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PLATO ON DIALECTIC AND DEMOCRACY*

PLATO'S MORAL EVALUATION OF THE CONSTITUTIONS AND ITS REPRESENTATION BY ARISTOTLE
(*STATESMAN* 302b - 303e)

SECTION ONE

I. The Problem

This paper is divided into four unequal parts; the first one presents a statement of the problem; the second one deals with that which, under normal conditions (i. e., keeping in mind the spirit of the *Statesman*, as well as fundamental points of Platonic philosophy generally) should be expected, the third one gives the main features of Platonic dialectic, and the fourth offers an interpretation of the particular passage mentioned above. I will try to give a new explanation, an analysis that, I hope, will help enlighten the Platonic technique, and focus my attention not on the conclusions but on the methods through which these can be reached i. e., the dialectic itself, which must come first, the results second. Making the dialectic the primary issue should be considered completely consistent with Plato's intention, if we can rely on the statement:

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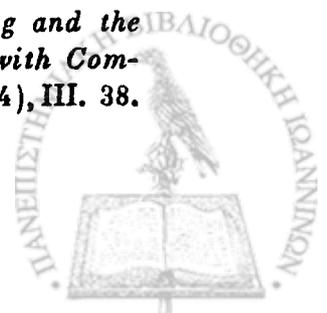


«The speech advises us to be content with and cherish the length relative to the search of the problem set down, however we might find it most easily and quickly, but on a second and not primary consideration. But it advises us to honor most of all and in first place the pursuit itself of the capacity to divide by species»¹.

The interpretation which I offer is not new, but, in a sense, the oldest of all, because, broadly speaking, it is substantially identical with Aristotle's; not only as it pertains to the final results of the hypothetical reasoning, but also and foremost to the way the results are reached. This method shall be clarified, when we later interpret the passage. With regard to this last point, which, at least in my opinion, is the most important one, it is generally, but mistakenly, argued that Aristotle has misunderstood Plato, as we shall later see. This is the one crucial point, in which this interpretation differs from the others. The second one is- and here I must anticipate the conclusion of this paper- that Plato himself never made unconditionally any classification of the constitutions. On the contrary, most scholars only believe that he did. What Plato has actually done is merely to set the background and framework of the dialectic by raising three pairs of hypotheses, opposite to each other; with the patience of the reader, we shall later expound the meaning of «hypothesis» to Plato when we discuss his dialectic. After this starting point, he left it to the reader to examine the resulting logical implications from each hypothesis. The only explicit conclusion Plato drew was that democracy under different circumstances was the best and the worst of all six constitutions. This means that it may be both better than the kingdom and worse than the tyranny, odd as that might sound. The sense, in which this is meant, is another question which we will encounter in interpreting the passage. There are some subsidiary hypotheses that are also opposites, for example: 1) if monarchy is lawful, 2) if monarchy is unlawful (302e 10-12). The conclusions reached are opposite, as well; in the first case monarchy is the best of all six constitutions, whereas in the second it is the worst.

But even if we make the assumption, that Plato in fact inferred all the logical consequences and reached the final result which is the classification, i.e., the moral evaluation of the six constitutions (kingdom, aristocracy, (good) democracy, (bad) democracy, oligarchy

1. PLATO, *Statesman* 286d. The translation is from: *The Being and the Beautiful, Plato's Theaetetus, Sophist and Statesman, Trans. and with Commentary by Seth Benardete* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), III. 38.



and tyranny). previous scholarship does not seem to indicate an awareness of the way Plato reaches that evaluation, that is, by the method of logical deductions. This can be assumed for two reasons: 1) they are not really aware that the statements of Plato concerning this classification are conditional, contrary to those of Aristotle, which are categorical, and 2) when Plato says that democracy is both the best and the worst of all constitutions under certain conditions, they believe that Plato means that democracy is the worst not of all six, but only of the three legal forms of government, i.e., it is worse than kingdom and aristocracy, and the best, not again of all six, but only of the three illegal forms, i. e., it is better than tyranny and oligarchy. It is the major task of this paper to show that Plato never stated this explicitly; perhaps this is what he implied, but he left it to us to determine after a long, tedious, logical elaboration. This is the nature of dialectic which, as we shall see, is the ultimate goal of this dialogue.

The kind of dialectic used in the *Statesman* has great similarity with that of the *Parmenides*, but there are also major differences between them. One of them consists of the following: although in the *Parmenides* Plato draws many of the logical consequences of each pair of contrary hypotheses, he does not do the same here. (We must here note that we do not use the term «contrary» in the strict sense of modern logic, but merely to signify «opposite»). The only conclusion that Plato reaches in the *Statesman* from the two contrary hypotheses 1) if all constitutions are legal and 2) if all constitutions are illegal, is that democracy is in the first case the worst, and, in the second case, the best of all six. Before we attempt a new interpretation, it would perhaps be useful first to state what would be the expected interpretation of the passage under consideration on the basis first of Aristotle's testimony, and then to explain the purpose of the dialogue, understood in terms of main features of Plato's philosophy.

This investigation aims at the moral evaluation of constitutions in Platonic political contemplations. Therein, we would also like to pose the question about dialectic in the same way as Aristotle did about Plato's theory of ideas. He maintained that the real question is not whether ideas exist, but how we are to understand these assertions. In this way we place our interest not in whether Plato classified the in his days well known six constitutions, but in how we know if he did; so it becomes mainly a gnosiological and logical problem, for it concerns the dialectic used as a way of reaching true knowledge



in the *Statesman*. To clarify, our concern is less with Plato's actual classification and more with his methodology, i. e. with his truth-seeking technique. The question is mainly a textual interpretation and less a cognitive or epistemological one, i. e. whether Plato was right and how we can determine his correctness. Using it as a starting point, we go further to review other dialogues, too, mainly the *Republic* and the *Laws*, that are presumably writings most concerned with politics. We shall speak of the moral evaluation of the regimes, because they are strongly related with good and evil (*Statesman* 303a5), which constitute the fundamental focus of ethics in general.

II. What Should be Expected: A. Aristotle's Testimony

The evaluation from both philosophers has been considered to give the following hierarchical order: kingdom, aristocracy, polity (or good democracy), democracy, oligarchy and tyranny. For Aristotle the first three are the right constitutions and the last three their deviations¹, while for Plato all six are «not right» and bad constitutions². This means, as he explains it in his *Seventh Letter* (326a-b), that all constitutions are bad except the only right one, which is that which applies the philosopher-king. It must be noticed here that a discourse about the evaluation of the constitutions existed before Plato, as Herodotus reports³. Consequently, another problem that should be examined is whether Plato meant only the existing constitutions or eventually the ideal ones, given that he persisted in his theory of ideas, notwithstanding the problems he raised for it in the first part of the *Parmenides*. Thus we must ask whether Plato meant the actual reality, for instance, the tyrant Periandros of Corinth, or the ideal tyrant, provided that such an idea exists, or whether he perhaps used «tyranny» in both senses. Does he really make here any distinction between the actual tyrannies and the idea or form of tyranny and, if so, how? This is a nexus of themes that must be confronted. Anyhow the answer of Plato's commentators has been up to now that Plato's words can have only one meaning, that is, he is referring to the actual constitutions, to the «historical reality»⁴.

1. ARISTOTLE, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, VIII 10, 1160 a 31-37; *Politics*, Γ 13, 1283 a 26-35; Γ 7, 1279 a 17-32, b4.

2. PLATO, *Statesman*; 302b5; *Republic*, V 449 a; VIII 544 a.

3. HERODOTUS, *History*, III, 80-84.

4. Κ. ΔΕΣΠΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, *Πολιτική φιλοσοφία του Πλάτωνος*, 'Αθήνα, Παπαζήσης, 1980⁷, 142-143.



