aspects of the Hegelian dialectic are within the realm of estrangement and can be expressed as follows:

1. The supersession (heben) as an objective movement of revoking the alienation into self: this process implies the real objectification of man through the recovering of his objective essence which involves the appropriation of the objective world. That is the reason that for Marx atheism, as the supersession of God, -and as the advent of theoretical humanism- and communism are the two necessary conditions for the understanding and fulfiling of the real and actual essence of men.[191]

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[188] *Ibid.*, K. Marx, *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,* translated into English Progress Publishers, Progress Publishers and Lawrence and Wishart, Sixth Printing, Moscow/London, 1981, p. 132.

[189] See *ibid.*, p. 135.

[190] *Ibid.*, p. 136.

[191] See *ibid.*, p. 142.

2. Hegel's entire logic is the demonstration that abstract thought - definite concepts- and the absolute idea as its culmination are nothing in themselves. Just nature -says Marx- is something.[192]

It is true that Marx's idea of dialectic does not have a singular meaning. At least we can say that the common denominator of the word dialectic in its different meanings involves a situation of opposition, of contradiction, of antinomy, of contrast that has to be solved.

According to Norberto Bobbio[193] it is possible to summarise Marx's idea of dialectic in two main descriptions: the first is when the word dialectic is united to the nouns "reference", "relation", "fact"; and the second one is when dialectic is described as relating to "development", "movement", "process".

Engels asserts in his *Anti-Düring* that the proof of dialectical materialism is nature because dialectical materialism is:

> "... the science of the general laws of motion and development of nature, human society, and thought."[194]

In his *Dialectic of Nature,* Engels presents three main laws of dialectic relating to historical development and human thought: a) the material mutation of quantity into quality: that implies that dialectical materialism accepts different sorts of qualities which are an upshot of the transmutation of quantity into a new quality. Any sort of quality comes from matter itself; diversity of qualities is an effect of the transformation of quantity in

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[192] See *ibid.*, pp. 144-148.

[193] See N. Bobbio, *art. cit., op. cit.*, p. 268.

[194] F. Engels, *Anti-Düring,* p. 194, *apud* R. Norman and S. Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic: a debate,* The Harvester Press, Sussex/New Jersey, 1980, p. 22.

matter;[195] b) the unity of contraries: this law implies that every entity is identical to itself and different in relation to others. But it also implies that each entity contains contrary elements, while remaining as a unity. That explains -according to the Marxist theory- why inside any entity there are changes that give us a reason for its becomingness. The unity of opposites is the characteristic feature of the dialectical opposition that explains the process and the development of entities and systems. In that sense dialectical materialism has its foundation in the thesis that matter is self-sufficient and that it contains in itself the principle that explains any natural or human process; c) the negation of the negation: in any dialectical movement the negation implies a double partition. On the one side the negation of the previous system and on the other side the positive partition that implies the construction of something new.

Engels[196] was the theoretician of Marx's dialectic and he developed two main meanings for it:

1. Dialectic as synthesis of opposites: Hegel's idea of dialectic of negativity had a central influence on Marx as a philosopher of history. For Marx -as he says in his *Poverty of Philosophy*-[197] history is dialectical: this principle of the force of negativity is the core and necessary condition of historical development. There are two different formulas in relation to the necessity of opposites associated to the principle of the force of negativity: a) Every historical stage gives rise in itself to contradictions which are the core of the historical development. There is a point, nearly inevitable, in which a historical situation enters into contradiction with another historical

[195] Nevertheless, Engels himself could discern the difficulties that the generalisation of this principle involves and the multiplicity of qualitative changes which cannot be explained by a mere quantitative change.

[196] See F. Engels, *Outlines of a Critique of Political Economy* and *Anti-Dühring*; K. Marx, *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy.*

[197] See K. Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy, ed. cit.*, Chapter II The Metaphysics of Political Economy. §1 The Method, pp.103-126.

situation, and the result of the breaking of this contradiction is becomingness. b) Historical contradictions give rise to antagonisms, that is, to the struggle between the class representatives, and those who are victims of these contradictions, and at the same time the predestined to surpass them. The creation of the new society is a result of this struggle.

For Marx, as Hegel said, dialectic -as a theory of history- is understood as perpetual becoming developed in successive negations: if negation is the core progress, the negation of negation -in the sense of the resolution of the contradiction- constitutes progress itself.

2. Dialectic as interpenetration of opposites: because dialectic constitutes the formal structure of reality, dialectic is also the method of scientific search that Marx discussed and applied to elaborate an economical theory and a science of man in society. Marx thought that dialectic was the instrument *par excellence* for a rounded (complete) understanding, because dialectic stresses oppositions and tries to find a solution.

On these grounds dialectic is understood as a concrete unity in the study of the historical development: it is the result of the synthesis of opposites (negation of negation). Here the definitive category in the course of human history is becomingness.

But dialectic also is the scientific study of reality that shows us -in Marx's judgement- the unity represented as a result of an interrelationship among entities -reciprocal action- which the abstract intellect wrongly isolate from each other. In this way we get the definitive category of the organic totality. This organic totality is constituted of different entities in opposition. Here dialectic is a method of reciprocal action: the organic totality is the upshot of the reciprocal interrelation of entities.

From this general exposition of Marx's idea of dialectic we can see that he dissents from the ancient and medieval ideas of dialectic in a number of crucial aspects. For him dialectic does not involve any sort of dialogue,

art of discussion or human interchange. Following only the modern canon of dialectic, for him dialectic has to do first and foremost with the formal structure of reality. Despite the fact that Marx thinks that dialectic is also a method of scientific search that has to be applied in order to create an economical theory and a science of man in society, dialectic is not -as in Plato- a matter of philosophical conversation which has the aim of searching for the truth. Marx introduces -because of his Hegelian influence- an important element in his idea of dialectic: because dialectic permeates everything, dialectic is the correct way to approach to history in order to understand it.

Another point that is worth noticing -and one that is related to the previous one- is that for Marx philosophy has the task of transforming the world not of thinking about it. In that sense, Marx' philosophical project differs from Plato's. Marx will not consider that the act of thinking and examining everything with the aim of knowing is valuable in itself.

What is clear is that the Hegelian and Marxist idea of dialectic has exerted a definitive influence on the philosophy of the Tweintieth century. Proof of that is the fact that the word dialectic is immediately associated -and many times exclusively related- with the idea of the opposition of contraries and movement in reality. That explains why the majority of the philosophical developments of the topic of dialectic among contemporary philosophers always contain a Hegelian and Marxist basis.

After this historical analysis of the idea of dialectic we will deal with the topic of the Socratic-Platonic dialectic and its concrete application in the *Sophist.*

PART III. SOCRATIC-PLATONIC DIALECTIC

The third part of this thesis intends to give an account of the essence and development of the Socratic-Platonic method. As an illustrative case we will analyse how dialectic works in the *Sophist.*

§7. THE NATURE OF THE SOCRATIC-PLATONIC METHOD

The first thesis of this part is as follows: elenchos and dialectic are two inseparable activities. Any topic chosen for dialogue must be submitted to the dialectical process (philosophical conversation) and has to to be put to the test (*elenchos*). Socrates' figure is central and cohesive for understanding and keeping the essence and aims of the philosophical task as Plato conceived it: as a methodical (dialogic and rigorous) and unselfish search for the truth. That is the reason that we will concentrate our efforts on defining the nature of Socratic-Platonic activity (§7).

One constant idea in Plato's thought was his understanding of what philosophy is. Because he identifies philosophy with dialectic or the act of philosophising with the dialectical τέχνη it is central to trace the different written forms in which Plato presents his idea of dialectic (§8).

The Socratic-Platonic dialectic is a single entity that has different and interrelated aspects: *elenchos*, hypothesis and collection and division. We will centre our attention in the elenctic element. *Elenchos* is part of the Socratic method, but part of the Platonic method too. *Elenchos* is not the whole of the Socratic method, but it is essential to Platonic dialectic because testing is fundamental to Platonic dialectic. If *elenchos* is part of Platonic dialectic it is because it forms a fundamental part of the whole Platonic dialectic.

Our starting point will be that *elenchos* is necessary to the dialectical process. Dialectic involves coming up with ideas and the act of testing them. The Socratic testing is in principle always positive. In other words: part of the Socratic method is to reach positive conclusions through arguments. The Socratic method is one of is moving on from dialectical agreements.

Too much emphasis has been put on defining the Socratic method in negative terms, that is, as a mere process of refutation that does not lead to positive conclusions. In this narrow sense the Socratic method is identified with the *elenchos* and the latter is understood as a mere cross-examination in which one of the interlocutors submits his opinion to another person and to a succession of questions. When the Socratic method is defined in these terms it seems that it does not contain a positive epistemological value, insofar as it is not a method for discovering the truth.

The main questions and objections that are usually put to Plato about the Socratic *elenchos* are the following: if *elenchos* normally leads to refutation and hopefully admission of ignorance, where do we go from here? Is *elenchos* only useful as a means or mere part of the hypothetical method? Does *elenchos* only test other people's opinions? Can the *elenchos*, in principle, reach positive conclusions? Was Socrates not a complete philosopher because he only refuted people and rarely set out positive theses? Why does Plato have confidence in someone who seems to be unsystematic, like Socrates? Again, it is not completely clear whether the Socratic method is *per se* a scientific method because, Socrates is so often arguing *ad hominem.*

When the Socratic method is identified with the *elenchos* and the latter is characterised in terms of refutation, it is normally associated and identified with the similar practice of eristics and antilogicians. In the same

way this approach links, historically speaking, the Socratic *elenchos* with the Greek predilection for debate and discussion.

"Plato's view that question-and-answer is essential to good method was due in general to the fondness of the ancient Athenians for discussion. They regarded thinking as a social affair, and interpreted thought in terms of speech. Although Plato recognized that a man may make discoveries in his study, he held that he does so by a process essentially the same as that of discussion."[1]

Hence anyone who describes *elenchos* as a refutative and polemical method will associate the Socratic-Platonic practice with Zeno and therefore, with the Aristotelian sense of dialectic. The common element - according to this common interpretation of the *elenchos*- in Zeno's, Socrates', Plato's and Aristotle's method resides in the refutation of an opponent's thesis by deducing from it some unacceptable consequence. The result of the process will be an indirect argument or destructive hypothetical syllogism.[2]

In that sense *elenchos* will not differ essentially from eristic (antilogic), rhetoric and sophistry. But, as we have shown,[3] Plato dedicated many pages to setting out the boundaries between these different practices and his own method. Moreover: Plato's dialogues frequently call antilogicians contradiction-mongers.[4] The idea expressed in this sentence is that the use of the reduction to contradiction commonly leads to abuse.

To define the "Socratic method" (*i.e.*, the elenchos) as no more than a refutative method implies reducing its scope, atomising the elements that it involves and misunderstanding its nature. This is the typical approach, and

[1] R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, Oxford University Press, 2nd. edition, 1962, p. 83.

[2] See *ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

[3] See *supra*, Part II, §4, a) and c).

[4] See *Euthydemus*, 275 d ff., 277e ff., 283 e ff., 296 a ff., *Gorgias*, 520, *Sophist*, 223 b, 223 c ff., 231 b ff.

constitutes a wrong starting point.[5] The Socratic-Platonic method as a whole implies an elenctic process. *Elenchos* has to be understood as a process which involves testing, examining, dialogue and challenge among the interlocutors, and one which seeks to change their actual condition to a better one, that is, to educate them or take them forward.

Let us take, as a guiding example, the case of the *Crito.* We can appreciate that there are two people, Crito and Socrates who are challenging each other and suggesting different ways to develop the conversation and to tackle the topic. We see first of all Crito -siding with the majority- and trying to persuade Socrates to escape from death and putting his arguments to support his position,[6] and Socrates answering these and changing the course of the conversation:

Socrates.- "... How should we examine (σκοποίμεθα) this matter most reasonably? Would it be by taking up first your argument about the opinions of men, whether it is sound in every case that one should pay attention to some opinions, but not to others? Or was that well-spoken before the necessity to die came upon me, but now it is clear that this was said in vain for the sake of argument, that it was in truth play and nonsense? I am eager to examine together with you, Crito, whether this argument will appear in any way different to me in my present circumstances, or whether it remains the same, whether we are to abandon it or believe it. It was said on every occasion by those who thought they were speaking sensibly, as I have just now been speaking, that one should greatly value some people's opinions, but not others. Does that seem to you a sound statement?"[7]

This passage is central because it allows Plato to show the essence of his method and to stress the element of dialogic and rational examination and

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[5] See *e.g.* C. D. C. Reeve, *Socrates in the Apology,* Indianapolis, 1989; M. W. Blundell, "Commentary on Reeve", in J. J. Cleary and W. Wians (edd.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy,* Volume VIII (1992), University Press of America, pp. 115-181.

[6] See *Crito,* 45e-46a.

[7] *Ibid.*, 46 c7-e3 (G. M. A. Grube's translation).

challenge as the core of philosophical conversations. Socrates insists to Crito that we do not have to care about the majority's opinion, but for the truth itself; and he proposes to *examine* whether this is correct (to *examine* the view).[8]

In the *Crito's* model we can appreciate the real nature of the Socratic-Platonic method and the *elenchos*:[9] it implies a joint exercise of reasoning about things in a process of testing through questions and answers which has the ultimate aim of reaching conclusions. That is, what the interlocutors finally aim is to ask questions about the nature of things and to try to find the most accurate answer about them according to the evidences that we can extract from reality. The ideal result is to get an understanding -normally provisional- of the thing in question that is communicated in verbal and rational terms. The Socratic-Platonic method which involves *elenchos* is the way to reach conclusions and is not primarily refutation:

Socrates.- "Let us examine the question together, my dear friend, and if you can make any objection while I am speaking, make it and I will listen to you, but if you have no objection to make, my dear Crito, then stop now from saying the same thing so often, that I must leave here against the will of the Athenians. I think it important to persuade you before I act, and not to act against your wishes. See whether the start of our inquiry is adequately stated, and try to answer what I ask you in the way you think best."[10]

According to the Socratic-Platonic procedure the philosophical search for the truth will be understood in terms of putting things to the test.

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[8] See *ibid.*, 48 a.

[9] A point which has not only epistemological implications, but also ontological implications.

[10] *Crito,* 48 d9-492 (Grube's translation).

Philosophy is a permanent process of examining things.[11] The positive result of the Socratic-Platonic method can be expressed as follows: that we agree about something in dialectical conversation because we discover something reliable insofar as it has been tested.[12]

The elenctic process often involves also the dialectical search for a definition. Socrates clearly expressed his aim to pursue the truth by asking for the essence of the things, *i.e.,* the one and not the many.[13] The way to reach the truth is to *give the logos* of the object in question.[14] Plato thought Socrates' method to be justified because, for him too, question and answer is the best way to do philosophy, to teach and to put things to the test. *Elenchos* is essential for the dialectical process.

Socrates insists also that the main task for human beings consists in the examination of our lives. Socrates' form of procedure can be defined in ethical terms as a method of life through self-knowledge with the aim of our becoming better people. The Socratic-Platonic method, through its elenctic phase (for sometimes -especially in the so-called "Socratic" dialogues- it appears *just* as a method of *elenchos*) gives us the opportunity to examine our lives. When Socrates is questioned in the *Apology* about the sort of wisdom that he possesses he answers that perhaps the wisdom that he has is a human wisdom (ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία).[15] This wisdom has as a starting point a clear awareness of one's ignorance and one's human limits. At the same time this brings us back to the point that the philosophical search for completion is, in Socratic-Platonic terms, a joint search for self-

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[11] Related to this topic see J. F. Balaudé, "La philosophie comme mise à l'épreuve. Les mutations de l'*elenchos* de Socrate à Platon", in *Platon et lóbject de la science,* Textes réunis et présentés par Pierre-Marie Morel, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 1996, pp. 17-38.