It is also believed that Plato's classification of the constitutions is exactly as Aristotle reports. I don't dispute this, but as a matter of fact, one cannot know whether this is really so or not, without having first tested some presuppositions, for, as stated above, Plato himself never expressed clearly his opinion about their hierarchical order, and one will look in vain for a plain statement to that effect in Plato's works. Thus we are not able to know how Aristotle was acquainted with this hierarchy, without first subjecting the Platonic text to close scrutiny. Aristotle presents us with Plato's hierarchy of the constitutions, although this is not found lucidly in Plato's works. Thus a major question is how Aristotle arrived at this view. Possibly it was the result of a dialectical exercise, and if so, we should try to determine its framework. Surely for Aristotle the problem was less formidable than it is for us, because of course he had attended Plato's lectures in the Academy and he was doubtless familiar with his "unwritten doctrines". It is, no doubt, rightly asserted that in the Academy there had often been exercises in dialectic¹, in which Aristotle played a leading part². Thus it may be accepted that his witness is trustworthy and credible. This doesn't mean that one can entirely share the opinion, according to which it is impossible that Aristotle has misunderstood³ his master, for, surely, no one is infallible. I think it would be nearer to the truth if we asserted that it is much more probable that we misconceive Plato's thought than that Aristotle did, because of their relationship as pupil to teacher, contemporaries with the same language and cultural background. We mention this, because Aristotle's interpretation is quite different from the traditional one, not regarding its final conclusions, which from the point of view of formal logic is quite similar, but in the way in which the conclusions are reached. There is a great discrepancy between the two interpretations on this last point. It consists of the following: whereas Aristotle presumably uses a certain method to arrive at this conclusion— as we shall later show, it is the use of syllogisms—we, in truth, do not apply any method at all. We may imagine that we read in Plato's text the final complete classification of the constitutions, but in reality, it is only found in Aristo-

1. A. DIÈS, *Platon, oeuvres complètes*, tome ix-1re partie, *Le politique*, (Paris: 1950), xxvi-xxvii.

2. G. RYLE, «Dialectic in the Academy», in: *Aristotle on Dialectic. The Topics. Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum*. Ed. by G. E. L. Owen, (Oxford: 1968), 68-79.

3. H.G. GADAMER, *Platons dialektische Ethik und andere Studien zur Platonischen Philosophie*. (Hamburg: Felix Meiner Verlag, 1968 [1931]), 5-6.



tle's *Politics* and, as far as we know, not anywhere else. The sequel to this is that we reject the Aristotelian method as incorrect, and argue that Plato never arrived at the constitutional hierarchy as Aristotle concludes he did.

The interpreters agree on the whole with Aristotle's presentation of the classification of the constitutions, but when he explains the different point of view of his master about the subject, it is said that his account seems odd and bizarre, and so they are compelled to declare that he misconstrued or misinterpreted his master's theory, as we shall see in detail further on. I think it is a mistake to reject his testimony so lightly. Surely it calls for a close examination. It is perhaps the only reliable ancient testimony we have about the issue. If we take the words of Aristotle seriously, then we are obliged to admit that we have in front of us a void, a vacancy or lacuna as this Latin word is used in the editions of ancient texts. To create a metaphor: this *lacuna*, when filled, can serve as a bridge that will carry us to the opposite bank of the river. Now, if we are not willing to choose the easy way, to reject Aristotle's testimony as flawed, then our effort to interpret the passage seems at first glance unexpected, odd, and curious as it is like a course against the flow. In spite of that Aristotle's words should serve as a signal that we might revise our attitude toward this theme, for they are a thing upon which we can presumably rely, and this should encourage us to attempt to find a new starting point, although it may be the opposite of what has until now generally been considered the only true interpretation.

The view that Plato never explicitly stated the classification of the constitutions is also supported by the fact that Aristotle made use of the terms "propound" ($\acute{\alpha}\pi\sigma\phi\acute{\eta}\nu\alpha\tau\omicron$) and "judge" ($\acute{\epsilon}\chi\rho\iota\nu\epsilon$), which are rather logical terms, but not of the phrase, "Plato said". The relevant passage is the following: "A writer who preceded me has already made these distinctions, but his point of view is not the same as mine. For he lays down the principle that..."¹ It is important to note the fact that Aristotle tells us that Plato did not necessarily state explicitly what he thought about the hierarchy of the six forms of government, but that he left it to be understood through logical deduction, in the manner which he presumably taught in the Academy. In other words, Aristotle gives us the impression, that it is

1. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, IV 2; 1289b 5-11, Trans. by Jowett, in: *The Complete Works of Aristotle, The Rev. Oxford Trans.*, Ed. by Jonathan Barnes, vol. II, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 2046.



not certain whether Plato was ambiguous on this point or not: the only certainty is that this result can be supposedly inferred from what Plato had already said. This hierarchical order is: kingdom, aristocracy, polity, democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. Here we must notice that Plato speaks of two kinds of democracy, the legal and the illegal¹, whereas Aristotle speaks of *polity* (meaning good democracy) and of democracy (meaning perverted democracy).

Aristotle refers to Plato's opinion by saying that "if all constitutions are good, democracy is the worst, but, if all of them are bad, then democracy is the best". Here the word «all» must be taken literally, because there is no reasonable argument to take it differently than what is said to be. Thus there cannot be any possibility other than to include all six, because the totality of the regimes at that time was all six except that of the philosopherking which is the seventh (*Statesman* 303b1-5). This implies that the six constitutions are sometimes good and sometimes bad. In other words, every constitution is good and bad. Aristotle mentions the good oligarchy, as an example, and continues by saying that the same applies also to the others. This he opposes with his own theory, that one oligarchy cannot be better than another, since all of these three (democracy, oligarchy, tyranny) are on the whole defective. This is the main reason, why the interpreters have said that Aristotle misunderstood his master. So they maintain: «The difference between Plato and Aristotle is only a difference of nomenclature. And even in the matter of nomenclature, as Newman notes, Plato had not spoken of a good form of 'oligarchy', he had used the term 'aristocracy'»². Another reason, for which Aristotle is charged with having misunderstood his master, is that he maintains that for himself one oligarchy is not better, as Plato says, but all three (democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny) are bad and defective.

What is usually held is that there is no real difference at this point between Plato and Aristotle, because both say essentially the same thing³. So Plato declares that all these regimes are «not right» and therefore difficult to live with⁴. The usual view, in my opinion,

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 302d-e.

2. E. BARKER, *The Politics of Aristotle*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1958), 158.

3. L. CAMPBELL, *The Sophistes and the Politicus of Plato*, (New York: Arno Press, 1973), 1867.

4. PLATO, *Statesman* 302 b.



cannot be correct for two reasons. When Plato contends that all six constitutions are "not right", he has included kingdom, aristocracy, and polity, which for Aristotle are, in fact, the only right forms of government (*Politics*, III, 7, 1279a 18 - 25). So the two philosophers do not say the same thing about this theme. According to Aristotle, Plato saw the six forms of government in a different perspective. Thus he saw them as either legal, and therefore good, or as illegal, and therefore bad. In other words, the six constitutions have been redoubled and became twelve, for each one of them is potentially legal and illegal or good and bad, but Plato does not pretend to know if they are really so. This duplication of the number of the constitutions has not been taken seriously by the interpreters who might not be thoroughly aware of the problem. So this crucial point, which makes the dialectic possible is lost, however unintentionally, and buried under the ruins. Thus the alleged aim of the dialogue, which is to explore the nature of dialectic and to demonstrate its effectiveness in philosophy, as Plato himself says¹, is not yet revealed, because of the obscurity of Plato's thought, combined with the imperceptiveness of the interpreters.

It is this exact interpretation of the Platonic doctrine that creates problems for scholars who deny its correctness, because Aristotle ostensibly puts in Plato's mouth words he never uttered. His assertion, that according to Plato democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny can also be good just as kingdom, aristocracy and polity can also be bad is quite another matter, which cannot be readily rejected as untrue. When Aristotle says a "good oligarchy" (and he and the others in the same way would have also said a «bad kingdom»), he does nothing else but analyze the hypotheses by saying the same thing in different words. In order to overcome these difficulties, the passage has been wrongly interpreted in the following way. When Aristotle says, "If all constitutions are good", they do not understand him to mean all six, but only half of them, namely the kingdom, the aristocracy, and the (good) democracy. Again, when he raises the second hypothesis. "If all constitutions are bad", they understand it only to apply to the other half, namely to (bad) democracy, oligarchy, and tyranny. In this way the whole becomes only half, which is absurd, unless we ascend in the sphere of the dialectic and play with the doubles and the halves as Plato was doing². And thus, because

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 d.

2. *Ibid*, 262 a.



dialectic deals primarily with contrarities as Aristotle mentions, the whole and the half are contrary notions just as are the one and the many. Thus, it must be clear that such an interpretation is untenable unless one can show how the dialectic functions in this particular context. On the other hand it can be said that it is a general problem of interpretation to ascertain intent, since writers, who know what they mean, may not always express it precisely. If Aristotle, who was presumably familiar with Plato's thinking, thought that he and Plato had pretty much the same understanding about the classification of the states, and said so, that might suggest that the standard interpretation, whether it is correct or not, is at least plausible.

But let us suppose that this interpretation is right. If we carefully examine the implications of doing so, we will see that these lead us to still greater difficulties. If we really should understand that in the first hypothesis he means the three good and in the second the three bad constitutions, then it is really worth asking what function these hypotheses have, and why we might need them. These hypothetical statements, in such a case, would be meaningless, because the first three constitutions are legal and the last three illegal *ex definitio*¹. In this case the hypotheses would mean: 1) if the legal constitutions are legal, and 2) if the illegal constitutions are illegal.

This leads us to a semantic monism, according to which only tautological sentences are true, as for instance the statements 'the man is a man' or 'the good is good'. So is, as it is widely agreed, the thesis of the school of Antisthenes², which Plato has fought against and calls childish³. It is true that the first hypothesis of the *Parmenides* is of that kind, "If the one is one", from which he draws contradictory results, as the one is neither identical nor different from itself. But the second hypothesis is contrary to the first, «If one is (exists)», that is: "If the one is many" which is equivalent to: "If the one is not one"⁴. If it should be the same case in the *Statesman* as in *Parmenides*, then the first hypothesis had to be contradictory or contrary to

1. *Ibid*, 302 c-e, 291c-292a.

2. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, V 29, 1094b 30-35; F.M. CORNFORD, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge: The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato*, (London: Routledge 1980), 254.

3. PLATO, *Sophist* 251 b-c; *Theaetetus* 201 e; *Philebus* 14 d; J. STENZEL, *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, Trans. by D. J. Allan, (New York: Russell and Russell, 1964), 139.

4. G. KOUMAKIS, *Platons Parmenides, Zum Problem seiner Interpretation*, Bouvier Verlag, Bonn 1971, 152-129.



second in order to set the basis for dialectic; but it is not so according to this interpretation, because the subject of each hypothesis is not the same but different. In order to avoid all these difficulties, some scholars translate the passage as follows: "democracy is best among the bad varieties, but the worst among the good ones"¹. Although this translation is impossible from the aspect of language (i.e., the Greek simply won't permit such a translation), it is nevertheless a clever attempt to avoid the above unfavourable and adverse circumstances.

The following passage can also be held to be an indirect reference by Aristotle to the topic under consideration: "In the *Laws* it is maintained that the best constitution is made up of democracy and tyranny, which are either no constitutions at all or the worst of all"². Here again democracy and tyranny are marked as the worst constitutions, but from an other perspective they are the best. Plato said that the best constitution consists of democracy and monarchy³ not tyranny as Aristotle reports, and for this Aristotle has been said to have misunderstood Plato⁴. But the fact is that, when Aristotle, several lines later, summarizes the results of his own argument, he says that it is impossible that the best constitution should be composed of democracy and monarchy as Plato asserts⁵. This shows that Plato certainly used "monarchy" in a broader sense to include «tyranny». Actually sometimes the word "monarchos" was used to mean "tyrannos", because most monarchs were tyrants⁶. When Plato says in his *Laws* that the ideal state—one that differs from that in the *Republic* only in degree and not in essence⁷—consists of these two elements, he means that democracy and monarchy would be the best constitutions and not the worst as Aristotle asserts, for it is obvious that the best constitution cannot emanate from two which are the worst.

1. R. RACKHAM, *Aristotle, The Politics with English Translation*, (New York: Loeb, 1932), 285.

2. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, II 6, 1266a 1-4, Trans. by B. Jowett, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, Vol. II, Ed. by J. Barnes, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2008.

3. PLATO, *Laws*, III 693 d; IV, 756 e.

4. E. BARKER, *The Politics of Aristotle*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1958), 60. Cf. H. CHERNISS, *Aristotle's Criticism of Plato and the Academy*, N. York 1962 (1944).

5. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, II 6, 1266 a 23-25.

6. H. BERVE, *Die Tyrannis bei den Griechen*, (München: Beck, 1967), 5.

7. H. HERTER, «Platons Staatsideal in zweierlei Gestalt», in: *Kleine Schriften*, Ed. by E. Vogt, (München: W. Fink, 1975), 262-263.



Here we must again notice the different meaning of "democracy" and "tyranny" in the two philosophers. For Aristotle these terms always have a negative connotation, because they are either not right constitutions or not constitutions at all, whereas for Plato they have a double meaning, for they can be both the best and the worst of all. Especially in the aforementioned passage the tyrant is treated by Plato as equal to or even better than the king (IV, 710 d-e).

If we summarize the results of this inquiry, it can be said that Aristotle probably understood Plato rightly. He considers two hypotheses (if all constitutions are good; if all constitutions are bad) contrary to each other. The result is that democracy in the first case is the worst, while in the second the best of all six.

II. B. Platonic Philosophy

It is not only the testimony of Aristotle that causes our sense of unease, if we accept the traditional interpretation without any qualifications; Platonic philosophy—especially the *Statesman*—also suggests reasons, why we cannot remain satisfied with the generally accepted explanation. Let us notice some of them.

1. The Double Facets of the Constitutions

When we review the whole of Plato's works, as far as we can within the scope of this paper, it would seem that each part of the divided three main constitutions—and particularly the first and the third—is a Janus head with two faces. So tyranny is presented as both the best and worst regime. Kingdom and democracy are also presented in this way. In the *Republic*, tyranny and democracy are dealt with as the worst regimes and as the extreme maladies of the State¹. On the contrary, the tyrant is later treated in the *Laws* and in the *Seventh Epistle* as equal to or even better than the king². For the death of the tyrants, Dionysius and Dion of Sicily, Plato expresses his regret:

«Now I convinced Dion, when I explained to him these doctrines and others of the sort, so that we have every reason to be angry with his slayers in a certain way exactly as with Dionysius. In both cases I and all the rest of mankind, you may say, received the greatest injury. For the slayers of Dion made away with the man who intended to make justice effective, while Dionysius would not consent to put justice into practice throughout his empire. He possessed great power, and if in his

1. PLATO, *Republic*, VIII 544 c.

2. PLATO, *Laws*, IV 709 c-711 c; *VII Letter* 335 c-d.



empire philosophy and political power had really been united in the same man, its glory would have shone forth among all men, Greek and barbarian»¹.

The death of the tyrant Dion moved him to deep grief, comparable to that felt by him at the death of his teacher Socrates, as is shown by the epigram composed by Plato². At the beginning of the *Statesman*, Plato identifies the despot, i.e., the tyrant, with the statesman and the king³, although after a while he recognizes his mistake and corrects it, by saying that the two men are most dissimilar⁴. But it might not be without relevance that Plato corrects his faults. The king is also introduced as the best and the worst. There are several places, where one kind of kingdom— of course not that of the philosopher king— is regarded as one of the worst regimes, and this happens also in the *Statesman*⁵. In other places, kingdom is presented as the best regime, as we shall later see in this interpretation.

The same can also be said about democracy. There are passages, especially in the earlier dialogues, where democracy is praised as the best constitution⁶. So it seems reasonable to support the view that early democratic Athens was the place Plato had in mind to establish his ideal state⁷. This harmonizes good with the fact that Plato could have his Academy due to Athenian democracy. On the other hand, it can be argued that this seems unlikely for two reasons; 1) the state of the *Republic* is presumably an attempt to delineate the nature of an ideal state, and 2) Plato was probably of the aristocratic party, both in fact and in temperament. This would seem to produce in him a profound skepticism of the viability, and certainly the value of actual democratic states. Athenian democracy would seem to be a quite unlikely predecessor of, or foundation for, a Platonic state. Athens would have seemed, one supposes, a quite unlikely locus for the establishment of the ideal constitution. It is unfair to Plato to hold the viewpoint, that his encomium of democracy in the *Menexenos* is a parody and an irony⁸, as I hope to show

1. PLATO, *VII Letter* 335c-d, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato*, Ed. by Edith Hamilton, Trans. by L.A. Post (New York: Pantheon Books, 1964), 1583-84.

2. H. HERTER, Platons Dionsepigramm, in: *Kleine Schriften*, 359-380, 370.

3. PLATO, *Statesman*, 358e-359d.

4. *Ibid* 276 e.

5. *Ibid* 291 a 1, *Republic*, VIII 544 d.

6. PLATO, *Menexenos*, 238 b-239 a; *Crito*, 52 b-c; *VII Letter*, 324 c-d.

7. H. HERTER, «Urathen der Idealstaat», in: *Kleine Schriften*, 273-304, 300.

8. K. POPPER, *The Open Society and Its Enemies*, vol. I, *The Spell of Plato*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1966 [1962]), 96.



below. The ostensible aristocracy of the elected regime of the thirty men turned out much worse than the previous democracy (*VII Letter* 324a-d). Here we might encounter a historical problem: were the thirty tyrants really popularly elected? Perhaps, one could say, they were put into power as a safe, Sparta-favoring, puppet government, by the Spartan victors, after the Peloponnesian war.