[12] See *Republic,* VII, 538 d-539e.

[13] See *Theaetetus,* 146 and 147c; *Meno,* 72c, and 74d, *Euthyphro,* 6d.

[14] See *Sophist,* 239e-240a, *Republic,* 534b.

[15] See *Apology,* 20 d.

examination, self-knowledge and self-improvement. In the *Alcibiades* Socrates makes reference again to the human need to look after ourselves through a τέχνη that improves us. The main requirement for this τέχνη is self-knowledge.[16] The process of self-knowledge requires an encounter between souls, that is, of one soul with another as a mirror of intelligence and rationality. Self-knowledge is the source of moral consciousness, that is, it allows us to know what is good inside us and in that way we can know what is better for us:

Soctrates.- "Well then, could we ever know what skill makes us better if we didn't know what *we* were?

Alcibiades.- We couldn't.

Socrates.- Is it actually such an easy thing to know oneself? Was it some simpleton who inscribed those words on the temple wall at Delphi? Or is it difficult, and not for everybody?

Alcibiades.- Sometimes I think, Socrates, that anyone can do it, but then sometimes I think it's extremely difficult.

Socrates.- But, Alcibiades, whether it's easy or not, nevertheless this is the situation we're in: if we know ourselves, then we might be able to know how to cultivate ourselves, but if we don't know ourselves, we'll never know how.

Alcibiades.- I agree."[17]

What does the Socratic figure embody, methodologically speaking ? If we consider *Theaetetus* 150a-e and 167c-e we can conclude that:

1. What Socrates practises is an art. "The Socratic art" is - metaphorically speaking- a process of midwifery that implies an examination of souls. The feature of Socrates' art is the ability to apply all

[16] See *Alcibiades* I, 128c ff. (often regarded as spurious, but it contains what are generally acknowledged to be genuinely Platonic ideas).

[17] *Ibid.*, 128 e10-129a10.

possible tests to young men with the aim of specifying if their mind is conceiving imaginative mistakes or fertile truths;

2. His art is a compulsion from god that permits him to assist at the births of others' ideas (but, puzzlingly, forbids him to give birth). The *elenchos* is the necessary stage for distinguishing between ignorance and the presence of understanding.

3. For Socrates, any intelligent person should prefer the method of question and answer to any other because it is the best way of testing any theory given insofar as it implies a mutual challenge.

In short: there are ontological, epistemological and ethical benefits to the Socratic-Platonic method, and it may reach positive conclusions. The ethical aim of the Socratic-Platonic method is that we should become better people. It is necessary to know what virtue is if you are to be virtuous because virtue is knowledge for Socrates. Furthermore, there is his vital commitment to the ethical idea that knowledge of the good is the necessary condition of the rational and organic construction of a real human life. The self-consciousness of ignorance is the first condition of improving oneself (the *elenchos* as illustrated especially in the so-called "Socratic" dialogues). The key is not in a final answer about the nature of the truth, but in the correct preparation for asking the ideal question that is going to be our task in life: the permanent examination of everything and the examination of oneself (itself no less a matter of *elenchos*) in order to be able to live a worthy life.[18] This purpose is translated into the fundamental Socratic question: how should men behave? The knowledge of what we should do implies a kind of commitment in our acts.

The positive results of the Socratic-Platonic method can be summarised in the following sentences:

[18] See *Apology*, 38 a.

1. The Socratic-Platonic method through the elenctic process is capable of changing ignorant men from the state of falsely supposing that they know to the state of recognising that they do not know. This recognition ignorance excites the desire to know. Philosophy begins in *thauma* (wondering and questioning). *Elenchos* supplies the *thauma.* Curiosity is basic to the acquisition of knowledge.

2. But the Socratic-Platonic method is an active and positive process insofar as everything has to be put to the test through conversation that involves mutual challenge among the interlocutors. That is the reason that *elenchos* is for Plato the most sovereign of purifications, both of men and of their thoughts and ideas:[19] it is the medium for the examination men's lives.

3. The Socratic-Platonic method has ethical consequences: virtue is knowledge for Socrates in the sense that we have to live thinking: to think is a way of life, because thinking is vital (thinking is living). The Socratic-Platonic method synthesises theory and practice in the person of Socrates: Socrates' procedure is a method of living.

4. The Socratic-Platonic method through the elenctic process includes the self-consciousness that we are aiming at this end by these means. That is, Socrates is a systematic and serious philosopher, with positive aims.

5. The elenctic process that the Socratic-Platonic dialectic involves mantains the basic ontological and epistemological idea that knowledge is a dialogic and communicative act, one that implies the primary evidence which reality gives us of the same object of knowledge, shared by two or more subjects. A perspective on this fundamental idea has been lost after Plato and it is the origin of the ancient problem of philosophical solipsism, so frequently repeated in subsequent philosophy.

[19] *Sophist*, 229 e-230e.

§8. DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES ON PLATONIC DIALECTIC

The most common approach to Platonic dialectic takes as a starting point the idea that there is an evolution to it. This evolution involves the thesis that in the earlier dialogues Plato portrays an elenctic dialectic that leads to refutation, while in the middle dialogues, he develops a hypothetical method which permits him to reach positive conclusions, and in the later dialogues he refines this process through the application of the technique of collection and division.

If we look more carefully we can distinguish some constants in Plato's dialectic in such a way that the fundamental notion of dialectic remains the same. First we realise that there are always at least two interlocutors in the conversation; and second that we always get positive results of some kind (or if not something positive is always aimed at). What is important to evidence is that under the consideration of these constants there are some variables in which Plato shows us the possible ways to develop his arguments through a philosophical conversation. Whatever the way that Plato presents his arguments, it always corresponds to dialectical means and aims: the rational, dialogic and unselfish search for the truth. In other words: there is a phenomenon called Platonic dialectic that comes in different forms and is represented in different ways.

Focusing our attention on the different ways that Plato represents his arguments we notice that the figure of Socrates is usually central for showing these variations. We find some conversations in which Plato portrays mainly Socrates and another interlocutor in a process of question and answer. In this inquiry Socrates tests and challenges the respondent's thesis. Normally, Socrates presents himself as an ignorant person. His ignorance has two inter-related sides: on the one hand, the acceptance that he does not know, and on the other hand the willingness to examine things,

to learn and to test his interlocutor's thesis. Sometimes, the conversation leads to an *aporia* in which either Socrates' interlocutor has to accept that he is contradicting himself and that he has to change his stated position, or the joint search concludes in a provisional answer in the form of an open new question that needs further examination.[20] The role of *aporia* in Plato's dialogues is central because it is a state of perplexity in the course of the conversation which stimulates a new beginning: the interlocutors realise that they do not know what they thought they knew. This state of perplexity permits us to re-order our thoughts and to try to provide a new, and better founded explanation for ourselves. The *Lysis* is a good example of this, and above all in the way that the dialogue concludes:

Socrates.- "'... Now we've done it, Lysis and Menexenus -made fools of ourselves, I, an old man, and you as well. These people here will go away saying that we are friends of one another- for I count myself in with you- but what a friend is we have not yet been able to find out."[21]

Another way in which Plato presents Socrates in conversation is through the positing of tentative hypotheses. The process of examination in this case consists in testing and providing reasons about which of them is the most viable. The development of the dialectical process consists mainly in an interchange in which Socrates and his interlocutor reflect and deliberate on the pros and cons of the provisional hypotheses proposed. The *Meno* contains examples of this type:

Meno.- "Can you tell me, Socrates, can virtue be taught? Or is it not teachable but the result of practice, or is it neither of these, but men possess it by nature or in some other way?

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[20] We can find examples of this in the *Charmides*, *Protagoras* and *Euthydemus*.

[21] *Lysis*, 223 b4-8.(S. Lombardo's translation). See also *Meno*, particularly 84 ff.

Socrates.- Before now, Meno, Thessalians had a high reputation among the Greeks and were admired for their horsemanship and their wealth, but now, it seems to me, they are also admired for their wisdom, not least the fellow citizens of your friend Aristippus of Larisssa. The responsibility for this reputation of yours lies with Gorgias, for when he came to your city he found that the leading Aleuadae, your lover Aristippus among them loved him for his wisdom, and so did the other leading Thessalians. In particular he accustomed you to give a bold and grand answer to any question you may be asked, as experts are likely to do. Indeed, he himself was ready to answer any Greek who wished to question him, and every question was answered. But here in Athens, my dear Meno, the opposite is the case, as if there were a dearth of wisdom, and wisdom seems to have departed hence to go to you. If then you want to ask one of us that sort of question, everyone will laugh and say: 'Good stranger, you must think me happy indeed if you think I know whether virtue can be taught or how it comes to be; I am so far from knowing whether virtue can be taught or not that I do no even have any knowledge of what virtue itself is.'

I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens in this matter, and I blame myself for my complete ignorance about virtue. If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses? Or do you thing that someone who does not know at all who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these? Do you think that is possible? "[22]

As the foregoing passage illustrates, Socrates puts to his interlocutor different hypotheses. These will be the connecting thread of the whole dialogue and will be developed by means of the dialectical form of question and answer.

There are two other particular occasions when Plato presents the dialectical process that deserve special consideration: the *Phaedrus* and the *Symposium.* In the *Phaedrus* Plato shows us the difference between dialectic, as a question and answer process, and rhetoric, as involving long speeches. The dialectical process itself is described in terms which include a pupil challenging a dialectician. Plato portrays also a criticism of written

[22] *Meno*, 70 a-71b8 (Grube's translation).

texts (and set speeches) and the privileged place that he ascribes to living conversation for the developing of philosophical arguments. Socrates himself appears giving two long discourses. In them, Plato shows us the difference between the authentic rhetorical method and the mere unsubstantial speech.[23] Dialectically speaking the dialogue concludes with the idea that the teacher is the ideal philosopher or dialectician insofar as he is able to sow a philosophical seed in his pupils and bear fruit.[24] In relation to dialectic the *Phaedrus* shows us the way that two people in conversation can still search for the truth, despite the fact that the topic chosen can present many complexities and the interlocutors have to take a very long way around before they can arrive at some positive results. By implication, even the best rhetoric -and perhaps even *written* "dialectic"- is an unfruitful mode of communication.

In the case of the *Symposium* it seems that Plato breaks with his conventional way of presenting the dialectical process. Furthermore: it seems that in the dialogue the interlocutors agree that they will compete with each other presenting individual discourses with the aim that one of them wins the competition, but with a not very clear interaction among them. In my judgement, what is clear is that certainly Plato is presenting his dialectic in a heterodox way, but there is still an elenctic process with a different mode of interaction among the guests. Plato organises his argument in a very interesting form of elenctic dialectic. There, Socrates plays a pivotal and interconnective role in order to develop Plato's arguments. Plato presents five speakers -other than Socrates- in a party who will give their own account in a long discourse about the topic decided for conversation. Socrates is at the beginning just a listener, but then gives his own account.

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[23] See *Phaedrus*, 263 d ff. and 266 a.

[24] See ibid., 276 e-277a.

This account is preceded by a conversation through questions and answers with Agathon, at the end of which Agathon has to admit his ignorance about the topic. Afterwards, Plato resorts to introducing through Socrates the figure of Diotima in a fictional conversation in which Diotima plays the role of the questioner and Socrates plays the role of the respondent. At a certain point, the dialogue is turned into a evocative description of Diotima's teaching which constitutes the climax. Then the conversation concludes with the appearance of a drunken Alcibiades, who changes the line of the conversation and develops an encomium of Socrates. The conversation at the party starts to die with the irruption of more drunken people who hamper the development of a conversation. The final scene presents just Socrates sober and active, talking and putting questions to Agathon and Alcibiades who are forcing themselves to keep awake. Finally, everybody falls asleep and just Socrates stays himself, ready to start a new normal day. Socrates' role is central throughout the dialogue because he tries to keep a permanent dialectical disposition either as a listener or as a speaker.

Another way in which Plato likes to represent the dialectical process is by putting prominent figures on stage. The aim of these "historical" conversations is to examine and to test other people's theses and, often, make use of them as a good "philosophical excuse" to develop Plato's arguments in relation to a specific topic. Here the figure of Socrates is central again because the fictional conversation and development of the argument make a particular impact when a person who has a certain intellectual reputation is tested by Socrates or vice versa. The question and answer process and the series of agreements and disagreements throughout the dialogue are an exhibition of what a philosophical conversation must

be.[25] A clear example of this process can be found in the *Parmenides.*[26] There, Plato presents the figures of Zeno and Parmenides. First Zeno is questioned by a young Socrates. Afterwards Parmenides exposes the difficulties that Socrates' position involves. In the next step Parmenides takes the leading role and proposes a method of analysis in order to solve these difficulties. This dialogue also exposes what sort of consequences follow from asserting or denying posited hypotheses. The way that Plato deals with the idea of hypothesis as a reasonable assumption gives a dynamic to the dialogue because it is a starting point but at the same time an issue that has to be put to the test. The rest of the dialogue is dedicated to Parmenides' presentation and demonstration of the analysis of different hypotheses with Socrates as his interlocutor, in the presence of a young Aristotle.[27]

Sometimes, as he commonly does in some of the so called late dialogues, he resorts to use again a historical dialectic, but in an indirect way, when it is necessary for the purposes of the argument and to provide us with another lesson about how the dialectical method could be practised. Let me explain. If we analyse the dialogic form of the *Sophist* and the *Statesman,* in both cases Socrates plays an introductory role only and the main conversation will take place between two other figures:[28] the Young Socrates and the Eleatic Visitor, in the case of the *Statesman,* and Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor, in the case of the *Sophist.* It is worth noticing that the role of both interlocutors is very active and there are mutual

[25] Some of course are demonstrations of what dialectical exchange is not, *e.g. Gorgias,* 481 b-527e and *Hippias Major.*

[26] Another example of a dialectical exchange through a prominent figure appears in the *Protagoras,* 356 c ff. in which Protagoras plays a very positive and outstanding role.

[27] Not necessarily *the* Aristotle.

[28] In the *Sophist* and in the *Statesman* Plato shows us how the Socratic-Platonic method is fertile and produces its best fruits in Theaetetus, the Young Socrates and the Eleatic Visitor who are able to have a philosophical conversation in which Socrates does not lead it or does not play a preeminent role.

challenges throughout the conversation. Plato makes use of paradigms for presenting his thesis, searching for a clear formula about the object into question and at the same time for exhibiting the dialectical method and the dialectician's work through a laborious process of collection and division.

In short: as we have said, Plato's ways of representing his dialectical method in written form involve a variety of modes of carrying on conversations. His technical resources are wide enough to present different sorts of interlocutors and possible routes to explore. He also represents the different complications that any philosophical conversation implies in accordance with his philosophical project of a dialogic search for the truth. Plato's insistence on expressing philosophy as a communicative act is a constant philosophical stimulation for refining, rethinking and conversing rigorously and clearly. His masterly written display of philosophy as a dialectical act must be a permanent source for new historical conversations with other philosophers and for the understanding of the nature of the philosophical act.