2. *The Purpose of the Dialogue*

We have good reason to believe that the paramount purpose of the dialogue *Statesman* has failed. This could be due either to Plato himself, who could not achieve and carry out the supposed purpose in spite of his intention, or to our inability to grasp the meaning of the dialogue, which in the latter case has been rather misconceived. But first the purpose of the dialogue must be defined. This has been addressed in two different ways. According to the first, the main purpose of the *Statesman*—as well as of the *Sophist*—is the definition of the statesman and the sophist respectively¹, because the two dialogues are closely linked with each other, as the intent in both is to investigate if the three names of sophist, statesman, and philosopher correspond to three, two, or one entity². To achieve this purpose each must be defined. The second line of interpretation maintains that the chief purpose of the dialogue is to make the interlocutor a better dialectician³, or to «present us with an essay on philosophical and scientific method,»⁴ i.e., the dialectic.

Before we investigate these two possibilities, it must be said that in both cases the purpose of the *Statesman* must not have been achieved, because neither a complete definition of the statesman has been given, nor has the nature of dialectic in the narrow sense of showing contradictions, been demonstrated, as for example is the case in

1. P. KUCHARSKI, *Les Chemins du Savoir dans les dernier Dialogues de Platon*, (Paris: Presses Universitaire de France, 1949), 150. A. DIÈS, *Platon, Oeuvres Complètes*, tome IX, 1re partie, *Le Politique*, «les Belles Lettres,» Paris, 1950, viii-ix. J. WARRINGTON, *Plato, Parmenides, Theaetetus, Sophist, and Statesman*, (London: J. M. Dent, 1961), Introduction x.

2. PLATO, *Sophist*, 217 a.

3. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 d; H. GUNDERT, *Dialog und Dialektik*, (Amsterdam: Winter Press, 1971), 152.

4. A.E. TAYLOR, *Plato: The Man and His Work*, (London: Methuen, 1978 [1926]), 375.



*Parmenides*¹. Plato should surely have developed the dialectic, at the very least, in keeping with his familiar method of division, in this case by dividing the constitutions "by kinds". So the question arises, how can the three main constitutions be "divided by parts and by kinds". This urgent question certainly requires answering. Why would Plato have made these divisions earlier in other lesser cases, as in weaving, which serves only as an example, and yet not make them for the constitutions themselves, which are of greater importance? The ideal case for Plato would be to have demonstrated the dialectic by combining this method of "division by kinds" with the "hypothesis procedure", concerning the six forms of government and the ideal one which is the seventh.

If the main purpose of this dialogue is, again, to provide the definition of the terms "statesman" and "sophist", these have not been given in a satisfying way. The definition can be accomplished by stating the essence and delineating the nature of an entity. This negative outcome was a very frequent approach of Plato, as he used to conclude his dialogues by saying, in effect, "we could not find what we were searching for"². There are three possible explanations for this. The first is that he lets the interlocutor find it out for himself, accepting this method as the main educational principle that corresponds to the contemporary concept of "problem solving". The second possibility is that Plato did not know the definition for which he was looking, and the third is that he believed that it was impossible to be given any true definition at all. Even today, indefinability «is constantly being asserted and denied»³. So if the main purpose of the dialogue was the definition of the statesman, there really would not be any failure in Plato's writing given the aporetic (i.e. in doubt ending) character of philosophy in general⁴, and especially of Platonic philosophy in particular.

But it would perhaps be a failure if Plato's intention was to instruct his interlocutor in dialectic, because it is not clear enough

1. G. MARTIN, *General Metaphysics, Its Problems and Its Method*, trans. by D. O' Connor, (New York: Humanities Press, 1968), 318.

2. PLATO, *Lysis*, 223 b 7-8.

3. R. ROBINSON, *Definition*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962 [1954]), 4-5.

4. PLATO, *Sophist*, 244 a; ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, V 1, 1028 b 3. B. RUSSELL, *The Problems of Philosophy*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1912 [1912]), 91.



how the dialectic is to be carried out. As we said above, in the beginning of the *Sophist*, Plato states just what he is searching for. It is to ascertain whether the sophist, the statesman, and the philosopher are one, two, or three entities¹. For this purpose, of course, a definition of each of them is presupposed. So, after a few lines, he begins his investigation seeking with the aid of «reason» (*λόγος*), i.e., the method of dialectic, to make evident what the sophist is². The same is also done with the statesman, as at the opening of the homonym dialogue it is said that after the search for the essence of the sophist it appeared necessary to seek for that of the statesman³. Here he again applies the same method as in the inquiry concerning the sophist, that which reaches the truest conclusions obtainable⁴. This logical method is none other than the dialectic⁵. Thus we have the purpose, which is the definition, i.e., the subject of the search, as well as the means through which the proposed purpose can be achieved. This "organon", in Platonic and Aristotelian terms, is the dialectic (*Republic*, Z 518c).

This means-purpose scheme can be reversed: the purpose becomes the means, and the means becomes the purpose. In this particular case the dialectic turns out to be the purpose and the search for the definition of the statesman the means. The dialectic is more the point of the dialogue than the search for a particular definition. It is more important. This is in fact what Plato tried to show. He says that the best way to search for any propounded theme is that which makes us more capable of dialectic, i.e., of finding out the essence of the things⁶. Plato directly asks the question, whether the search for the definition of the statesman has been set out for its own sake or to render us better dialecticians about anything. The answer is that this last task is better and more important than to find out only one thing, namely, what the statesman is. He adds that this is what every reasonable person should do, exactly as he would not wish to trace the definition of the art of weaving for its own sake⁷.

1. PLATO, *Sophist*, 217 a 6-9.

2. *Ibid*, 218 b-219 a.

3. PLATO, *Statesman*, 258 b.

4. *Ibid*, 266 d.

5. P. KUCHARSKI, *Les Chemins du Savoir...* 150 ff.

6. PLATO, *Statesman*, 286 d-287 a.

7. *Ibid*, 285 d.



We learn what these words mean from Plato and Aristotle, who insist that the term "good" has two meanings: 1) things good in themselves, i.e. for their own sake, and 2) things good for the sake of others and not for themselves¹. So happiness, which is the highest good, is chosen for its own sake and not for any other purpose, because it is sufficient unto itself²; the more it is self sufficient, the more it is worthy of choice³. Thus the slave is defined as one who exists not for his own sake but for his master's⁴, whereas the freeman is one who exists for his own sake and not for another's⁵. The slave is an instrument (organon) for life⁶. So the relationship between the search of the definition of the statesman and the dialectical exercise seems to be analogous to that between the slave and the freeman. From this we can easily derive the superiority of the latter as opposed to the former.

Because of its obscurity, the main theme of the dialogue has been differently conceived, and attempts have been made to interpret it in purely logical and metaphysical terms⁷. On the contrary, the better view is that, whereas in the *Sophist* the logical and metaphysical "interest predominates", in the *Politikus* it is the final definition that is of real importance. Indeed, the question has been so rightly posed, "How could the Academy in those years have discussed the *Statesman* as a mere school exercise"?⁸ Neither of these two conceptions is entirely wrong, because the first relies on Plato's intention to demonstrate the methodology of dialectic, which notwithstanding, he seems not to have succeeded perfectly in doing (i. e. with contradictions) if we accept the traditional interpretation, while the second is based on what Plato seems to have done, which is not dialectic in its real sense, in spite of the fact that Plato presumably intended to do just that.

It is rightly supposed that the paradigm, of which Plato makes use in order to illustrate his important doctrine, is also a dialectical

1. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I 6, 1096 b 10-20. PLATO, *Republic*, II 357a-358a, 367 c-d.

2. ARISTOTLE, *Nic. Ethics*, I 7, 1097 b 4-20.

3. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, II 2, 1261 b 14-15.

4. *Ibid.*, I 4, 1254 a 14-17, b 20-23.

5. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, I 2, 982 b 26.

6. ARISTOTLE, *Politics*, I 4, 1253 b 30-35, 1254 b 15-19.

7. E.M. MANASSE, *Platons Sophistes und Politikos: Das Problem der Wahrheit*, (Berlin: S. Scholem, 1937).

8. J.B. SKEMP, *Plato's Statesman*, (Bristol: Classical Press) 18.



exercise¹. Of course the division "by kinds", as Plato constantly executes it in both of these dialogues, is a kind of dialectic that is rather different from the example. One serves as an induction, while the other has to do with syllogisms or deduction. Aristotle distinguishes two kinds of dialectical propositions². The dialectic that deals with syllogisms refers to the "same" and "other", "like" and "unlike", and all the contrarities, that are finally reduced to "being" and "not being", as well as to "one" and "many"³. It means that when in dialectic contradictions appear, the *one* and the *many* (as the one idea and the many particulars) should be involved. This last kind of dialectic with contradictions about the one and the many is to be found in the *Parmenides*. If the "division by kinds" were the sort of dialectic to which Plato was limited, then there would still arise the question, whether Plato himself would have utilized this form of dialectic in connection with the six constitutions. It is true that he has really made a division in the three main constitutions: monarchy, the will of a few, and democracy. So are respectively derived kingdom and tyranny, oligarchy and aristocracy, and two kinds of democracy⁴. The prominent question is to determine what kind of division this is. Is it one "by parts" or "by kinds", or by both at the same or different times, given that the two types of divisions do not necessarily coincide⁵, and equally important, how do we know this?

Here in the *Statesman*, as elsewhere, we have the means-purpose relationship. The very search for the essence of things in Plato is "considered in its methodological aspect". The method occurs in the search, which is realized only by means of the method⁶. It is also possible that the method becomes an end in itself and the object of the inquiry can be any appropriate subject, because it seems that the inquiry often serves as little more than an occasion to exercise the dialectic. In the *Parmenides*, for instance, fully nine hypotheses are raised about the "one". Plato wanted to educate phil-

1. V. GOLDSCHMIDT, *Le Paradigme dans la dialectique Platonicienne* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1947), 9.

2. ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, A 12, 105 a.

3. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, II 1, 995 b 20-27. For Aristotle's dialectic see: D. EVANS, *Aristotle's Concept of Dialectic*. London, Cambridge University Press (1971) 1978.

4. PLATO, *Statesman*, 302 c-e.

5. *Ibid*, 263b 7-9.

6. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962 [1953]), 71.



osophers and therefore he had to find some reasons to exercise the dialectic about "all" things, and thus would not be satisfied considering only "one" of them. Here we have in opposition the "one" and the "all" or the "many". Plato is not interested here in determining one definition, but rather in exploring the nature of dialectic. This ability to reason and to contemplate, Aristotle also says, can be attributed only to philosophers and to dialecticians¹, who are identified by Plato². Dialectic is practised both for its own sake and for another higher purpose as well, namely, for the acquisition of a state of mind in which everyone is able to think well and to be moderate³. No man without experience and practice can ever have self-command⁴. Temperance and wisdom are the two main qualities that can bring the supreme human felicity⁵. The whole capacity and value of dialectic lies in the fact that the man who is trained in it acquires the ability to demonstrate and find out the real truth by reasoned argument⁶. This means that Plato regarded dialectic as the highest of intellectual functions that offered unlimited possibilities for a serious and presumably fertile investigation of all things. Aristotle defines the discovery or finding of something as the resolution of the puzzle of the perplexity and of the doubt⁷. In *Minos* (317d) also, which, although not an authentic work of Plato, nevertheless echoes his views, the law is defined as the "discovery of being". Plato, himself feels obliged to search and perhaps to find out the cause of everything, for instance, the necessity of legislation⁸.

This hierarchical order between the dialectic and the search for the definition of the statesman, wherein Plato values the first as higher than the second, can be seen to be parallel to Odysseus' adventure in Homer's *Odyssey*. On the one hand we have the strong desire of Odysseus to return to his native land, the island of Ithaca. On the other hand, the experience and the knowledge he acquires from his

1. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV 2, 1004 b 1-22.

2. PLATO, *Sophist*, 253 e. CH. PERELMAN, «La méthode dialectique et le rôle de l'interlocuteur dans le dialogue», *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 60, 1955, 26-31, 30.

3. PLATO, *Sophist*, 227 a-b; *Laws*, IV 712 a.

4. PLATO, *Laws*, I 647 c-d.

5. *Ibid*, V 733 e.

6. PLATO, *Statesman*, 286 e-287 a.

7. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII 3, 1146 b 7-8; *Metaphysics*, II 1, 995 a 24 - b 5.

8. PLATO, *Statesman*, 294 c-d.



long, laborious, and beautiful journey, undertaken because of Ithaca, can be seen as parallel to the main purpose of the *Statesman*. Thus the dialectic is analogous to the journey itself, just as the search for the concept of the statesman is analogous to the desire to return to Ithaca. This idea of the *Odyssey* has been rendered by a modern Greek poet, as follows¹:

Keep Ithaca always in your mind.
 Arriving there is what you're destined for.
 But don't hurry the journey at all.
 Better if it lasts for years,
 so you're old by the time you reach the island,
 wealthy with all you've gained on the way,
 not expecting Ithaca to make you rich.

Ithaca gave you the marvelous journey.
 Without her you wouldn't have set out.
 She has nothing left to give you now.

And if you find her poor, Ithaca won't have fooled you.
 Wise as you will have become, so full of experience,
 you'll have understood by then what these Ithacas mean.

After we have concluded that the primary aim of the dialogue was to exhibit, to demonstrate, to present and to clarify the dialectic rather than to define the term "statesman", the next step is to understand what Plato means by "dialectic", given that there are several kinds of it in the history of ideas². Here we must note that the grasp of the essence of the statesman is only one of the infinite number of results that can be achieved by it. It is exactly this unlimited ability that proves its superiority as opposed to reaching any particular definition, the rightness of which might continue to remain at issue. The problem of uncertainty becomes more acute when we bear in mind that words can mean different things in various places and can change their meaning throughout time. But even if we are mistaken in considering dialectic to be the supreme aim of the dialogue, it is still necessary for us to have-if not a real conception-at least an inkling of what role dialectic has in Plato's thought, for it is universally supposed to be one of the main features of the

1. C.P. CAVAFY, *Collected Poems*, Trans. by E. Keeley and Ph. Sherrard, ed. by George Savidis, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968 [1963]), 66-69.

2. G. MARTIN, *General Metaphysics*, *op. cit.*, 322.



dialogue. To put it simply, if we could know with absolute certainty what Plato intended to do, it would be easier to decide whether or not he has achieved his purpose.

Another possibility remains. Perhaps we are not facing a real alternative between the search for the definition of the statesman and the exercise of dialectic, because dialectic deals with the search for definition in general, and so the search for the statesman's definition may be considered just one particular case, a distinct application of dialectic. But perhaps a clear distinction of these notions is very difficult or even impossible to achieve. Thus it seems indispensable to inquire carefully into what Plato means by this term, because it will only then become possible to understand what he intended. In other words, we can penetrate Plato's designs only after we have fulfilled the condition of knowing exactly the kind of dialectic he wished to exercise. We cannot here write an essay on Plato's dialectic, for this would be well beyond the scope of this paper and fill far more than one volume. Moreover there already exist many valuable treatises on this highly significant subject. It is noteworthy here that in the *Statesman*, and not in the *Sophist*, Plato makes the claim that it is better to become more of a dialectician than to search for a single definition, although it is said in the *Sophist* that the division "by kinds", which he does there, is dialectic. At any rate, the fact that he here emphasizes dialectic as one of the most important things in the dialogue and in philosophy in general makes the qualitative superiority of the *Statesman* undeniable as Plato himself asserts¹. Dialectic is the means by which Plato evaluates and classifies things generally², and, as we shall hope to show, it is by means of the dialectic that he evaluates and classifies the six constitutions as well.

III. Plato's Dialectic

Here we will attempt to investigate very briefly the main principles of dialectic in Plato's thought. The purpose is not only to find out what dialectic is, but also to learn how it can be practised considering that dialectic is the core and most valuable manifestation of true philosophy³. Kant, then, is probably correct, when he says that

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 284 c 6.

2. J. MOREAU, «Aristote et la dialectique Platonicienne», in: *Aristotle on Dialectic*, op. cit., 80-90, 84, 86. L. ELDERS, «The Topics and the Platonic Theory of Principles of Being», in: *Aristotle on Dialectic*, op. cit., 126-137, 126.

3. PLATO, *Sophist*, 253d-e.



philosophy cannot be learned; the very most we can do is to learn to philosophize¹. From this point of view the definition of philosophy as an intellectual activity², which is "always on the way"³, is quite accurate. The Platonic dialectic revealed itself in the following species: 1) forming an hypothesis; 2) a synthesis and division "by kinds" 3) to ask and to answer; 4) to exact an account of the essence of each thing; 5) to view things in their mutual connection. The last three are rather descriptive. We shall now examine briefly all these types in the reverse order.