§9. DIALECTIC IN THE *SOPHIST*

The second thesis of this part III is as follows: the philosopher's activity, through dialectic, is a search for authenticity and improvement that leads to self-knowledge, knowledge of human nature and knowledge of reality. Philosophy is a communicative act. For Plato reality is not dialectical -as Hegel said- but dialectic is the philosophical method for searching and for discovering what reality is. As an illustrative case, we will describe how dialectic works in the *Sophist.*

There has been long speculation about a supposed trilogy that Plato seems to have had at one point in mind: the *Statesman,* the *Sophist* and the *Philosopher.* We think that the *Philosopher* is in effect contained in the

other two dialogues because in them Plato will show us what a philosopher is.[29] In the case of the *Sophist* the real irony is that Plato is going to display what a real philosopher (dialectician) is and what philosophy is (dialectic) in the dialectical (philosophical conversation) process of the definition of (hunting down) the Sophist. The dialogue will exhibit, as a game of contrasts, what the philosopher is and what he is not.[30] What the *Sophist* shows us is that dialectic is essential for grasping the truth.[31]

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[29] See M. L. Morgan, "Philosophy in Plato's *Sophist*", in J. J. Cleary and W. Wians (edd.), *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, Volume IX (1993), University Press of America, Boston, 1995, p. 84. See also N. Notomi, *The Unity of Plato's Sophist. Between the sophist and the philosopher*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, pp. 21-27 and 239.

[30] *Cf.* N. Notomi, *op. cit.*, Preface, XII. Throughout this §9 we will make reference to Notomi's book very frequently and when it is pertinent to do so. Any resemblance or resonance of his thesis is just this, a mere resemblance or resonance because we are dealing with the same topic, but our positions are very different. We cannot deny that the greatest merit of Notomi's book is to return the philosophical discussion of the *Sophist* to its real core and unity (and to try to put an end to obsessive microanalysis): to establish the difference between the philosopher and the Sophist. First of all, Notomi does not show clarity about the difference between the historical antecedents of philosophy and its related activities, and the historical Greek beginning of philosophy and the conditions and principles that make it possible as a differentiated and new scientific activity. Secondly, Notomi thinks that the possibility of philosophy -as the *Sophist* illustrates-depends on sophistry (as its subtitle indicates). We think exactly the opposite: for Plato the real category is philosophy and sophistry is not possible without its confrontation with philosophy. Thirdly, Notomi considers that philosophical thinking is in the *Sophist* -and for Plato in general- inner dialogue. In fact, for Notomi the key for the definition to the Sophist resides in two points: in the differentiation between true and false appearances -for Notomi to seem or to appear are in opposition to being- but mainly in the permanent inner dialogue and confrontation of our own epistemic state that permits us to recognise our own falsities. For him the Sophist is "within us". That is the reason that for Notomi the dividing line between the Sophist and the philosopher is very fine and the permanence of philosophy so weak. There are no objective criteria to differentiate the Sophist and the philosopher: just these inner dialogues and the performance of dialectic -which he understands as a refutative process of cross-examination and as mere combination of kinds. Any other sorts of philosophical conversations are subject to the final criterion of our internal dialogues. In contrast we think that philosophy began in Greece with the Presocratics who were the first in asking rationally and systematically for the essence of things. We are not denying that there were different antecedents that make philosophy possible and that there were related activities, but when philosophy was born it starts as a new, differentiated and self-conscious science that searches for the truth and that has a universal scope. Philosophy crystallises with the Socratic-Platonic dialectical project. We also think that Plato's dialectical project involves the idea of philosophy as a communictive act: philosophy is a dialogic activity -one of its variants is internal dialogue in the act of thinking that finally will be externalised. In the case of the *Sophist* the key for the definition of the Sophist, in clear contrast to the philosopher, lies in the following distinctions: the Sophist seems to be wise, but he appears as he is, as an impostor and what he communicates to us is a false representation of things. The essence of the Sophist is in his appearance. The difference and boundaries between the philosopher and the Sophist are well established insofar as the latter is not a dialectician: the Sophist does not care for the truth and does not search in an unselfish, dialogic, methodical, rational, systematic and objective way for what things are. The permanence of philosophy depends on this faithfulness to objective truth through an intersubjective philosophical -elenctic- exchange.

[31] *Cf. ibid.*, Preface, XIII, p. 299.

The connecting thread of the *Sophist* that provides unity to the dialogue is the search for the definition of the Sophist. In order to do that Plato has first to define what a philosopher is. Because his philosophical project is defined in dialectical terms, in order to fulfil the task of defining the Sophist in contrast to the philosopher he has to make explicit what the nature of philosophy is and to deal with fundamental philosophical problems such as: the contrast between reality and images, the possibility of falsehood, the ontological and epistemological status of being and not being, what dialectic is, and the way that the dialectical method operates in the process of collection and division and in the combination of kinds. The *Sophist* gives an illustration of what the philosophical task is. That is the reason that the *Sophist* is a key dialogue because Plato reveals his idea of the nature of philosophy: philosophy is a rational, self-conscious science that asks and defines its essence and aims. The philosopher is the dialectician who is in clear opposition to the eristic Sophist. The question for the essence of philosophy is a permanent philosophical question. Philosophy is defined as the science that asks questions and tries to provide us with rational answers about the essence of things.[32]

The third thesis of this part is as follows: Plato presents the Sophist's attitude, as deliberate sorcery. In our judgement the Sophist's activity involves a quadruple kind of prejudice: 1. Ontological predisposition and epistemological distortion: because the Sophist presents to his audience a blurred representation of things which superimposes on and disguises their nature. This predisposition and distortion prevents a clear and transparent presentation and possible knowledge of things as they really are. 2. Ethical and human distortion: because with his attitude of pretending to know everything, the Sophist is destroying the initial disposition of good faith that everybody ought to have to make possible a dialogue without prejudices.

[32] *Cf. ibid.*, Preface, XI-XIII and p. 25.

3. Ethical and methodological distortion: the Sophist is preventing the open and unselfish search for the truth or the search for the examination of things as they really are themselves, independently of any personal or group interest. 4. Dialectical distortion: because the Sophist is hampering and breaking off the honest historical dialogue and interaction (historical exercise of dialectic) with other philosophers in the past in the sense that he atomises and reduces the search for the truth to his personal interest and circumstance.

Throughout these sections we will show the following:

Plato exercises in the *Sophist* different levels of dialectic in order to define the Sophist in contrast to the philosopher: i) firstly, and most evidently the common interaction between the interlocutors in an elenctic dialectic; ii) secondly, a historical, and clearly elenctic, dialectic when he introduces Parmenides' theses and some other previous philosophers' theses in order to criticise them; iii) thirdly, the application of the dialectical method as a process of collection and division and as science of combination of kinds.

We will treat the topic of dialectic in the *Sophist* in the following sections.

a) The nature and justification of the form of the *Sophist* as dialogue, the seven definitions of the Sophist and the process of division

The structure of the dialogue is as follows:

1. 216-221c: first we see Theodorus introducing the Eleatic Visitor and getting an agreement in relation to the topic of dicussion. They agree to converse about how to get a clear formula about the Sophist. The Eleatic Visitor proposes the question and answer method, recalling it as

Parmenides' method, and chooses Theaetetus as his interlocutor. The two interlocutors consider that it is convenient to apply the question and answer method to a small model or paradigm. They apply the process of collection and division in order to get a definition of the angler.

2. 221c-231a: the interlocutors will apply the same method of collection and division in order to define the Sophist. They get six initial definitions: a) the Sophist as a hired hunter of rich young men (221c-223b); b) the Sophist as a trader in knowledge (223c224c); c) the Sophist as a retail dealer (224d); d) the Sophist as a manufacturer and salesman of information (224e); e) the Sophist as an eristic (224e-226a); f) the Sophist as a cross questioner (226a-231b). At the end of this section there is a recapitulation of the six definitions.

3. 232a-249c: they will center their attention on the productive art and on a seventh definition of the Sophist that emerges from it as a maker of false conceit of wisdom. The Sophist appears as a creator of images or semblances. That is the reason that the interlocutors will discuss the status of both. The existence of images involves the existence of not being, breaking Parmenidean principles. They will put in question Parmenides' principles. From there, they will try to demonstrate that not-being exists and co-exists with being. They reject the Parmenidean thesis and make a dialectical review of the materialist and idealist positions in relation to the topic of being.

4. 249d-259d: the interlocutors state their position in relation to the possible combination of kinds and define dialectic as the science of interrelationships between kinds. They specify also a definition of not-being as the different and not as the contrary of being.

5. 259d-268d: Finally they deal with the problem of the relationship between not-being and falsity with thought, discourse, and judgement in order to classify the Sophist's activity. All of this will permit them to define

false judgement as that which says something different from what is. With all these elements they will take up again the seventh attempt to define the Sophist and collect all the features that permit them to define the Sophist as a magician who produces illusions and fantasies in his discourse.

In this first section we will develop the idea that from the beginning of the dialogue the characters' deliberate choice is of dialectic as the proper method to do philosophy, that is, as a cooperative dialogue in which the interlocutors make a real contribution in the search: in this particular case, to study and to bring the nature of the Sophist into a clear formula by the method of Collection and Division applied to the angler. There is an analogical process that Plato uses to talk about the six initial definitions of the Sophist and the important role that they will play at the end of the dialogue in the final "hunting down" of the Sophist. That is the Sophist always appears "like something".

The dialogue starts with an introductory conversation (216a-218d) when Theodorus with Theaetetus and the young Socrates meet Socrates for further discussion as it had been agreed. With them -they emphasise- there is a real philosopher, a Visitor from Elea. Theodorus and Socrates launch a first problem: are the Sophist, the Statesman and the Philosopher a single type, or two, or are they three types each with a corresponding name? (217a).

Socrates and the Eleatic Visitor talk about the method that they will use to carry out the conversation.[33] There are two options: 1. an unbroken long speech; 2. or a conversation through questions. The Visitor's choice is for the second one. That decision shows us the Visitor's philosophical character: he is a dialectician. Next is the choice of interlocutor. The Visitor opts for Theaetetus as his ideal interlocutor insofar as he has

[33] Regarding the topic of the choice of the question and answer form over a long and uninterrupted discourse see *Protagoras,* 329 b and 337 a-338a; *Gorgias*, 448 d and 449 c; *Republic* I, 337 a.

conversed with him before and (because the topic will be difficult) he is mature enough to tackle the joint search. Theaetetus will appear throughout the dialogue as a very active, cooperative and sharp interlocutor. First of all the Visitor of Elea and Theaetetus try to define the topic: to study and to bring the nature of the Sophist into a clear formula (218).

The dialectical exercise starts with a process of selection -and the correspondent divisions- of a model or paradigm (the angler). On these grounds they apply the method of collection and division which culminates in six initial attempts to define the Sophist.

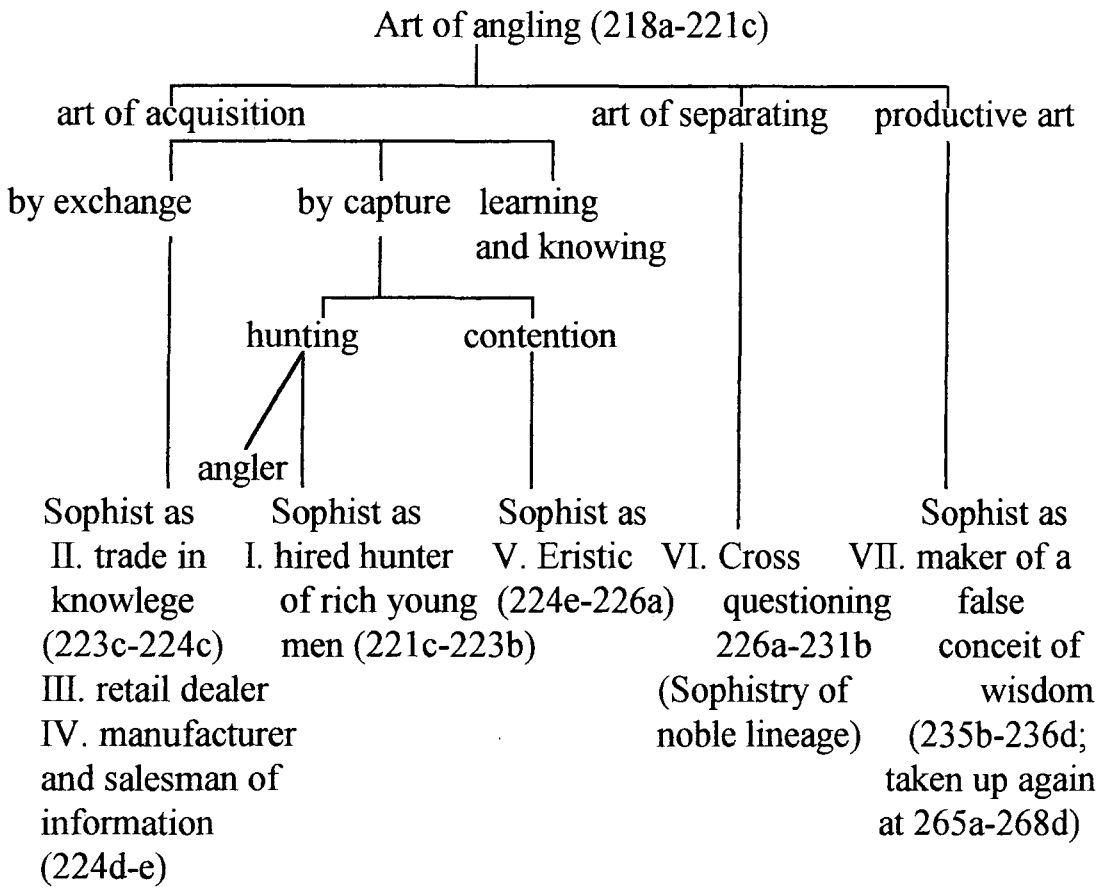
One key passage that makes explicit the purposes of the dialogue is 221c6-7, where the Eleatic Visitor says that by applying the method of division to the angler they are trying to find what the Sophist is: "φέρε δή, κατά τοῦτο τὸ παράδειγμα καὶ τὸν σοφιστὴν ἐπιχειρῶμεν εὑρεῖν ὅτι ποτ' ἔστιν."

Why are the first seven definitions of the Sophist so important? There are two lines of interpretation. The first considers that only the seventh definition grasps the Sophist rightly and therefore that not all of them are equally valid. The second possible interpretation is that all divisions get something right because all of them are looking at the Sophist from different perspectives. We will support the latter interpretation. We think that the six definitions are central because it is the first fish that the two interlocutors catch in the conversation. These first definitions show us why for Plato primary evidences are very important as a methodological and epistemological starting point. The seven definitions represent the different ways in which the Sophist presents himself and appears before us as he really is. All of them will be crucial at the end of the dialogue when the final recapitulations and definition of the Sophist will be presented.[34]

[34] *Cf.* N. Notomi, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-94 and F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato.* Translation with a running commentary, Routledge and Kegan and Paul, 5th,

Methodologically speaking the long process of divisions that these six initial attempts to grasp the essence of the Sophist involves also illustrates how this process works in detail.

The scheme is as follows -including the seven definitions:[35]



It is important to clarify that what perplexes the interlocutors is how it is possible that a man -*i.e.*, the Sophist- who appears as a master of many different τέχναι possesses and is named according single one. The following dialectical step that the interlocutors assume is to try to find where the unity of these different modes of appearing of the Sophist is and how to express it in a clear and consistent formula (232 a1-6). We emphasise that

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Impression, London, 1957, pp. 186-187. See W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, Volume V The later Plato and the Academy, Cambridge University Press, Reprint, 1996, pp. 133-134.

[35] Taken -with some modifications- from F. M. Cornford, *op. cit.* p. 171. For detail tables of this divisions see R. Bluck, *Plato's Sophists. A commentary* (G. Neal ed.), Manchester University Press, 1975, pp. 55-57.