• III A. *The Connection of Things to Each Other and to the Due Measure*

A dialectician is one who can view things in their mutual connection. Everything, and especially the studies, may not be viewed as disconnected, but one must come to a comprehensive survey of their affinities with one another and with truth itself⁴. The capture of the kinship of the logical propositions and of the speeches in general is indispensable for anyone to be drawn toward philosophy⁵. Here it is important to note the double relationship of all things to each other and to the truth, which is the due measure, as we shall further see, is in the exposure of the "measurement". With its aid, people can distinguish good and bad⁶. Thus it is a well expressed opinion that dialecticians see things in the shape of a pyramid, at the top which is the idea of the Good⁷. This kind of dialectic corresponds to the "measurement" (μετρητική).

1. I. KANT, *Kritik der reinen Verunft*, B 541-542, (Akademie-Ausgabe).

2. L. WITTGENSTEIN, *Tractatus*, 4: 112; M. BERGSON, *L'évolution créatrice*, (Paris: 1963), 193; SEXTUS EMPIRICUS, *Adversus Mathematicos*, X, 169.

3. K. JASPERS, *Einführung in die Philosophie*, (München: 1950), 100ff.

4. PLATO, *Republic*, VII 537 c; 531 b-d.

5. PLATO, *Republic*, VI 494d-e; *Sophist*, 227 a-b; *Statesman*, 303 c; *Phaedo*, 84 a-b.

6. PLATO, *Statesman*, 283 c.

7. H. J. KRAEMER, «Über den Zusammenhang von Prinzipienlehre und Dialektik bei Platon: Zur Definition des Dialektikers (*Poltieia*, 534 b-c)», in: *Das Problem der Ungeschriebenen Lehre Platons*. (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1972), 394-448, 405.



III B. Account of the Essence

A dialectician is one who can give an account of the essence of each thing¹. The essence (οὐσία) is mainly attributed to the ideas. At the top of their hierarchy there is the idea of the Good, which provides the essence in all entities and still "transcends the 'ousia' in dignity and power"². Here we must note that not only ideas have ousia, but also the sensible things, though in quite a different way³. The ousia presupposes the existence of the objects, to which it is applied⁴. The logos of ousia might, perhaps, not be very different from the logos of the name,⁵ although the logos is distinct from the name⁶. Also, in Aristotle "name" and "thing" do not necessarily coincide⁷. The dialectician must be able to receive an account of the essence of each thing. One, who is unable to do this, cannot also render an account to anybody else, because he does not possess it: the possession presupposes the receipt⁸. We should here emphasize that to receive an account of the essence is more difficult and more important than to render it, because it is impossible to teach something satisfactorily, without having it previously well understood. We must first be able to grasp the very essence of each thing, i. e., what it is and what is its true definition, in order to be able to communicate it to others. This is self evident. According to Aristotle, in order to know, we must first find out the first causes⁹. For Plato, the cause of knowledge as well as of being of everything are the ideas and especially the idea of the Good¹⁰, which has been identified with the

1. PLATO, *Republic*, VII 534 b.

2. PLATO, *Republic*, VI 509 b.

3. PLATO, *Philebus*, 27 b 8-9; Γ. ΚΟΥΜΑΚΗΣ, «Τὸ πρόβλημα τῆς ιδέας τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ εἰς τὴν Πολιτείαν τοῦ Πλάτωνος», in: *Πλάτων* 23, 1971, 108-224.

4. R. LORIOUX, *L'Être et la Forme selon Platon: Essai sur la Dialectique Platonicienne*, (Bruxelles: Desilee de Brouwer, 1955), 34.

5. PLATO, *Statesman*, 267 a.

6. PLATO, *Sophist*, 221 b; 244 d; 262 a; *VII Letter*, 342 a-b; *Statesman*, 271 c.

7. Γ. ΚΟΥΜΑΚΗΣ, «Ὄνομα καὶ πράγμα στὸν Ἀριστοτέλη», in: *Language and Reality, Proceedings of the Second International Symposium of Philosophy*, Ed. by K. Boudouris (Athens 1984), 220-225.

8. PLATO, *Republic*, VII 534 b; *Statesman*, 286 a 5.

9. ARISTOTLE, *Physics*, I 1, 184 a 10-15; II 3, 194 b 16-23.

10. PLATO, *Republic*, VI 509 b.



“one”¹. To receive and to give an account of the essence of each thing is an echo of Socrates’ persistent demand to give an account of everything about which we speak².

III. C. Question and Answer

A dialectician is one who knows how to both ask and answer questions³. This is the most general definition of dialectic, which must possess the highest rank among all studies in an educational program and is called, therefore, a “coping stone”⁴. The questions and answers that constitute dialectic concern the account of the essence (λόγος τῆς οὐσίας)⁵. This presupposes a dialogue, which has the same etymological roots with dialectic; both derive from the verb “dialegethai”, which means “enter into conversation” with someone. Thus dialectic is the power to talk⁶. This discussion need not actually be with someone else, for the soul can enter into dialogue with itself. This special kind of conversation is called thought (dianoia)⁷. So when the soul thinks of something, it is doing nothing other than talking with itself by asking and answering questions⁸.

The dialectic is performed in a discontinuous form “as opposed to the oral harangue and the written discourse,” and in this way it becomes a “conversational method”⁹. If this statement is true, then we are encouraged to better understand the words of Plato, when he alleges that he hasn’t composed any work about philosophy with the justification that it cannot be put into words like other studies, but the acquaintance with it comes after a long period of “attendance and instruction” in the subject¹⁰. Thus we learn the truth and the falsehood of any essence by “constant practice through a long time”¹¹.

1. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, I 6, 988 a 10-11; XII 10, 1075 a 35-38; XIV 4, 1091 b 14-16; cf. H. J. KRAEMER, *Über den Zusammenhang...*, op. cit., 432, 415.

2. PLATO, *Protagoras*, 336 c; *Phaedo*, 78 c, 95 d; *Sophist*, 221 b; 230 a; *Theaetetus*, 175 c.

3. PLATO, *Cratylus*, 330 c.

4. PLATO, *Republic*, VII 534 d-e.

5. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 78 d, 75 c-d.

6. PLATO, *Parmenides*, 135 c.

7. PLATO, *Sophist*, 263 e; 264 a.

8. PLATO, *Theaetetus*, 183 e-190 a.

9. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's...* op. cit., 77.

10. PLATO, *VII Letter*, 341 c.

11. *Ibid*, 344 b.



Philosophy cannot be written because in that form it can be read continuously; but its very essence is to be discontinuous by asking and answering questions. Philosophy cannot be said at all; one must create it by thinking.

If we now ask which element is more important, the question or the answer, I think we can say without much hesitation or reserve that it is the question. Plato himself defines the dialectician elsewhere as one who is able to formulate questions¹. But one could not find a definition of the dialectician as one who is able to give answers. This is reasonable when we think that his philosophy is aporetic, for it usually ends in doubts² like that of Descartes³. The view that to ask questions is more important than to answer them has been adopted by many philosophers⁴. We have already seen that Plato often could not find the answer for those things for which he searched⁵. Moreover, Plato in *Meno* presents the thoroughly uneducated slave as providing right answers⁶. The question that now arises is whether Plato could say that this slave was philosophizing, just because he was able to answer these simple questions. The answer would be negative, I think, because as he himself says, one who cannot know how to talk (*dialegesthai*) cannot define anything, and in that particular case, the rhetoric⁷. He must be able to give as far as he can, a definition, i.e. to give account of the essence in order to be a dialectician, as we said before. Dialectic must not be confused with the eristic (wrangling)⁸ that is attributed to the sophists⁹.

III. D. Synthesis and Diaeresis (Collection and Division)

A dialectician is one who can do synthesis and division in which the "one" and the "many" are involved¹⁰. This kind of dialectic is

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1. PLATO, *Cratylus*, 398 d.
 2. Γ. ΚΟΥΜΑΚΗΣ, *Εισαγωγή στη φιλοσοφία* (Αθήνα 1993 [1984]), 63-65.
 3. R. DESCARTES, *Discourse de la methode*, Greek Translation, (Athens: 1976), 31-33.
 4. M. HEIDEGGER, *Τί είναι φιλοσοφία*, (*Was ist Philosophie*), 102.
 5. PLATO, *Meno*, 74 a.
 6. *Ibid*, 82 b-e.
 7. PLATO, *Phaidrus*, 269 b.
 8. PLATO, *Republic*, V 454 a; *Philebus*, 17 a.
 9. PLATO, *Sophist*, 226 a; 231 e.
 10. PLATO, *Phaidrus* 266 b; 249 b-c; 252 b-a; 253 c-d; 259 e; *Theaetetus*, 230 c; *Philebus*, 23 b; 25 a; *Phaedo*, 101e.



developed and systematically carried out in his later dialogues, although some signs of it can be located mainly in the earlier ones as well as in the *Republic*, and particularly in the upward and downward paths in the divided line (511b)¹.

Two kinds of division must be distinguished: by parts (*κατὰ μέρος*), and by kinds or species (*κατὰ εἶδος*). Dialectic consists only in the second art of diaeresis², which is an operation opposite of synthesis³. Martin Heidegger interprets Plato as follows: "Here the 'σύν' has a purely apophantical signification and means letting something be seen in its togetherness with something, letting it be seen as something...⁴". "In the logos an entity is manifest and with a view to this entity the words are put together in one verbal whole."⁵ Aristotle also makes wide use of the synthesis and diaeresis⁶. Heidegger interprets him this way: "Every assertion, whether it affirms or denies, whether it is true or false, is synthesis and diaeresis equiprimordially. To exhibit anything is to take it together and take it apart"⁷.

This kind of dialectic is mainly used in searching for definitions⁸. This theme predominates in the *Sophist* and the *Statesman*⁹ but also in the *Parmenides*, where the hypothesis procedure is used. The final purpose is also the definition. This is evident when Plato says that presupposition for anyone to be able to define each idea is the dialectical exercises¹⁰. But also the other kinds of dialectic—that we have already exposed—have the same purpose: the definition. This concern of Plato, namely the searching for definitions is manifested also and mainly in his earliest dialogues by putting the question, what is virtue, what is bravery, etc. This ontological and gnosis-theoretical question is also according to Aristotle the fundamental issue of phi-

1. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 163.

2. PLATO, *Sophist*, 253 d; *Republic* V 454 a.

3. R. ROBINSON, «Hypothesis in the Republic» in: *Plato, A Collection of Critical Essays I: Metaphysics and Epistemology*, (New York: Anchor Books, 1971), 97-132, 114.

4. M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, Trans. by J. Macquarrie and E. Robinson, (New York: Harper and Row, 1962) 33.

5. *Ibid.*, 159.

6. ARISTOTLE, *Topics*, VI 14, 151 a 20-22; *Metaphysics*, XIV5, 1092a 25-27, V 4, 1027 b 18-22, XI 11, 1067 b 25-28.

7. M. HEIDEGGER, *Being and Time*, 159.

8. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 277 b 6-7, 265 d.

9. J. KLEIN, *Plato's Trilogy, Theaetetus, the Sophist and the Statesman*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 5.

10. PLATO, *Parmenides*, 135 b-d.



osophy in general¹. Thus the chief aim of the dialectic seems to be the inquiry concerning the definition of everything.² Consequently, the ability to be a dialectician about everything as Plato claims³ and Aristotle confirms⁴, is about the same with that to find out the definition of everything. Here is a universality postulated, which is for both Plato and Aristotle the main characteristic of the philosophy⁵.

After these general considerations about the essence and the purpose of the use of synthesis and diaeresis, we have now to turn to the details, so that the problem will be more elucidated. This kind of dialectic and that kind of hypothesis are the hardest to understand and consequently the most difficult to state accurately: when Plato was asked to give some further explanations pertaining to the way one can practise division, he refuses⁶. Throughout his life, Plato exhibited a tendency, not to display but rather to almost hide and keep secret his deepest and most essential thoughts. It is a problem that will be encountered later.

At this point we shall try to reveal the theoretical background and the main principles of dialectic that Plato had in mind but never expressed clearly enough, perhaps due to great distance in time that separates us from his work. Before the exposition of the theory, we must decide which comes first: the synthesis or the diaeresis. One answer that has been traditionally offered is that "the Division should be preceded by a collection to fix upon the genus we are to divide"⁷. And elsewhere: "The division is a downward process from the genus to the definition of a species"⁸.

It could also be equally well argued that the reverse course should be adopted, because, in order to have a concept of the genus, we must first know its species. The genus corresponds to the whole and the

1. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, VII 8, 1028b 2-7.

2. PLATO, *Phaidrus*, 277b; *Republic*, VII 533 b; Cf. H. G. GADAMER, *The Idea of the Good in Platonic Aristotelian Philosophy*, Trans. by P. Ch. Smith, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986), 84.

3. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 d.

4. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV 2, 1004 b 20-21.

5. *Ibid*, 1004 a 3 - b 1.

6. PLATO, *Statesman*, 263b; Cf. H. GUNDERT, *Dialog und Dialektik*, 194.

7. F. M. CORNFORD, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge, The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato*. (Indianapolis: Bobbs — Merrill Educational Pub., 1980 [1952]), 186.

8. *Ibid*, 184; R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 165.



species to its parts¹. Therefore the question arises: which must take precedence, the whole or its parts? Aristotle could not give a clear answer to this problem². The whole is the idea or the principle and the parts are the particular sensible things. The procedure from the general idea to the particular is deduction, while the reverse course is induction. We cannot easily say which of these two ways must be followed. We must keep in mind that both Plato and Aristotle were in doubt about this issue, as Aristotle says: "We must notice, however, the difference between argument from origins and arguments toward origins. For indeed Plato was right to be puzzled about this, when he used to ask if the argument set out from the origins or led toward them—just as on a race course the path may go from the starting-line to the far end, or back again"³. I think the right solution of the upward and downward path has been given by Heraclitus who in a somewhat dialectical spirit said: "A road up and a road down is one and the same"⁴. This means that a definitive answer about it cannot be given with certainty. Anyway, we begin with division because Plato gives it grave importance and treats it at length.

Here we endeavor to reconstruct and clearly expose, as far as it is possible, Plato's theory on synthesis and division "by kinds" and "by parts". Dialectic consists of synthesis and diaeresis "by kinds" and, not "by parts". But because the diaeresis "by parts" is a presupposition for the synthesis, as we shall see, we are obliged to analyse this kind of division, also. In order to trace the main principles of his theory, we have in our disposition two things: 1) the examples Plato gives and 2) some instructions which are dispersed here and there.

Examples and general instructions or principles constitute two opposing ways of thought, namely induction and deduction (ἐπαγωγή ἢ καὶ παραγωγή). As Aristotle reports, Plato was uncertain whether the argument should begin from first principles or concrete things, i.e. whether we are on the way from or towards first principles⁵. I will confine myself to two examples: the division of mankind and

1. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV 24, 1023 b 12-19.

2. G. KOUMAKIS, «Ethik und Politik bei Aristoteles», in: *Dodone*, Ioannina, 1979, 55-72, 64.

3. ARISTOTLE, *Nicomachean Ethics*, I 4, 1095 a 31-b 3, Trans. T. IRWIN, (Indianapolis: Hackett Pub. Co., 1985), 6.

4. T. M. ROBINSON (Ed.), *Heraclitus, Fragments*, (Toronto: Toronto University Press, 1987), 60.

5. ARISTOTLE, *Nicom. Ethics*, I 4, 1095 a 31-b2.



that of number. If we divide these only into parts and not simultaneously into kinds, we have the following results: mankind is divided into Greeks and Barbarians, i.e. non-Greeks, while number is divided into 10.000 and all other numbers. If, on the contrary, we divide them into kinds, we find the following distinctions: male and female for mankind and odd and even for number. Plato makes the following remarks in order to clarify the two types of division: "A division setting Lydians or Phrygians or any other peoples in contradistinction to all the rest can only be made, when a man fails to arrive at a true division into two groups, each of which after separation is not only a portion of the whole class to be divided but also a real subdivision of it." (γένος ἅμα καὶ μέρος)¹. Now it would be useful to gather together some hints Plato gives on the method of division and synthesis.

1. Dialectic, which is the pure and true portion of philosophy, consists mainly of synthesis and diaeresis. Division according to kind means not taking the same thing for a different one or vice versa. This is the business of dialectic method².

2. There can be two methods of dialectic, i.e. of making synthesis and diaeresis: the longer and the shorter way³. This does not mean that the longer way is the correct dialectic and the shorter way is incorrect as one might think⁴. The 'longer' and 'shorter' way can apply to two things: a) their relationship to each other, and b) the connection to the due measure (πρὸς τὸ πρέπον, τὸ δέον)⁵. The right length must be concordant with the true measure, neither longer nor shorter. It is of no account if the ways are longer or shorter in relation to each other⁶.

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 262 c-e. Translated by I. R. Skemp. For an analysis of other examples see: S. BENARDETE, 'Eidos and diaeresis in Plato's *Statesman*', in: *Philologus* 107, 3/4, 1963, 193-226. N. HARTMANN, 'Zur Lehre vom Eidos bei Platon und Aristoteles', in: *Kleinere Schriften*, vol. II, Berlin, de Gruyter, 1957, 159-164. H. J. KRAEMER, 'Aristoteles und die akademische Eidoslehre. Zur Geschichte des Universalienproblems im Platonismus', in: *Archiv fuer Geschichte der Philosophie*, 55, 1973, 119-190. K. GAISER, *Platons ungeschriebene Lehre*. E. Klett Verlag, Stuttgart 1963, 125ff.