Plato gives all the importance and weight to the different ways that the Sophist appears because they are the first clue that has to be analysed carefully. None of them will be discarded. The essence of the Sophist resides in his appearance. Plato is not making a difference between the different ways that the Sophist present himself and the essence of him. Plato simply is trying to collect the first data and primary evidences that we get from reality about the Sophist and which constitute a firm starting point.

The common interpretations of this passage of the *Sophist* tend to apply a Parmenidean and Kantian metaphysical criterion -*mutatis mutandis*- that distinguishes two ontological levels of reality: the phenomenal and the noumenal. That is how they explain the presence of a second stage, saying that Plato rejects the six initial definitions because they just have a phenomenal value, but not a real or noumenal content which permits us to define the essence of the Sophist, *i.e.*, not in his appearance or in the different ways that he presents himself.

In accordance with this beginning the aim of the dialogue -as we will see- is to discover the nature of the Sophist through the concrete applicaton of the dialectical method of collection and division and the combination of kinds. One interesting remark that the Eleatic Visitor suggests is that the method of collection does not reject any object. Everything is liable to be studied (227 a10-b4). That point suggests an initial but clear difference in attitudes between the philosopher and the Sophist. The philosopher -as a dialectician- is open to inquiry about the essence of everything. The Sophist's starting point is his "knowledge" of everything.

The Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus realise the great difficulty that is involved in "hunting down" the nature of the Sophist because of his evasiveness and the multiple ways of he has presenting himself: he appears as an expert at many things an he is called by a single name. The Eleatic Visitor mentions the other opposite possibility as an open question: is it not

possible to call him by different names because he possesses many different skills? (232 a).

Considering the complexity of the case they decide to fix their attention on one clear feature of the Sophist that they got hold of before in the fifth division: the Sophist as a controversialist (ἀντιλογικός) or a person engaged in disputes. Now the idea of the Sophist as a controversialist will comprehend a wider sense: the Sophist as a lover of disputations (ἀμφισβητητικός) which includes also private and public debates.

The Sophist as a lover of disputes appears as having a kind of conceit of knowledge of everything, but not truth (233c). That is a crucial assertion because it permits us to discern clearly that what the Sophist practises is not the Socratic method (divisions V and VI).[36] What characterises the Sophist is his deceptive procedure that hampers objective knowledge and education because he cannot distinguish the real nature of things from mere false beliefs. With this wider definition of the Sophist the interlocutors are including among these "hunters" the mere creators of persuasion (division I), and the pseudo-teachers of virtue (divisions II, III and IV) (234c-d). The Sophistic practice of controversy involves any sort of knowledge and allegedly they make their pupils able to dispute about any subject-matter without really having knowledge about it (234e-235a). In short: the Sophist seems to know all subjects, but not reality. Sophists are "like" philosophers or seem to be philosophers, but they are not philosophers.

Throughout the dialogue Plato will insist on a parallel and contrast between the Sophist's practice and the philosopher as a dialectician. For the moment it is clear that the enterprise of chasing the Sophist's nature is difficult because of his many different ways of appearing and because of his evasive way of presenting himself.

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[36] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 60-68.

The next step in the search for the definition of the Sophist takes place when the interlocutors decide to concentrate on the seventh division. Because this division describes the Sophist as a creator of images, it will be necessary to define what an image is. That will be crucial for establishing the connection with the ontological and epistemological elements that the definition of the Sophist includes as a creator of images: falsehood and the metaphysical status of being and not being.

b) Reality and images. The possibility of falsehood. The ontological and epistemological status of being and not being

Now the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus focus on a seventh division, that is, in the productive class which describes the Sophist as a "maker of false conceit of wisdom" (233d ff.). The central idea is that the Sophist is a creator of images or semblances. But he is a particular kind of producer of images: he is a creator of illusions. Let me explain. The Sophist describes himself as a man who is able to produce all things with his single skill. Because he creates illusions by means of discourse, making his listeners believe that what he presents is the truth and that he is the wisest of men, the interlocutors have to discover how he can do this imitation of real things and how he can present himself as a real philosopher. That means the main question that emerges in the dialogue is how εἴδωλα are possible and if they are, what sort of existence they have. In a sort of fictional dialogue the Eleatic Visitor considers the possible way that the Sophist can defend himself against these charges. The Sophist would put forward his case as follows: he is an expert in semblance-making (φανταστική). He creates unreal images, and unreal things cannot exist in any way. Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor have to demonstrate that "what is not" has a sort of existence and that thinking and saying something "what is not" (false) is

possible. In fact, one of the clues for the definition of the Sophist's activity (241a-b) emerges from this discussion: the Sophist's practice consists in an act of attributing not-being to facts or being to what is not a fact. At the same time, Plato will show one of his key ontological ideas, that is, that "what is not, in some respect has being, and conversely that what is, in a way is not" (241d). In short: in the search for the ontological status of being and not-being, it is necessary to define what "real" means. These moves in the dialogue are crucial in order to define clear boundaries between the Sophist and the Philosopher. With the possibility of falsehood Plato reveals the essence of any epistemological act in dialectical terms: we can discover in a philosophical conversation if something is false in a clear and objective confrontation with things and in an agreement about that. Let us take this step by step.[37]

If we look at 235 the conclusion of it is that the Sophist is a "wizard" (θαυματοποιός) because he is an imitator of real things. Furthermore, he does not possess genuine knowledge of all the things that he "seems" to dispute about. Here we can notice that the Sophist's attitude is a deliberate sorcery. The consequence is that he presents things to his audience in such a way that he creates a certain predisposition to see reality in a peculiar and wrong way.[38] This allegory of the Sophist as a θαυματοποιός permits us to understand the essence of his practice from its roots: he is generating -in a premeditated way- a misrepresentation of what things really are putting θαύματα between us and things. As a consequence of that he is hampering a direct, fresh and philosophical approach to things and the possibility of

[37] See forward p. 217.

[38] Cornford (see *op. cit.*, p.195) thinks that the passages 235b and 268d are comparable with *Republic* VII, 514b in two aspects: a) because the Sophist is a kind of θαυματοποιός and b) because in the *Sophist* -as in the *Republic*- the Eleatic Visitor is trying -like Socrates in the *Republic* with the prisoners- to bring Theaetetus and his friends closer to realities. That is related to our argument because it helps to illustrate the different epistemological attitudes of the Sophist and the philosophers. See also R. Patterson, *Image and Reality in Plato's Metaphysics*, Hackett, Indianapolis, 1985, pp. 33-34.

knowing them as they really are. He is breaking the initial ethical condition for a philosophical conversation: the willingness and good faith of the interlocutors to search for the truth.

The next dialectical agreement among the characters is that the Sophist is an imitator. They will work on this point using a dialectical process of division. There are two forms of imitation: 1. the making of likenesses (εἰκαστική) and 2. the making of semblances (φανταστική). The argument goes as follows: the Sophist creates εἴδωλα, in his discourse, but it is a malicious production in so far as it involves a deliberate deceit and illusion addressed to his audience. The Sophist is not presenting and representing things as they really are. What is important to stress is that Plato, from the beginning, insists on exposing the Sophist's hypocrisy in its deliberated twisted sort of imitation in contrast to the transparent, unselfish and unequivocal attitude of the philosopher before things.

Regarding the topic of false judgement: this topic comes into the conversation because the Sophist is an image-maker; he creates a world of particular fictions which purport (pretend) to be the real things. The metaphysical originality in Plato is that he is trying to show us how non-being can be in certain way and the logical, ontological and epistemological consequences that follow if we accept this assertion. The questions that emerge in the dialogue are: what is the relationship between the εἴδωλα that the Sophist produces and the problem of false judgement and otherness? Another question relating to this is: what is the ontological, epistemological and logical status of non-being and how are negative statements and thoughts possible?[39]

In the next step -237b-239c- the EleaticVisitor will show us that there are things that have *some sort* of existence. That is, the term "what is

[39] It is worth noticing that the introduction of some of the Parmenidean theses -up to 259- permits Plato to display a historical dialectic, in parallel with the main argument of the dialogue.

not" is applicable to "something", but it is not used by itself or in isolation from everything that exists. To talk about the existence of "what is not" is - in Platonic terms- a matter of putting thing in relationship. We find this part crucial, because Plato will also be rejecting the possibility of thinking, speaking or conceiving absolute nothingness without self-contradiction. Here there is a connection with Parmenides. This link is as follows:

With the acceptance that false judgements, false beliefs and not-being exist in a context of relationships about things, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor are making a very refined point about dialectic: reality is a matter of relationships and we have to discover what sort of similitudes and differences there are among things if we search to grasp them. On these ontological and epistemological grounds the interlocutors get the dialectical key for establishing what sort of relationship would be possible between the philosopher and the Sophist.

Nevertheless, the Sophists' objection is still very powerful: they say that they are not practising the art of semblance-making (φανταστική, 239 c9) and creating unreal images, because unreal things cannot exist. The Visitor remarks that the same objection will be put forward against the possibility of thinking or saying "what is not", that is, what is false.

After a short dialogue, Theaetetus and the Visitor can state the following conclusion: things that are not (falsehoods) are things which are contrary to facts (or contrary to the things that are). It is interesting that Plato is appealing to reality or facts as the ultimate criterion of truth. The possibility of defining falsehood in objective terms will be one of the key epistemological points for hunting down the Sophist. Philosophy is an inter-subjective act that has the aim of discovering what is objectively true or false:

Eleatic Visitor.- "And what now? How can we define his art without contradicting ourselves?

Theaetetus.- How do you mean? What sort of contradiction do you fear?

Eleatic Visitor.- When we say that he deceives with that semblance he spoke of and that his art is a practice of deception, shall we be saying that, as the effect of his art, our mind thinks what is false, or what shall we mean?

Theaetetus.- Just that. What else could we mean?

Eleatic Visitor.- And false thinking, again, will be thinking things contrary to the things that are?

Theaetetus.- Yes.

Eleatic Visitor.- You mean, then, by false thinking, thinking things that are not?

Theaetetus.- Necessarily."[40]

That is the reason that in the next couple of passages (240d-e) the interlocutors make clear that it is possible to define what an error is, and that Sophists are doing something when they produce simulations: false beliefs are equivalent to one particular kind *i.e.,* images or semblances.

The next agreement between the Visitor and Theaetetus is that falsehoods exist in thoughts and in statements. We can qualify the Sophists' activity -at least provisionally- as an act of attributing not-being to facts or being to what is not a fact (241a-b). Here the contrast between the Sophist and the philosopher starts to emerge: the philosopher for Plato is first and foremost a very careful observer of reality and therefore, a person who deliberates at length before he makes his judgements because he searches for the truth. The Sophist's world is a fictional one that does not correspond to what things really are. He does not care for the truth.

What has just been agreed permits the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus to commit a kind of parricide against Parmenides since "what is not, in some respect has being, and conversely that which is, in a way is not"

[40] *Sophist,* 240 c7-d7 (Cornford's translation).

(241d). We think that the Platonic revolution in metaphysics is concentrated in this phrase.[41]

To amplify their ontological position -from 242b to 243c- the interlocutors make a general review of what earlier philosophers consider real things in combination with Parmenides' unitarian thesis about what is. Some questions emerge: is there one or are there several real things (ὄντα)? What is the meaning of "real" or "the real"? What do we express when we state of a thing that "it is"? Dialectically speaking this passage shows us again what historical conversations with other philosophers imply in the search for the clarification of the main topic of the dialogue -the definition of the Sophist- and how to develop a real dialogue with fictional interlocutors.

Eleatic Visitor.- "The general run of these expressions we will consider later, if we so decide. We must begin now with the chief and most important of them all.

Theaetetus.- Which is that? Of course you mean we ought to begin by studying 'reality' and finding out what those who use the word think it stands for.

Eleatic Visitor.- You have hit my meaning precisely, Theaetetus; I do mean that we must take this line. Imagine them here before us, and let us put this question: 'You who say that Hot and Cold or some such pair *really are* all things, what exactly does this expression convey that you apply to both when you say that they both are "real" or each of them is 'real? How are we to understand this "reality" you speak of? Are we to suppose it is a third thing alongside the other two and that the All is no longer, as you say, two things, but three? For surely you do not give the name "reality" to one of the two and then say that both alike are real; for then there will be only one thing, whichever of the two it may be, and not two.'"

Theaetetus.- True."[42]

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[41]The question is: why do many philosophers ignore Plato's thesis and continue to insist on the possibility of thinking, speaking and qualifying absolute nothingness despite the fact that it involves a contradiction? The cases of Hegel and Heidegger are good examples of that.

[42] *Sophist,* 243 c10-e7 (Cornford's translation).

The most prominent feature of the foregoing passage is that it provides us with the ontological basis for establishing the dialectical process of comparison between the philosopher and the Sophist. Let me make myself clear. Philosophers and Sophists are a real pair of things among the universe of objects that constitute reality. Insofar as both coexist, we have to find and to interweave the elements that will establish the similarities and differences between them.

In short: in the search for the ontological status of being and not-being, it is necessary to define what "real" means and involves. But it is important to keep track of the plot of the conversation: because the Sophist is dealing with falsehood, we have to know how falsehood is objectively possible and in that way to put the Sophist in contrast to the philosopher. That is the the context of the analysis of the positions of the Giants and Gods that constitutes the next step of the dialogue.

c) The Battle of Gods and Giants: a case of elenctic dialectic

This section of the *Sophist* is also important because it permits Plato to show us two things: 1. The Battle of the Gods and Giants is a clear example of how a historical conversation with other previous philosophers has to be developed as an elenctic dialectic that has the main aim of searching for an objective truth. 2. The Battle of the Gods and Giants exhibits how two extreme positions are put in contrast and in comparison. This comparative process provides an analogy to the main parallel between the philosopher and the Sophist.[43] It is a kind of prelude to Plato's position in this respect: there are clear boundaries between the philosopher and the Sophist. There is a clear dividing line between them but we have to discover the way that they relate to each other.

[43] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 211-221.

The search for the definition of the real will be carried out through an examination of "Materialistic" (Giants) and "Idealistic" (Gods) positions on reality. At the same, Plato will examine his position in relation to motion and rest. Let us see see how this historical examination is a clear and long extended example of the way that Plato introduces another dimension of dialectic in the context of the dialogue.[44]

The elenctic process is as follows. At the beginning the Materialists accept that they identify the real with visible and tangible body (247b). Nevertheless, when the Visitor and Theaetetus start the fictional challenge to them some problems emerge about keeping on this extreme position. If we talk about any sort of goodness or badness and, above all, the soul that gives them existence, it is unavoidable that we should accept the reality of bodiless realities. The Giants have to make a concession: there is a real, incorporeal *dynamis* or agent that permits that things affect or be affected. This concession also involves the assertion that permanence is not incompatible with change and being because things are susceptible of producing an effect or being affected:

Eleatic Visitor.- "Let us question them further, then; for it is quite enough for our purpose if they consent to admit that even a small part of reality is bodiless. They must now tell us this: when they say that these bodiless things and the other things which have body are alike 'real', what common character that emerges as covering both sets of things have they in view? It is possible they may be at a loss for an answer. If that is their state of mind, you must consider whether they would accept our suggestion a description of the real and agree to it.

Theaetetus.- What description? Perhaps we can tell, if you will state it.

Eleatic Visitor.- I suggest that anything has real being, that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however

[44] L. Brown calls this historical dialectic, "second hand dialectic", but not in a pejorative sense because she considers that it is also authentic dialectic; see "Innovation and Continuity. The Battle of the Gods and Giants, *Sophist* 245-249, in J. Gentzler (ed.), *Method in Ancient Philosophy,* Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1998, p. 182.

small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things, that they are nothing but power (δύναμις).

Theaetetus.- Well, they accept that, having for the moment no better suggestion of their own offer.

Eleatic Visitor.- That will do; for later on both they and we perhaps may change our minds. For the present, then, let us take it that this agreement stands between us and the one party.

Theaetetus.- It does."[45]

The introduction of the idea of δύναμις will play -in my judgement- a key role in the next part of the dialogue because it provides us with the ontological condition for the combination of kinds and otherness. This idea permits us to state firmly: that there is a relationship among things in terms of passive possibility (susceptibility) of being affected and in terms of active possibility (acting upon). This is central because it will permit us to mark out the way that philosophical activity affects sophistry and vice versa.

Eleatic Visitor.- "We proposed as a sufficient mark of real things the presence in a thing of the power of being acted upon or of action in relation to however insignificant a thing.

Theaetetus.- Yes."[46]

Turning now to the Friends of the Forms (Idealists): they support the thesis that: 1. There is a clear distinction between becoming and real being; 2. Our relationship with becoming is via our body through sense, and our relationship with real being is via our soul through reflection. Real being is immutable and becoming is variable (248a).

Despite the fact that the two interlocutors proposed the idea of δύναμις as a feature of things, they realise that the Friends of the Forms can

[45] *Sophist*, 247 c9-248a3 (Cornford's translation).

[46] *Ibid.*, 248 c3-6 (Cornford's translation).

raise an other objection against this position: they can state that this power just belongs to becoming, but is not compatible with real being (248 c7-9).

The Friends of the Forms (Idealists) have to concede that reality is not constituted as a whole only by unchangeable things because:

Eleatic Visitor.- "... what changes and change are real things."[47]

and because if they do not concede that, it would imply to accept their false premise

Eleatic Visitor.- "... that a living thing (which has intelligence, life and soul) remains at rest in complete changelessness?"[48]

In this way Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor can reject the other extreme position that

Eleatic Visitor.- "... all things are moving and changing, on that view equally we shall be excluding intelligence from the class of real things."[49]

The Eleatic Visitor -in 249d-251a- makes explicit the conclusion of the elenctic process about the two positions that: 1. Reality does not consist solely of unchangeable things because then nothing could be known; 2. but all reality is not reducible to things that are perpetually changing either because again intelligence and knowledege would be impossible, 3. Therefore, real things are both at once: changeable and unchangeable.[50] 4.

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[47] *Ibid.*, 249 b3 (Cornford's translation).

[48] *Ibid.*, 249 a8-10 (Cornford's translation with slight modifications).

[49] *Ibid.*, 249 b5-10 (Cornford's translation).

[50] With this assertion we have to be extremely careful because some interpreters of Plato tend to associate it with the Hegelian idea of dialectic as the synthesis of opposites and the retroactive affiliation and origins of this that Hegel attributes to Heraclitus. It is one thing to say that Plato recognises the fact that change

Reality is not reducible to motion and rest, but motion and rest partake of realness:[51]

Eleatic Visitor.- "On these grounds, then, it seems that only one course is open to the philosopher who values knowledge and the rest above all else. He must refuse to accept from the champions either of the One or of the many Forms the doctrine that all Reality is changeless; and he must turn a deaf ear to the other party who represent Reality as everywhere changing. Like a child begging for 'both', he must declare that Reality or the sum of things is both at once -all that is unchangeable and all that is in change.

Theaetetus.- Perfectly true."[52]

It is worth remarking that here too the Eleatic Visitor stresses one initial and fundamental feature of the philosopher's attitude: the philosopher cares above all for knowledge of reality. This point will be crucial for making a clear and objective distinction with the closed mind of the Sophist in his epistemological attitude to things.

The next step -250c-251a- shows us the two interlocutors in a state of perplexity that is part of the elenctic search too. Reality is revealed as not reducible to rest and movement. They launch some questions: what does "real" mean?; what does "unreal" mean?, and how can we apply the name "unreal"?

Eleatic Visitor.- "And now we are in no less perplexity about reality?

Theaetetus.- In even greater, I should say, sir, if that be possible.

Eleatic Visitor.- Let us take it, then that our difficulty is now completely stated. But since reality and unreality are equally puzzling, there is henceforward some hope

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and permanence cohabit in things and it is another totally different to say that this assertion is included in his idea of dialectic and that he says -as Hegel did- that reality is dialectical.

[51] See Cornford, p. 241.

[52] *Sophist,* 249 c10-d5.

that any light, whether dim or bright, thrown upon the one will illuminate the other to an equal degree; and if, on the other hand, we cannot get sight of either, at any rate we will make the best we can of it under these conditions and force a passage through the argument with both elbows at once.

Theaetetus.- Very good."[53]

This epistemological state of *aporia* opens us to an state of *euporia* in relation to our main argument: the dialectical way of defining the Sophist will be in a relation of contiguity and opposition to philosophy. The notion of δύναμις is central to the possiblity of κοινωνία. That is the reason that the interlocutors should demonstrate clearly how the dialectician operates his science of combination of kinds.[54]

d) The combination of kinds. The definition of the science of dialectic

Gradually the interlocutors have been showing how the conditions for being a philosopher are defined in dialectical terms and in clear opposition to the Sophist's practice: the unselfish, essentially cooperative attitude in relation to things, which has the aim of searching for the truth, remains firm.

At this point of the conversation the interlocutors provide an explicit definition of the science of dialectic emphasising one of its methodological features: the ability to discern and to combine kinds. The only reason (*i.e.*, to illustrate the nature of dialectic, but it is also to establish the possibility of sophistry) they will introduce the topic of the combination of kinds in one dialogue. The argument goes as follows. A τέχνη or science is needed which shows us how to discern and combine kinds, and dialectic emerges as this sort of indispensable philosophical tool: dialectic is a process of

[53] *Ibid.*, 250 e1-251a4.

[54] *Cf.* Notomi, p. 237.

philosophical conversation that is always attempting the search for the truth, and dialectic is the philosophical method of discerning kinds. In other words: the process of collection and division has to take place through dialectic or to take the form of διαλέγεσθαι. To put things in comparison and to discern similarities and differences among things involves a joint process of detailed analysis of them through objective (*i.e.*, because aimed at the truth) agreements or disagreements between the interlocutors in a real dialogue.

The second feature that this definition of dialectic stresses is that the philosopher is someone who has a "free man's knowledge". This point we will treat in a comparative way, that is, as a description in which we can find the key of the opposition between the philosopher's and the Sophist's activity.

The interlocutors treat first -in 251a-259d- the topic of the combination of kinds and the problem of negative statements. The purpose of this section is to clear up the confusions that appear in relation to negative statements. We think that Plato will illuminate his idea of otherness, and make explicit in what sense that "which is not" exists or has being. After that there is going to be a long discussion about the combination of kinds. In the middle of the discussion, there is a description of dialectic, and the task of the philosopher. The section -*i.e.*, 251a-259d- will be dedicated to the relationship between the kinds themselves, and what will be reflected in true statements that we can construct about them. This section is crucial because it will provide us with the methodological and epistemological tools which will permit the interlocutors to fix clear boundaries between the Sophist and the philosopher. Let us take it step by step.

The opening problem is to be about the interweaving of kinds -251a-252e. In this passage the interlocutors try to show us that it is impossible to

support either of the opposite theses of the complete interdependence of kinds or their complete independence. With the first position we will provide an inaccurate map of reality; with the second position we would imply talking about a kind of atomised reality and denying the δύναμις that inheres in things. The conclusion is: there is blending of kinds, but some kinds combine each other, others do not.

The combination of kinds (κοινωνία γενῶν) depends on the way that things affect each other (δύναμις).[55] In the same way, the definition of the Sophist depends on the manner that he affects, or relates to philosophical practice. The Sophist can only be defined in contrast to a positive proceeding: philosophy. Sophistry is not possible without philosophy.[56]

The fact that some kinds will blend and some not means that there are some affirmative and some negative statements about kinds that are true. The true statements will shape philosophical discourse. The exercise of philosophical discourse involves a τέχνη or a science that shows us how to discern kinds. After that, the Eleatic Visitor will compare the pattern of philosophical discourse with the configuration of sounds in speech and music. In both cases there are going to be combinable and uncombinable elements. Dialectic provide us with rational means to discern kinds in permanent relation to what things are.

We think that this passage is crucial because it is a kind of preamble about the necessity of a dialectical method, as a τέχνη that permits us to know the combination of kinds and which kinds will be central for a clear description of reality. Plato insists that a science is necessary -maybe the most important science- for establishing which kinds are combinable and which not:

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[55] See *Sophist* 247 c-9248a3; see *supra* §9, c) my earlier discussion of δύναμις.

[56] *Cf.* Notomi, Preface, XII, pp. 53-54; 71-73; 166; 204.

Eleatic Visitor.- "And what name shall we give to this science? Or -good gracious Theaetetus, have we stumbled unawares upon the free man's knowledge and, in seeking for the Sophist, chanced to find the Philosopher first?

Theaetetus.- How do you mean?

Eleatic Visitor.- Dividing according to Kinds, not taking the same Form for a different one or a different one for the same -is not that the business of the science of Dialectic?

Theaetetus.- Yes.

Eleatic Visitor.- And the man who can do that discerns clearly one Form everywhere extended throughout many, where each one lies apart, and *many* Forms, different form one another, embraced from without by one Form; and again one Form connected in a unity through many wholes, and *many* Forms, entirely marked off apart. That means knowing how to distinguish, kind by kind, in what ways the several kinds can or cannot combine.

Theaetetus.- Most certainly.

Eleatic Visitor.- And the only person, I imagine, to whom you would allow this mastery of Dialectic is the pure and rightful lover of wisdom.

Theaetetus.- To whom else cold it be allowed?

Eleatic Visitor.- It is, then, in some such region as this that we shall find the Philosopher now or later, if we should look for him. He too may be difficult to see clearly; but the difficulty in his case is not the same as in the Sophist's.

Theaetetus.- What is the difference?

Eleatic Visitor.- The Sophist takes refuge in the darkness of Not-being where he is at home and has the knack (τριβή) of feeling his way; and it is the darkness of the place that makes him so hard to perceive.

Theaetetus.- That may well be.

Eleatic Visitor.- Whereas the Philosopher, whose thoughts constantly dwell upon the nature (ἰδέα) of reality (τοῦ ὄντος), is difficult to see because his region is so bright; for the eye of the vulgar soul cannot endure to keep it gaze fixed on the divine.

Theaetetus.- That may well be no less true.

Eleatic Visitor.- Then we will look more closely at the Philosopher presently, if we are still in the mind to do so; meanwhile clearly we must not loosen our grip on the Sophist until we have studied him thoroughly.

Theaetetus.- I entirely agree."[57]

The speech of the Eleatic Visitor in 253c is central because the description of the science of dialectic is a description of the philosophical task. First of all, the search for the definition of the Sophist takes place through dialectical agreements. And second, there is dialectic as a philosophical method of discerning kinds, that permits us to distinguish, in the nature of things, which are compatible and which not. The result of this process of division is the philosophical production of interconnections and disconnections expressed in affirmative or negative statements about what things really are.

Plato gives -in the passage that we have just quoted *in extenso*- an explicit description of the science of dialectic. Dialectic is a τέχνη that implies both science and art, that is, technical knowledge and an ability to employ that knowledge. It is an art of philosophical conversation. This art involves a technique which can be described as process of discernment of kinds that has as its aim a knowledge of reality.

Suddenly, the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus realise that by a sort amazing coincidence, in seeking the Sophist they have grasped first what a philosopher is. Plato is treating the philosopher as someone with a "free man's knowledge", τῶν ἐλευθέρων ἐπιστήμην[58].

The competence of the dialectician who practises this science is described as follows: 1. he knows how to discern compatible and incompatible kinds; 2. he can distinguish clearly one common kind that is

[57] *Sophist,* 253 c4-254b7 (Cornford's translation).

[58] We will return to this point later.

extended throughout many where each one lies apart; 3. he can discern many kinds, different from one another, but included in one greater kind; 4. he differentiates one kind connected in a unity through many wholes and many kinds completely apart and separate. In short: practising the science of dialectic implies coming to know how to distinguish things, kind by kind and in what ways the several kinds can or cannot blend. 5) The person that has the mastery of dialectic is identified with the philosopher (lover of wisdom).

After that, there is a comparison between the philosopher and the Sophist: the philosopher is in a region of clarity (being) and that is the reason that it is easier to grasp the essence of his activity. Philosophy appears as a positive category and practice. The Sophist, as far as he is concerned, takes refuge in the hideout of darkness (not-being). There, he feels at home because it is a suitable terrain for his empirical practice (skill in argument). It is precisely the blurred nature of the context of his activity that makes him so hard to grasp. Nevertheless, the philosopher, who is constantly thinking and expressing his thoughts about the nature (ἰδέα) of reality (τοῦ ὄντος), is complex to define because his region is too bright, and "the eye of the vulgar soul" cannot bear to fix its eyes on the divine.

It is only possible to define the Sophist in comparison with the philosopher. The Sophist's practice is heavily dependent on the relation of alterity that he has with the philosopher: his practice is an anti-practice, he is a non-philosopher. The Sophist is in a region of darkness because he refuses to start a serious conversation about real things with the aim of finding its possible interconnections. He takes refuge in his own falsities about things and builds a fictional world about what things are not. In opposition, the philosopher's attitude is clearly communicative: he is open to conversation with others and he is open to discovering what combinations

among things are really possible. The clarity of the philosopher resides in his unselfish attitude towards searching for the truth.[59]

On the reference to the philosopher as having a free man's knowledge in 253c: we think that it is important to go deeper because with this description we can find another key to the opposition between the philosopher's and the Sophists' activity.

1. Plato refers to free men in *Theaetetus* 172 c10-d2: those who are experts in court from their youth look like slaves, if you compare them with free men, that is, those who are educated in philosophy (and similar things).

Socrates.- "Well, look at the man who has been knocking about in law-courts and such places ever since he was a boy; and compare him with the man brought up in philosophy, in the life of a student. It is surely like comparing the up-bringing of a slave with that of a free man".[60]

2. 172d3-173b6: philosophers can spend as much time as they want - at peace and leisure- to put their arguments together without any external engagement or pressure except to attain the truth.

Experts in courts are under the pressure of time (in a hurry), tackling specific and imposed cases, without the possibility of any deviation:

Socrates.- "As a result of this the speaker becomes tense [violent] and crafty; they know how to wheedle their master with words and gain his favor by acts, but in their souls they become mean and warped. This slavery deprives their souls of magnanimity [growth], honesty and freedom; they are compelled to act against love of justice and love of truth. In this way they become bent and stunted. [...] Consequently

[59] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 299-300.

[60] *Theaetetus*, 172 c2-7 (translated by M. J. Levett, revised by M. Burnyeat, Hackett, Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1990).

they pass from youth to manhood with no soundness of mind in them, but they think they have become clever and wise."[61]

3. 173b7-174b8: philosophers are not interested in acquiring a good public reputation, but in the search for the nature of everything and above all in answering the question about what human nature is.

The reference at *Sophist* 253c can be understood if we put it face to face with the *Theaetetus* 172c ff. passage, with *Republic* 537d ff. and 492 ff. and *Gorgias* 492e ff. as a bridge. Again, we think that it is important to go deeper with these passages because they can throw light on our original point about the philosopher as having a free man's knowledge and the contrast with the Sophist.

Republic 537d-539e: the topic is dialectic and the idea that at the beginning, dialectic has kind of "negative" role. Plato is trying to define what a dialectician is:

1. A dialectician can view things in their mutual connections (interweavings). 2. He is searching for being itself and for the truth. 3. Dialectic is at the beginning a process of recognition that *flatterers* are *flatterers* and that they corrupt your mind and ἦθος. Dialectic is initially a process of purification. 4. 539b-c is about sophistry: the habit of confutation only leads to a public discredit of refuters and philosophy itself. 5. 539c-d: But a mature person will be aware of dialectic and will choose to imitate its true practitioners:

Socrates.- " 'But an older man will not share this craze', said I, 'but will rather choose to imitate the one who consents to examine truth dialectically than the one who

[61] *Ibid.*, 172 e7-173b7 (Fowler's translation with some modifications, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass./London, 1994).

makes a jest and sport of mere contradiction, and so he will himself be more reasonable and moderate, and bring credit rather than discredit upon his pursuit.' "[62]

What is crucial here is that Plato is opposing sophistry for the dishonour that this practice can give to philosophy. But Plato's hope for the permanence of philosophy resides in the fact that mature people can imitate real philosophers who care and are faithful to the elenctic-dialogic search for the truth.

Why are Sophists corrupt? The public corrupt the young through their applause. The real corrupting forces are the many. They are the real Sophist. Sophists, orators and poets, insofar as they listen to public opinion, become corrupted.[63]

Philosophy is impossible for multitudes: they are always going to condemn philosophical activity because the search for the truth is not a matter of unanimous approval, but a surrender to what things objectively are.[64]

Finally in the *Gorgias*:[65] 1. Socrates criticises the powers of flattery and rhetoric. 2. The worst of evils: having one's soul full of injustice. 3. Public men, tyrants, kings and potentates are the authors of the most impious crimes because they have the power to do them. 4. Real virtue is the most important thing to achieve in public and private life. The best thing, if a man is to become just, is to avoid any kind of flattery of himself as well as of others, of the few or of the many. Rhetoric can be used correctly and any action should be with a view to justice.

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[62] *Republic*, VII, 539 c4-d2 (Paul Shorey's translation).

[63] See *Republic*, VI 492 ff.

[64] See ibid., 493e-494.

[65] See *Gorgias*, 522d-527c.

There are some conclusions and questions about all these interrelated passages: 1. Sophistry has many different guises. 2. Philosophers do not have constraints in their activity. Orators and Sophists are slaves because they are constrained. 3. We can only understand Sophistry in relation to philosophy or, in other words, we need to do philosophy in order to discover the nature of the Sophist. It is clear again that the real category is the philosopher and the Sophist is just an anti-category. 4. One key question is: who or what is the corruptor? We think, that according to Plato, there are three sources of corruption: the misuse of power, public opinion (the many) and flattery.

Our main point is about the ethical conditions of dialectic or why a philosopher is a free man. We think that the key is in the text: the philosopher is qualified as having a free man's knowledge. He is a person with a free mind. This freedom allows him to search for the truth which will result in a better understanding of reality and oneself. In that sense, dialectic, considered as a whole, is *paideia par excellence.* Education for Plato involves an elenctic dialectic: an examination of everything including oneself. If the Sophist is an impostor because he distorts whatever he touches, the philosopher's activity, through dialectic, is a search for authenticity and improvement that leads to self-knowledge, knowledge of human nature and knowledge of reality.[66]

To return to the *Sophist:* for Plato the expert in dialectic will guide the philosophical conversation in the process of Collection and Division with mastery (art and science) because he knows how to discern and to bring order into the kinds which constitute reality. He can understand the structure of this articulation of kinds and make it explicit in a self-consistent philosophical discourse that expresses truth. This expression of truth will

[66] With regard to this point, in the *Alcibiades* I,135 c4 and 6 Socrates says: "... vice is appropriate for a slave; ... virtue is appropriate for a free man."

communicate itself in affirmative and negative statements about kinds.[67] Plato's dialectic shows that he is realist. The philosopher as a dialectician addresses his thoughts and conversations to the *nature of reality.*

After this description of the science of dialectic, the dialogue will concentrate on the structure of the kinds and on how and in what sense a kind is both one and many. The generic kind and the specific are complex, *i.e.,* both are one and many. The generic kind comprises all the species and its nature permeates them all. The lowest species comprises the nature of the genus and all the related differences.

On these grounds Plato will provide us with many ontological keys in the dialogue. In this way he show us how the aim of dialectic is to get a complete map of reality. First of all, the interlocutors arrive at the conclusion -254b-d- that the universe of the real is not reducible to the phenomenal world. Second, Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor agree that there are different possibilities of combination of kinds: some will combine with one another and some will not; some combine to a small extent, others with a large number. They will choose three very important kinds to serve as examples: existence, motion, and rest. The aim is to try to clarify, as much as possible, what being and not being are, and in what senses not-being exists.

Further on -at 254d-e- the Eleatic Visitor introduces two new kinds: sameness and difference, and shows us, in detail, that neither of these two can be identified with any of the previous three: existence, motion and rest.

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[67] We find Cornford's explanation of what dialectic is very clear because he makes some important distinctions. First: for Plato dialectic is not logic [if by logic we are going to understand the science either of *logoi* (reasons, thoughts) or *logismos* (reasoning in general)]. Dialectic is the study of the structure of the real world of kinds. It is a τέχνη of Collection and Division of this world of kinds. "It is a method for which some rules are laid down; but these are rules of correct procedure in making Divisions; they are not laws of inference or laws of thought." (p. 265). Second: dialectic is not formal logic, it is ontology because the kinds are realities (ὄντως ὄντα) and dialectic is the science which studies the structure of reality. "In Plato's view the study of patterns of statements we make would belong to Grammar or to Rhetoric. There is no autonomous science of Logic, distinct on the one hand from Grammar and Rhetoric and the other from Ontology" (p. 266).

There are now five distinct irreducible kinds, whose combinations we can study.

Existence, motion and rest are different from sameness and difference, but the same as themselves.

The Eleatic Visitor concludes that because motion and rest are contraries, neither of them can be identical with anything that we say of both of them in common, but both partake of sameness and difference.

With all these elemens the definition of otherness is grasped in these terms: what is different is always different from and in reference to another thing. Difference -like existence- is dispersed over real things.

In the same way that the Eleatic Visitor takes the five kinds one by one and makes some statements about them -255e8-256c9- we can infer some simple statements and combinations relating the philosopher and the Sophist and their correspondent practices:

1. The Sophist exists, because he partakes of existence, but 2. The Sophist is not the philosopher (or is different from the philosopher). 3. The Sophist is not a dialectician. 4. Sophistry does not care for the truth. 5. Sophistry is different from philosophy.

Ontologically speaking, with all these elements the interlocutors can state some general points about: (1) alterity (otherness), that is, a thing that is, is its single self, but is is *not* all indefinite number of other things, and (2) the community of kinds.

In the case of every one of the kinds there is much that it is and there is an indefinite number of things that are not.

What is clear now is that the interlocutors have refuted Parmenides' thesis that "what is" cannot-be in any way and that not-being is impossible because there are an unlimited number of negative statements that are true of any existent or of existence itself.

Equally, there are any number of true statements asserting that "what is not" in a sense "is". What Plato makes clear is that when he is talking about "that which is not", he is not referring to something that does not exist, but only to something that is different. The nature of the different (not-being) is in relation to something that is; "that which is not" is a thing that has a nature of its own: difference is as much a reality as existence itself. In the same way, the nature of the Sophist and of sophistry are defined in relation to something that is clearly different from them: the philosopher and philosophy. But both the Sophist and the philosopher are:

Eleatic Visitor.- "... we have seen that the nature of the Different is to be ranked among things that exist, and, once it exists, its parts also must be considered as existing just as much as anything else.

Theaetetus.- Of course.

Eleatic Visitor.- So, it seems, when a part of the nature of the Different and part of the nature of the Existent (existence) are set in contrast to one another, the contrast is, if it be permissible to say so, as much a reality as Existence itself; it does not mean what is contrary to 'existent', but only what is different from that Existent.

Theaetetus.- That is quite clear.

Eleatic Visitor.- What name are we to give it, then?

Theaetetus.- Obviously this is just that 'what-is-not' which we were seeking for the sake of the Sophist.

Eleatic Visitor.- Has it then, as you say, an existence inferior to none of the rest in reality? May we now be bold to say that 'that which is not' unquestionably *is* a thing that has a nature of its own -just as the Tall was tall and the Beautiful was beautiful, so too with the not- Tall and the not-beautiful -and in that sense 'that which is not' also, on the same principle, both was and *is* what-is-not, a single Form to be reckoned among the many realities? Or have we any further doubts with regard to it Theaetetus?

Eleatic Visitor.- None at all."[68]

[68] *Sophist,* 258 a7-258c5 (Cornford's translation).

With the definition of the real character of not-being Plato establishes: 1. The possibility and the senses of not-being; 2. The nature of the different as real and distributed throughout the whole field of existent things with reference to one another.

Eleatic Visitor.- "You see, then, that in our disobedience to Parmenides we have trespassed far beyond the limits of his prohibition.

Theaetetus.- In what way?

Eleatic Visitor.- In pushing forward on our quest, we have shown him results in a field which he forbade us even to explore.

Theaetetus.- How?

Eleatic Visitor.- He says, you remember,

> 'Never shall this be proved, that things that are not, are, but keep back thy thought from this way of inquiry'.

Theaetetus.- Yes he does say that.

Eleatic Visitor.- Whereas we have not merely shown that things that are not, are, but we have brought to light the real character of 'not-being'. We have shown that the nature of the Different has existence and is parcelled out over the whole field of existent things with reference to one another; and of every part of it that is set in contrast to 'that which is' we have dared to say that precisely that *is really* 'that which is not'.

Theaetetus.- Yes, sir, and I think what we have said is perfectly true."[69]

Some other ontological conclusions emerge: the sense of "is not" as referring to nothing at all is ruled out, at least in this context (ἡμεῖς γὰρ περὶ μὲν ἐναντίου τινὸς αὐτῷ χαίρειν πάλαι λέγομεν, εἴτ' ἔστιν εἴτε μή, λόγον ἔχον ἢ καὶ παντάπασιν ἄλογον·).[70] According to the acceptable use here of not-being it is possible to conclude: a) The kinds blend with one another; b) existence and difference pervade them all, and

[69] *Ibid.*, 258 c6-e5 (Cornford's translation).

[70] *Sophist*, 258 e6-259b8

pervade one another; c) difference, by partaking of existence, is by virtue of that participation, but on the other hand is not that existence in which it partakes, but is different; d) since it is different from existence, quite clearly it must be possible that it should be "a thing that is not"; e) existence, having a part in difference will be different from all the rest of the kinds; f) because it is different from them all, it is not any one of them nor yet all the others put together, but is only itself; g) existence is not many other things, and all other kinds in the same way, whether taken severally or all together, in many respects are and in many respects are not.

The two keys that permit us to establish the dynamic relationship of contiguity, but of clear difference between the philosopher and the Sophist are the δύναμις that inheres in things (*i.e.*, because of the relationships between kinds) and the positiveness of not-being -as alterity and difference and as a pervasive kind in reality- and its combination with existence.

Now with all these elements the Eleatic Visitor can make -in 259b9-d8- the connection between difference and the search for the definition of the Sophist and put philosophy and sophistry in clear contrast: he is very emphatic in specifying the difference between real philosophical argumentation, which makes clear distinctions of cases, and eristic that does not. Obviously the Eleatic Visitor is referring to the apparent contradictions which follow from the assertion of not-being. He contrasts all this philosophical process that shows and specifies the possible ways that not-being can be with the mere and unspecific (unphilosophical) way of using contradiction that asserts that the different is the same or conversely, in clear opposition to reality.[71]

[71] The presence of divisions V (the Sophist as an eristic -and as a contradiction-monger) and VI (the practice of mere cross examination without clear aims -*i.e.*, searching for the truth-) are clear here again.

e) True and false statements, the communication of kinds: διάνοια/δόξα, λόγος, and φαντασία

The next move in the dialogue[72] -and according to the same connecting thread of defining the Sophist in contrast to the philosopher- is central because it relates the interweaving of kinds with the objective possibility of false statements. The link is possible because kinds are referents of common names and they form part of the meaning of all statements. In such a way it will be possible to give a sense to false statements without resorting to non-existent things or facts for them to refer to.[73]

The argument is as follows: 1. If we deny the interweaving of kinds any discourse is impossible and therefore, philosophical discourse as well. Furthermore: to support a complete discordance among kinds represents the "crudest defiance" against philosophy.[74] This point is crucial because it gives us another clue to defining philosophy in accordance with dialectical terms, and contrasting it with the Sophist's practice. 2. It is important now to come to an agreement about the nature of discourse. Every statement or judgement implies the use of two kinds, at least. That is crucial because the admission that kinds are "parts of" the meaning of all statements will solve the problem about the possibility of false speech and thinking. 3. The next move is: "not-being" is a single kind among the rest, dispersed over the whole field of realities. Now the interlocutors should consider whether not-being blends with thinking and discourse. If it does not blend with them, everything must be true; but if it does, we shall have false thinking and

[72] See *ibid.*, 259d-261a4.

[73] In relation to the topic of the possibility of false discourse see D. O'Brien, *Le Non-Être. Deux études sur le Sophiste de Platon,* Academia Verlag, Sank Augustin, 1995, pp. 72-88.

[74] 259 d9-e2: Καὶ γάρ, ὠγαθέ, τό γε πᾶν ἀπὸ παντὸς ἐπιχειρεῖν ἀποχωρίζειν ἄλλως τε οὐκ ἐμμελὲς καὶ παντάπασιν ἀμούσου τινὸς καὶ αφιλοσόφου. *Cf.* also Notomi, *op. cit.*, pp. 247 ff.

discourse; the possibility of thinking or saying "what is not" is equivalent to falsity in thought and speech.[75] If falsity exists, deception is possible. If deception exists, images, likenesses and appearance will be able to pervade everything. (The Sophist had taken refuge somewhere in that region, but then he had denied the existence of falsity, because "no one could either think or say 'what is not'"; "what is not" never has any sort of being). But because "what is not" has been found to have share in existence, it is possible to think and to say "what is not". In spite of that the Sophist can put another objection: some things partake of not-being, some do not, and λόγος (speech) and δόξα (thinking) are among those that do not. He might contend that the τέχνη of creating images and semblances -where the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus say he is to be found- has no existence at all. Therefore, for him λόγος and δόξα have no share in not-being, and without that combination there is no such thing as falsity:

Theaetetus.- Certainly, sir, what we said at the outset about the Sophist seems true: that he is a hard sort of beast to hunt down. Evidently he possesses a whole armoury of problems, and every time that he puts one forward to shield him, we have to fight our way through it before we can get at him. So now, hardly have we got the better of his defence that 'what is not' cannot exist, when another obstacle is raised in our path: we must, it seems, prove that falsity exists both in speech and thought, and after that perhaps something else, and so on. It looks as if the end would never be in sight.

Eleatic Visitor.- A man should be of good courage, Theaetetus, if he can make only a little headway at each step. If he loses heart then, what will he do in another case where he cannot advance at all or even perhaps loses ground? No city, as they say, will surrender to so faint a summons. And now that we have surmounted the barrier you speak of, we may have already taken the highest wall and the rest may be easier to capture.

[75] Cornford thinks -see pp. 300 ff.- that from 260b-261c Plato is partially misled by all the complexities that not being involves, but that he recovers the thread of the conversation and the argument immediately.

Theaetetus.- That is encouraging."[76]

That is the reason that the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus begin by investigating the nature of λόγος, δόξα/διάνοια and φαντασία:[77] in order to understand their combination with not-being and so prove that falsity exists. By that means, they hope to hunt down the Sophist there. If not they will have to pursue the search in some other way.

What is worth noticing is the emphasis that Plato puts on the different directions that the philosophical search can take. The dialectical method is an open search that is just guided by the requirements that the object in question makes on the development of the conversation. Furthermore: if for Plato the search for the truth is a conversational act, the discovery and the awareness of falsity is objectively possible in dialectical terms and through dialectical means too. We should test and examine what we are thinking about things in a philosophical challenge with one or more interlocutors. If they do not pass the test, we are likely to be thinking and expressing false judgements and its corresponding verbal statements to our interlocutors. We are communicating falsities.[78] Here we will find the key for defining the Sophist. Ironically, the chase for the Sophist in contrast to the philosopher is a dialectical act.[79]

The Eleatic Stranger and Theaetetus propose -at 261c-262e- to consider λόγος (speech and statement) and δόξα (judgement) at first, to establish clearly whether not-being has any point of contact with them, or whether both are altogether true and there is no possibility of falsity in either. They propose that the signs we use in speech to signify are of two

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[76] *Sophist,* 261 a5-c5 (Cornford's translation).

[77] 1. λόγος: statement, discourse or speech; 2. δόξα/διάνοια: thinking or judgement. The first one accompanied by sound, the second one is soundless.

[78] *Cf. Notomi,* pp. 200-201 and 260-261.

[79] *Cf. ibid.,* pp. 239-240 and 246.

kinds: names (ὀνόματα) and verbs (ῥήματα). A verb is an expression which is applied to actions. You cannot have a statement with sounds uttered with meaning until you combine verbs with names:

Eleatic Visitor.- "The moment you do that, they fit together and the simplest combination becomes a statement of what might be called the simplest and briefest kind."[80]

Every statement is complex: those signs of speech that do fit (because some do not fit) make a statement.

At 262a Plato defines a word as a vocal sign (σημεῖον τῆς φωνῆς) that makes reference to being (περὶ τὴν οὐσίαν δήλωμα). That implies that every word signifies or means something. Even in a false statement, there is no meaningless element.

Now they can put all these elements together and prove some points. Theaetetus and the Eleatic Visitor arrive at the conclusion that every statement is about something and is either true or false. The true statement asserts things that correspond to what they are. The Eleatic Visitor defines the false statement as what states about the object things different from the things that are; it states things that are-not as being:

Eleatic Visitor"... so that what is different is stated as the same or what is not as what is -a combination of verbs and names answering to that description finally seems to be really and truly a false statement.

Theaetetus.- Perfectly true."[81]

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[80] *Sophist*, 262 c5-7 (Cornford's translation).

[81] *Ibid.*, 263 d1-5 (Cornford's translation).

We think that it is important to emphasise that the whole section in the dialogue on combination of kinds is openly dedicated to supplying the key to false statement. Plato makes this clear at 259 e5-6 when he says:

"... all discourse depends on the weaving together of kinds."[82]

And if the Sophist's discourse implies a combination of verbs and names that does not correspond to what reality is, his production is a false discourse. This real, but objectively false practice is in clear opposition to the dialectician's τέχνη: he knows how to combine kinds according to reality and the aim of the process is to try to present an accurate map of connections and interconnections of things and to communicate it.

The next moves -at 263d6-264b10- are an extension of the previous conclusion. Thinking, judgement and appearing (διάνοια, δόξα and φαντασία): all these things that occur in our minds can be either false or true. Thinking and discourse are the same thing, with the exception that we call διάνοια:

"... the inward dialogue carried on by the soul with itself without spoken sound."[83]

and λόγος:

"... the stream which flows from the mind through the lips with sound is called discourse."[84]

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[82] ... διὰ γὰρ τὴν ἀλλήλων τῶν εἰδῶν συμπλοκὴν ὁ λόγος γέγονεν ἡμῖν.

[83] *Sophist*, 263 e3-5 (Cornford's translation).

[84] *Ibid.*, 263 e 7-9 (Cornford's translation).

Assertion and denial occur in discourse. There is judgement when assertion and denial occur in the mind in the course of silent thinking. And if we suppose that there is a judgement occurring by means of perception, this state of mind is called "appearing". The key to the nature of false judgement and false statement resides in the following: the Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus have seen that there is true and false statement, and they will combine them with these three mental processes they were talking about, that is, thinking as a dialogue of the soul with itself, judgement as the conclusion of thinking and what "appears" as a blend of perception and judgement. From this combination it follows that these three mental processes are of the same nature as statement and must be, therefore, either true or false. If it is possible to hunt down the Sophist it is because he is communicating false thoughts, false judgements and false appearings and uttering them in a discourse of false statements that express what reality is not. The contrast between the philosopher and the Sophist is absolutely clear.[85]

In short: with all these elements it is possible to conclude that any epistemological act or state is a dialectical act or state that is not completed until we communicate it to another subject or subjects in verbal statements.

On these grounds the Eleatic Visitor concludes with Theaetetus: 1. False statement and false judgement exist. 2. It is possible that there should be imitations of real things; and the existence of these imitations gives grounds for positing the existence of a -pseudo- τέχνη of deception. 3. They agree that the Sophist does come under one or other of the two kinds mentioned -either the making of likenesses or the making of semblances:

Eleatic Visitor.- "Then let us not lose courage for what remains to be done. Now that these matters are cleared up, let us recall our earlier divisions by kinds.

[85] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 199-201 and 230.

Theaetetus.- Which do you mean?

Eleatic Visitor.- We distinguished two kinds of Image-making: the making of likenesses and the making of semblances.

Theaetetus.- Yes.

Eleatic Visitor.- And we said we were puzzled to tell under which of these two we should place the Sophist.

Theaetetus.- We did.

Eleatic Visitor.- And to increase our perplexity we were plunged in a whirl of confusion by the apparition of an argument that called in question all these terms and disputed the very existence of any copy or image or semblance, on the ground that falsity never has any sort of existence anywhere.

Theaetetus.- We did.

Eleatic Visitor.- But now that we have brought to light the existence of false statement and of false judgment, it is possible that there should be imitations of real things and that this condition of mind (false judgment) should account for the existence of an art of deception.

Theaetetus.- Yes it is.

Eleatic Visitor.- And we agreed earlier that the Sophist does come under one or other of the two kinds mentioned.

Theaetetus.- Yes."[86]

f) Recapitulations and final definition of the Sophist

The last part of the dialogue is crucial because it explains through dialectic in action how false judgement and the combination of kinds are related to the main aim of the dialogue: to define the Sophist and to show what a philosopher can achieve with dialectic.

The Eleatic Visitor and Theaetetus take up again the seventh division, deriving from the productive τέχνη, that is, the Sophist as an image maker or as a maker of false conceit of wisdom. In an exhibition of dialectical

[86] *Ibid.*, 264 b11-d11 (Cornford's translation with some modifications).

method, they continue with the subdivisions, until they get all the elements which contain the definition of the Sophist.

There are two forms of production: divine or human, and both can be divided horizontally and with respect to two kinds of products: production of originals (actual things, αὐτουργικός/αὐτοποιητικός) and production of images (some sort of likenesses, εἰδωλοποιεῖν).

Of this production of images -they recall- there were to be two kinds, one producing likenesses (εἰκαστική), the other semblances (φανταστική), if falsity was to be shown to be something that really is false and of such a nature as to have a place among existing things. And because that has been shown, on that ground the distinction of these two kinds is indisputable.

Dividing in two the kind that produces semblances: there is the semblance produced by means of tools (ὀργάνον) and another sort where the producer of the semblance takes his own person as an instrument (αὐτοῦ παρέχοντος ἑαυτόν ὄργανον), that is, mimicry (μίμησις).

Mimicry is of two sorts: some mimics know the thing they are impersonating [mimicry by acquaintance (μίμησις ἱστορική)], and some do not, because they perform mimicry guided by opinion, that is, conceit-mimicry (δοξομιμητική).

The Sophist is among those who practice conceit-mimicry. There are two types of conceit-mimicry: the simple-minded type (εὐήθης) who imagines that what he believes is knowledge, and an opposite type who is versed in discussion, which involves a pretended knowledge or real ignorance (εἰρωνικὸν μιμητήν). That means that there is an honest and authentic mimicry (ἁπλοῦν μιμητήν) which proceeds from the mimic with knowledge, and a false one -with two types- which proceeds from mimicry by opinion.

The type of this conceit-mimicry that involves dissimulation (εἰρωνικὸν μιμητήν) is divided into two types: one is the type who can

keep up his dissimulation publicly in long speeches to a large assembly. The other uses short arguments in private and forces others to contradict themselves in conversation. The first one is identified with the demagogue in opposition to the statesman; and the second one is classified as the Sophist in opposition to the wise.

And now they can collect all the elements of the definition of the Sophist from the end to the beginning: 1. he pretends to imitate a τέχνη resorting to contradiction-making; 2. he descends from the false kind of mimicry (conceit mimicry); 3. he practices semblance-making derived from human image-making production; 4. he is a juggler and charlatan because he presents a magic play of words.[87]

What is Plato trying to tell us with this final definition of the Sophist? Semblances generate confusion. What the Sophist is doing is a premeditated and deliberated imposture. He is pretending to be wise and to educate people. He really practises a δοξοσοφία and a δοξοπαιδευτική. He distorts the philosophical task and turns it into a mere game of words and a conceit of wisdom. His activity tergiversates real education into a mere conceit of virtue. If Plato presents throughout his work a very strong criticism of the Sophists' practice, it is because finally they represent a real threat to philosophy and for philosophers. Plato defines philosophy as an unselfish and loving search for the truth. The Sophist destroys this initial ethical principle and perverts from the beginning the nature of philosophy.

The deliberate practice of a δοξοσοφία kills the motive power of the philosophical search. When Plato presents Socrates as the ideal philosopher he presents him fundamentally as a man who perpetually examines everything and himself. The main aim of this constant examination is -at

[87] Sophist 268 c8-d4: Τὸν δὴ τῆς ἐναντιοποιολογικῆς εἰρωνικοῦ μέρους τῆς δοξαστικῆς μιμητικον, τοῦ φανταστικοῦ γένους ἀπὸ τῆς εἰδωλοποιικῆς οὐ θεῖον ἀλλ' ἀνθρωπικὸν τῆς ποιήσεως ἀφωρισμένον ἐν λόγοις τὸ θαυματοποιικὸν μόριον, "ταύτης τῆς γενεᾶς τε καὶ αἵματος" ὅς ἄν φῇ τὸν ὄντως σοφιστὴν εἶναι, πάληθέστατα, ὡς ἔοικεν, ἐρεῖ.

least initially- to become self-aware about what you really know and what you do not know. The first requirement for this process of examination is humility. By contrast, the Sophist assumes as a starting point an arrogant and antiphilosophical attitude: he pretends to know everything. It is important to distinguish the dialectical attitude of the philosopher who does not reject any object as unworthy of being studied,[88] from the attitude of the Sophist, who pretends from the beginning to know everything and to kill in that way the essence of any philosophical search.[89]

The deliberate practice of a δοξοπαιδευτική devastates the ethical aims of philosophy. According to Plato the final purpose of philosophy is humanistic: with philosophy we are searching for self-improvement through knowledge of reality, knowledge of human nature and self-knowledge. The Socratic-Platonic method is a clear example of what human philosophical interchanges are and why they are have a formative aim: to enable us to be better human beings. In opposition to this philosophical project the Sophist pretends to educate when he is just defrauding his pupils. He is a merchant of information (divisions II to IV) and a hired hunter of rich young men (division I).[90]

It is not merely incidental that at the end of the dialogue, at 267c - given that the two characters in conversation were trying to hunt down the Sophist- that the Eleatic Visitor remarks that it is impossible, finally, to impersonate knowledge of virtue by words and actions (to seem virtuous) when you are not really virtuous (to appear virtuous). What the Socratic-Platonic project of philosophy pursues is the formation of virtuous men through a live, reflexive interchange that transforms our ways of acting. What Plato asks for from any real philosopher is consistency between

[88] See *Sophist,* 227 a10-b4.

[89] *Cf.* Notomi, p. 300.

[90] *Supra,* pp. 210-211 and 213.

rigorous thoughts, clear words and good actions. The Sophist's imposture reverses the vital essence and aims of philosophy. That is the reason that his practice cannot be philosophy any more. Now the demarcation between the philosopher's and the Sophist's practices is clear: sophistry does not care for the truth. The Sophist presents and represents a world of double and complementary falsities: the one that he impersonates -pretending to be a wise man- and the other that is a result of the erroneous image of what things are that he communicates to us. With his teaching and bad example he perverts his pupils' souls and the ethical aim of the philosophical task.

We know that the word φαίνεσθαι involves two meanings: 1. To appear, to be evident; and 2. to be apparent, to seem, to pretend to be. We think that the key to grasping the Sophist's activity is in the combination of these two significances.[91] It is precisely because the Sophist is clearly and evidently disingenuous, that we catch him seeming: his practices involve simulation,[92] and so they are openly false. It seems that he is doing proper philosophy, but he appears clearly and distinctly as he really is: an impostor. We hunt him down as he is an appears: as a charlatan. If Plato uses the metaphor of the Sophist as a θαυματοποιός it is because it will reveal to us the essence of his practice: the false claim of knowing everything and of being a philosopher. [93] What the Sophist creates with his practice are "extraordinary" objects that misrepresent reality, *i.e.*, falsehoods or what things are not.[94]

Plato is clear. The Sophist's imposture is not merely a matter of insincerity, it is a matter of falsity. Sincerity is a subjective disposition which does not necessarily coincide with truth. The search for the truth

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[91] *Supra,* footnote 30.

[92] See *Sophist,* 268 a.

[93] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 87-121; 163-204; 224-230 and 246-269.

[94] *Cf. ibid.,* p. 200.

involves a commitment to reality. This commitment implies a complete lack of personal motivations. You can be sincere, but at the same time objectively wrong, but you are ethically safe. If you make a mistake, you can correct it. The Sophist is treacherously deceiving, cheating, a trickster. He is a liar. He is ethically condemned: he has broken the philosophical *ethos*. He is betraying the community. Plato insists on the point that the search for the truth entails the risk of making mistakes and the possibility of becoming aware of them and trying to correct them. That is the reason that he defines philosophy as a perpetual test of ideas with the readiness to take up again and restart the search with the same willingness to go into any subject in depth, with clarity and precision. Philosophy is a matter of putting ideas to the test and corroborating their sustainability. Sophistry is a practice that involves a deliberate ploy. The Sophist's aim is to use any trick to get his own way and to involve his audience in a false representation of things. In that sense the image that he presents of reality is distorted and the pretended knowledge that he seems to embody is just a mere game of words, a mere personal view.[95]

The Socratic irony[96] is something totally different from the Sophistic dissimulation since it suggests that other people say that they know what they really do not know. That connect us with the Socratic ignorance that is a philosophical and necessary dialectical starting point: not to take anything for granted, with the aim of having an impartial, new and fresh encounter with things and trying to grasp them as they are. It is also a methodological "purification" that permits us to recognise what we really know and what we really do not know.

That is the reason that Plato opposes the wise person to the Sophist. The activity of the philosopher necessarily entails the firm and permanent

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[95] *Cf. ibid.*, pp. 192-204.

[96] See *Republic*, 337a ff.

love of wisdom. What Plato portrays permanently in the Socratic figure is the ideal philosopher who has this perpetual desire for knowledge, desire that is never completely fulfilled.[97] The wisdom that philosophy entails includes awareness of our own human limitations and awareness that the search for knowledge is never completed. This perpetual aspiration to knowledge provides us with the key to the essence of philosophy -according to the Socratic-Platonic idea- that is, an indefatigable, dialogic research for truth with the understanding that reality presents us permanently with new questions and motives to philosophise. The Sophist's activity just caricatures philosophy. This misrepresentation paralyses the permanent process of philosophical searching and creativity into a mere game of words and assumptions that do not correspond to what things are. If Plato defines philosophy in dialectical terms it is because knowledge is finally a communicative act. That explains to us why any abuse or misuse of words in an allegedly philosophical context misleads as to the sense of the original act. The Sophist is a contradiction-monger; he does not have any real thesis to present for a dialectical testing. He is not open to a dialogic examination or philosophical conversation. He does not care for the search for the truth at all. That is the reason that Plato defines the Sophist's activity as a private dissimulation in short arguments which involves eristic (division V). His way of proceeding is characterised by disputation and its aim is to win a discussion regardless the truth. Furthermore: if Plato puts a clear line of demarcation between philosophy and Sophistry in dialectical terms it is because he was aware of the power of reason and words and the high and inevitable responsibility that a dialectican has in his task: the search for the truth by rational means and its expression in rational terms.

Plato does not condemn the representation of things that resorts to the use of allegories or myths, so long as one is aware that it is a philosophical

[97] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 200-201 and p. 288.

resource that can provide us with some light for understanding what reality is. What he condemns in the Sophist's imitation is that it is a pretended or false imitation of the philosopher without the principles, conditions, requirements and initial willingness to be one and the audacity to present that image as real philosophy. The Sophist's hypocrisy is exposed by the contrast with the philosopher's transparent and unequivocal attitude

Plato fulfils the difficult task that he has assigned to his interlocutors in the *Sophist*: to define the Sophist in clear philosophical terms by dialectical means. The *Sophist* as a dialogue is dialectic in action, showing us through contrast what philosophy can do: hunt down the Sophist. That is the perfect irony of the dialogue.[98]

As soon as we know what the Sophist is we can state clearly that he, with his sophistical practice, does not pass the dialectical examination of claim to be a philosopher: he is not able to communicate clear, true thought in clear and true statements that correspond to what reality is. He is not a dialectician.

It is impossible to define the Sophist without having definded philosophy first. The possibility of doing philosophy will remain so long as philosophers remain faithful to the permanent unselfish and rational task of asking for the essence of things with the aim of discovering the truth about it in a dialogic interchange that implies challenge and test.[99]

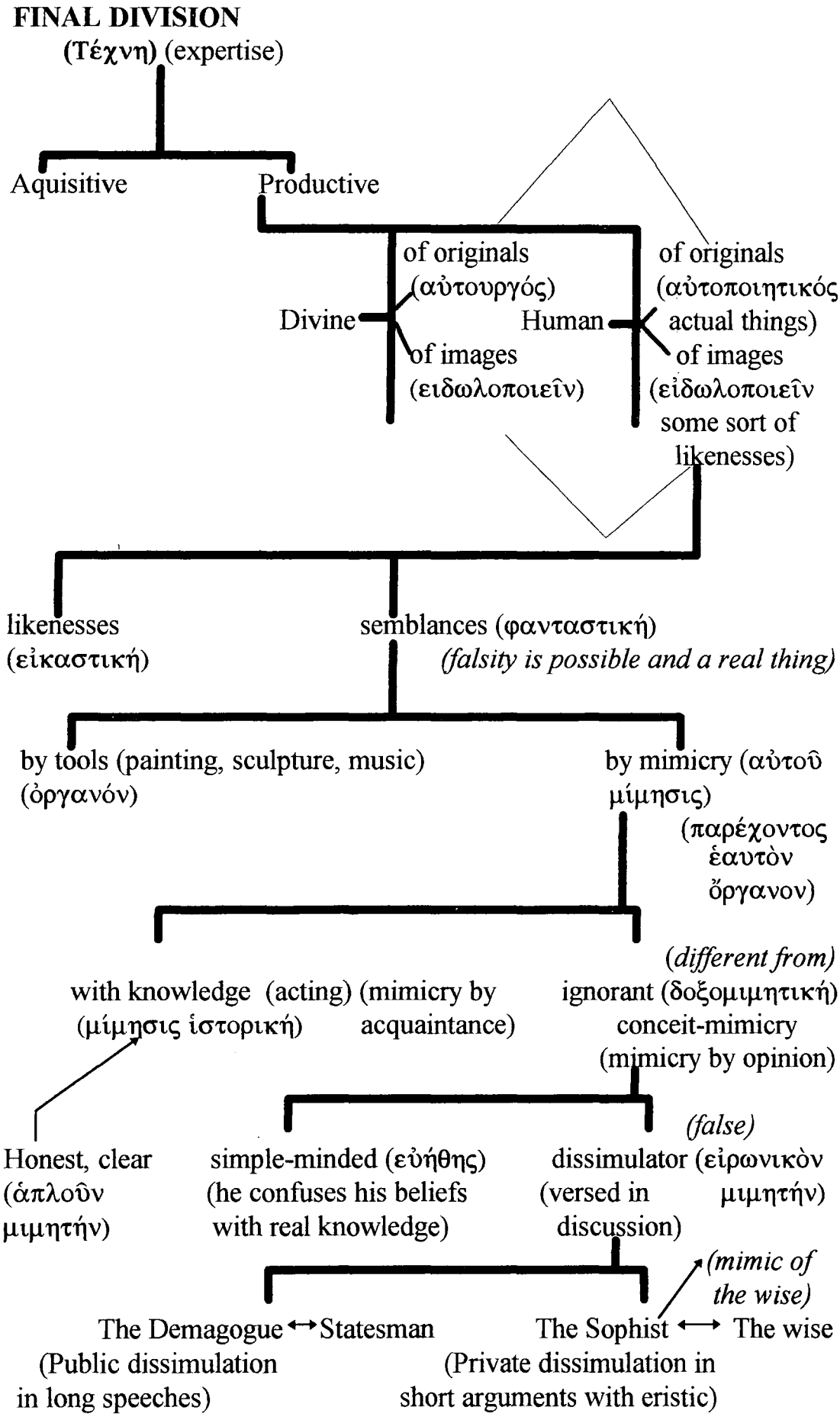
The *Sophist* is a philosophical opportunity to look back, to look forward and to grasp again the essence of the philosophical act, which involves a dialectical plan and purpose. Plato wants to build on the best of the Presocratic philosophical experience, but encourage a fresh approach

[98] The Sophist pretends to be wise, and the wise person is, or would be, the philosopher: the "imitation" is, as it were, at one remove.

[99] *Cf.* Notomi, pp. 25; 62-63; 299.

and criticism where necessary. That is the reason that the contrast between the Sophist and the philosopher enhances the nature of philosophy itself.[100]

[100] In relation to the following table of division *cf.* Cornford, p. 324.


FINAL DIVISION
(Τέχνη) (expertise)
Aquisitive
Productive
of originals (αὐτουργός)
Divine
Human
of images (ειδωλοποιεῖν)
of originals (αὐτοποιητικός actual things)
of images (εἰδωλοποιεῖν some sort of likenesses)
likenesses (εἰκαστική)
semblances (φανταστική)
(falsity is possible and a real thing)
by tools (painting, sculpture, music) (ὀργανόν)
by mimicry (αὐτοῦ μίμησις)
(παρέχοντος ἑαυτὸν ὄργανον)
(different from)
with knowledge (acting) (μίμησις ἱστορική)
(mimicry by acquaintance)
ignorant (δοξομιμητική) conceit-mimicry (mimicry by opinion)
(false)
Honest, clear (ἁπλοῦν μιμητήν)
simple-minded (εὐήθης) (he confuses his beliefs with real knowledge)
dissimulator (εἰρωνικὸν (versed in discussion) μιμητήν)
(mimic of the wise)
The Demagogue ↔ Statesman
(Public dissimulation in long speeches)
The Sophist ↔ The wise
(Private dissimulation in short arguments with eristic)

CONCLUSIONS

I. The Socratic-Platonic idea of dialectic provides us with a historical and philosophical foundation for the idea of philosophy as a dialogic act. Plato's idea of philosophy as dialectic involves a complete methodological account of how a philosophical conversation must be carried on in order to achieve philosophical aims: to understand what reality is. The fact that for Plato philosophy is a communicative act entails important metaphysical and ethical consequences: the act of knowing is only completed (if it is completed at all) when two or more subjects who are searching in an unselfish way for the truth, achieve and give a complete verbal account of the object in question. The philosophical search for the truth is a transpersonal and intersubjective matter, even while truth itself remains something objective.

Despite the fact that some philosophers disagree with Plato's dialectical project, they finally -despite their disagreements- are included in Plato's philosophical universe: for him the act of thinking too is a dialogic act with oneself, and one that will be communicated.

Aristotle's idea of dialectic implies a clear demotion from Plato's understanding of it and an affiliation to Zeno's method in that respect: dialogue will not be central for the search for the truth, dialectic will not be part of philosophy and dialectic will be associated with mere probable reasonings without scientific scope. This instrumental idea of dialectic will exert a definitive historical influence on subsequent philosophy.

II. The word διαλέγεσθαι (and its cognates) has a history before Plato use it. We have some antecedents of the Platonic employment of this set of words in Homer, Herodotus, Archilochus, Sappho, Alcaeus, Xenophon and Thucydides. Plato's originality consists in taking up these

antecedents and creating with them a new philosophical application of the word as a διαλεκτική τέχνη which involves a whole philosophical project.

We think that it is possible to find some clear literary antecedents of Plato's dialectical activity in Greek epic and lyric as dialogues in a sense and in tragedy as actual dialogue. Particularly so in the case of Euripides: we find in the way that he portrays legal debates in a process of question and answer a clear parallel of the elenctic Platonic dialectic. These Greek literary antecedents constitute the first written record of poetic consciousness of our tragic and limited human condition. At the same time they provide us with an illustration of the means to overcome this insufficiency through dialogues among reflective characters and communication of this message to the audience and through the promotion of a model of humanity.

There is a double source of the Platonic dialogical style of writing: its Greek literary antecedents and its philosophical origins in Presocratic and Socratic thought as a dialogic, rational and unselfish approach to things.

III. Throughout the history of philosophy it is possible to distinguish three main ideas of dialectic: 1. The Socratic-Platonic idea in which dialectic is equivalent to philosophy: philosophical conversation that has the aim of searching for the truth. Then 2. there is the Aristotelian idea, along with, some Stoic approaches and the Medieval idea of dialectic which treats it as a logical tool or instrument that permits us to find erroneous arguments. 3. The Hegelian and Marxist idea of dialectic in which dialectic is inherent in reality and the reason that provides us with an explanation of the dynamics of things as a permanent movement of synthesis of opposites.

There are important points to stress about the different ancient ideas of dialectic. Plato's idea of dialectic is an organic philosophical project which involves the undesrtanding of philosophy as the highest science that searches for the truth in a methodical, objective, rational, systematic and

unselfish way through philosophical conversation. This dialogic process involves questioning and answering, exchange and challenge and putting ideas to the test. Philosophy is an intersubjective and educative act that involves progress towards and communication of knowledge among the interlocutors. The dialectician is the man who can provide us with a complete map of reality insofar as he has the capacity of looking at the one and the many and has related them through a methodical search for definitions, setting out of hypotheses or collecting and dividing things in a whole unity.

Aristotle rejects Plato's idea of dialectic and starts a new project: dialectic is treated as an art that will give us access to the general common principles of all sciences by a method of questioning and answering and *endoxa,* but without any scientific capacity of its own.

Plato's dialectical project is clearly distant from Zeno's and the Sophists' practices. Plato's main complaint is that eristics, antilogicians and Sophist do not care for the truth, and that in that way they put in considerable jeopardy the dialectical nature of the philosophical task. Nevertheless, in the case of Aristotle it is clear that because his idea of dialectic involves the use of *endoxa* he is on the way to vindicating Zeno's and his colleagues' practices to a certain extent.

Aristotle's influence on the Stoic and Medieval ideas of dialectic is clear because dialectic tends to be treated as a tool, but not as philosophy itself. Nevertheless it is worth pointing out that the Stoic ideas of dialectic constitute a very complex issue. When dialectic is associated with the activity of the wise man who is in possession of an ορθὸς λόγος, that enables the dialectician to reason and to act correctly in accordance with the principle of the universe. In this way dialectic acquires a higher dimension and an interconnective role between logic, ethics and physics in the Stoic system.

Dialectic is in the Middle Ages the fundamental implement for philosophical argumentation. Dialectic is linked to the permissible use of reason to search and to clarify revealed truths, and to the exhibition of a logical mastery for disputing probable propositions or persuasive arguments in the Universities and among philosophers.

The place that dialectic occupies in Kant's philosophical system, interconnects the ancient and the modern ideas of dialectic. For him dialectic has a double role: a negative one as a "*logic of illusion*" that is connected with Aristotle's concept of dialectic and a positive role as a "*critique of dialectical illusion*" that will constitute the basis of Hegel's dialectic.

Hegel's dialectic involves a different approach in form and in content. Hegel understands dialectic as the dynamics of a synthesis of opposites that inheres in all existent things. That is the reason that dialectic explains all different kinds of movements and changes in the world and in our thoughts about it.

Marx accepts Hegel's theoretical discoveries, but he thinks that they do not succeed in describing reality. Marx proposes to make use of Hegel's dialectic by applying it to reality, men and nature, which should be understood in their material conditions. Marx thinks that the correct and concrete way of applying dialectic resides in the historical understanding of reality in terms of social and economic relations.

IV. The nature of the Socratic-Platonic method has to be understood in terms of the inseparability of *elenchos* and dialectic. That is, any subject-matter that is selected for a philosophical conversation has to be submitted to the dialectical agenda and has to be put to the test. The Socratic-Platonic dialectic is a single reality that has diverse and interconnected features: *elenchos*, hypothesis and collection and division. The elenctic process is fundamental for the whole of the Socratic-Platonic method and its essential

features are dialogue, examination, testing and challenge. That will permit Plato to fix clear boundaries between philosophy and sophistry insofar as the latter takes great delight in mere refutation and discussion regardless the truth.

Plato's notion of dialectic remains constant throughout his dialogues; however, every dialogue tends to exhibit of the variable ways and different aspects in which dialectic can be represented.

The *Sophist* is an excellent example for illustrating what dialectic is insofar as Plato there resorts to the irony of defining what philosophy is in clear contrast to Sophistry. Philosophy is a dialogic science that has the aim of carring on a loving search for the truth with the aim of expressing what things are in themselves. Philosophy is a communicative act insofar as it is a shared and communicated understanding of a common reality.

The philosopher is a dialectician or the person who is in possession of the διαλεκτική τέχνη. The dialectician is the man who is able to ask for the essence of things, who searches through dialogic and rational means how to give a complete and true explanation of reality through a network of interconnections and who communicates these thoughts in clear judgements and statements. What the philosopher finally aims at is an understanding of reality and an education of human beings through knowledge of human nature and self-knowledge.

The Sophist, by contrast, is the person who exhibits with his discourse a pseudo-τέχνη or false conceit of wisdom and virtue. He is a simmulator who displays his practice through the commercialisation of knowledge and education, love of disputation, gaining unfair advantage from his pupils, pretending to know everything and communicating in erroneous thoughts, judgements and statements an objectively false representation of the world.

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