2. PLATO, *Sophist* 253 d-e, *Statesman* 285 a-c, *Phaedrus* 265 d - 266 c.

3. PLATO, *Statesman*, 263 a 6; 265 a, 266 e, 286 b-c; *Republic*, VI 504 b-e; IV, 435d.

4. P. ERUTIGER, *Les mythes de Platon*, Arno Press, New York 1976 (Paris 1930), 89.

5. PLATO, *Statesman*, 286 c-d.

6. *Ibid.*, 286 d - 287 a.



3. Through dialectic we discover knowledge (εὐρετικώτεροι)¹.

4. Dialectic is like the idea of Good, i.e. the instrument, whereby everyone apprehends². Through it we acquire knowledge with the utmost precision and clarity³. From this we can draw the conclusion that dialectic and the idea of Good are identical⁴. This is also affirmed by the fact that through dialectic we reach towards the idea of Good. Moreover, the Greek verb ἀφίστασθαι or προαφίστασθαι (to desist, relinquish, forsake) is repeated several times in different contexts. In any case the meaning is that dialectic and the idea of Good are the same thing. For example: a) we do not relinquish our work, until we apprehend by thought itself the nature of Good in itself⁵. b) we do not desist until we find something out⁶. This perseverance presupposes courage⁷ without indulgence (μαλθακότης)⁸. c) we must not forsake our task until we see clearly all the true differences which exist in the whole class⁹. The identification of dialectic with Good also results from this. Plato says that through dialectic we discover the cause of being¹⁰. The idea of Good is also the cause of all being i.e. of all right and good things¹¹. In an other work I will demonstrate that dialectic is identical with the idea of Good.

5. Division must always be made down the middle, so we obtain equal parts from it.¹² But we must not forget that equality has the following three meanings: geometrical, harmonious and arithmetical. It is also possible, after division, to have on the one hand a kind (εἶδος) with a defined name, and on the other hand many parts with no common name. However, all these parts together must be equal to the kind (ἀντίσταθμον)¹³. Otherwise, if the two sides are not equal, we have division only into parts rather than kinds¹⁴. In this case we

1. *Ibid*, 286 e 2.

2. PLATO, *Republic*, Z 518 c.

3. *Ibid*, VI 504 d - 505 a.

4. *Ibid*, VII 532 a.

5. *Ibid*, VII 532 a-b.

6. PLATO, *Laws*, XII 960 e.

7. *Ibid*, VII 797 a 4.

8. PLATO, *Sophist*, 241 b 4; *Phaedo*, 85 c5-6.

9. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 b.

10. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 108 b; *Republic*, VI 509 b.

11. PLATO, *Republic*, VII 517 c.

12. PLATO, *Statesman*, 262 b, 265 a.

13. PLATO, *Sophist*, 223 b-c.

14. PLATO, *Statesman*, 262 d-e.



divide a small class from a large one and go faster than we ought¹. This is the shorter way². It must be remarked here that the right way can be longer than the shorter one or vice versa, but it may be neither longer nor shorter than the due measure (τοῦ δέοντος). Accordingly, "we should always divide down the middle where possible". From this division we accidentally have the longer way here (*Statesman* 265a-b). If we go more quickly or more slowly than we should, we have the shorter and the longer way respectively³.

6 The two types of division are not merely different in meaning but are also opposed to each other, although they use the same terms such as measurement (μετρητική), love (ἔρως) and equality (ἰσότης)⁴. It is important to notice that the same terms are used to designate different things as we have seen above, while it is also possible to state the same thing in different words⁵. These are called homonyms (ὁμώνυμα) and synonyms (συνώνυμα) respectively⁶.

7. Division into kinds implies division into parts but not vice versa; division into parts is not necessarily division into kinds⁷.

8. Division into kinds is not always easy or possible, because it must be made according to the following natural partition. Division into parts is on the contrary always or nearly always possible, because the whole can be cut into many pieces, as we "attempt to hack off parts like a clumsy butcher"⁸.

9. Division into kinds can go into subdivisions, as Plato often demonstrates. This procedure, however, cannot be infinite, because at some point we reach an indivisible kind (ἄτμητον)⁹.

10. Plato clearly shows the negative consequences of not distinguishing between division into kinds and into parts. If, therefore, we are not trained to divide into kinds, when we do so, the result is that

1. *Ibid*, 265 a, 262 a 8.

2. *Ibid*, 266 e 1.

3. PLATO, *Philebus*, 17 a 1-2: θᾶπτον καὶ βραδύτερον τοῦ δέοντος.

4. PLATO, *Statesman*, 284 e - 285 b; *Phaedrus*, 265 e - 266 a; *Laws*, VI 757 b; *Gorgias*, 508 a.

5. PLATO, *Statesman*, 261 a; *Cratylus*, 439 a; cf. J. DERBOLAV, *Platons Sprachphilosophie im Kratylus und in den spaeteren Schriften*, WBG, Darmstadt 1972.

6. ARISTOTLE, *Categ.*, 1a, 1, 1-10.

7. PLATO, *Statesman*, 263 b7-10; 262a8, b2, e7.

8. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 265 e (Trans. R. Hackforth); *Philebus*, 14 e; *Euthydemus*, 301 d.

9. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 277b 7; *Sophist*, 229d.



we judge substantially different things to be of a like nature. If, on the contrary, we do not divide things into parts when we should, we have the opposite result: we judge things to be different, although they are of the same nature¹.

It is useful here to illustrate this dialectic norm with an example and with the hypotheses of *Parmenides* in particular. I rely of course on the findings of my dissertation². Each of the first four hypotheses are literally: if one is (εἰ ἓν ἐστίν). In fact they are still four; otherwise we could also say, from another perspective, that there are five (and on the whole nine) hypotheses, because the third (155e) hypothesis is the synthesis of the first and second. The other four are: if the one is not (εἰ ἓν μὴ ἔστιν). Here division into kinds is not when we say that the first four hypotheses are the same as each other and that the other four are also similar among themselves. This is not true, because only some of them, and in particular the first half of each group, are the same, while the remaining two are not only different but also contradictory.

Thus the first hypothesis "if one is" means "if one is one", while the second "if one is" means "if one exists". Here we have the *one* and the *being* and so the one is two, i.e. many and consequently not one alone (142e-143a). So the second hypothesis means: if one is not one. Consequently the first hypothesis contradicts the second, although it seems the same. On the contrary, the second: "if one is", meaning if one exists, i.e. "if one is not one", as we have already seen above, is the same as the sixth: "if one is not one" (160 b-c).

Thus, if we do not divide things into kinds, they seem to be the same, while in fact they are completely different. To stay with our example, this sentence means that we consider the first two hypotheses to be the same, although they are quite different. If however we do not divide things into parts, we commit the opposite error. Thus we take the second hypothesis to be different from the sixth one, although they are the same. This means that we mistakenly do not divide the second and sixth hypotheses into kinds as we should. In other words we take this division to be into kinds, while in fact it is only into parts. Now, the second hypothesis is different from the seventh (163c) "if one does not exist", just as the first is from the

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 a.

2. G. KOUMAKIS, *Platons Parmenides. Zum Problem seiner Interpretation*, Bouvier Verlag, Bonn 1971, 109-129.



sixth (160b). In this case the division into parts coincides with that into kinds (τὸ μέρος ἅμα εἶδος ἐχέτω)¹.

11. The method of synthesis and division involves ideas. Thus in division, the downward dialectic path, we meet ideas². The same thing happens with synthesis or collection, where we ascend from many things to the one idea³. The one and the many play a significant role in Platonic dialectic⁴. The one which is the idea, however, is divided into many (tangible) things⁵. Aristotle also says that in dialectic everything is reduced to one and many⁶. It must be noted, too, that in most cases the two kinds of dialectic go together. This means that the hypothesis procedure contains both collection and division, as we have seen above in *Parmenides* and as Plato explicitly says (ἐὰν τὰς ὑποθέσεις τὰς πρώτας διέλητε)⁷.

12. Plato gives an important view on dialectic in general: it is the best way to acquire knowledge. Without it one is left desolate and helpless, i.e. unable to discover anything concerning knowledge. It is a method not very difficult to indicate but most difficult to employ. "It is indeed the instrument, through which every discovery ever made in the sphere of the arts and sciences has been brought to light"⁸. The measurement (μετρητική) which is an essential point of dialectic is involved in all that is created. "For all activities directed by arts involve measurement in some form or other"⁹. This is perhaps the reason Plato says that the universe is a product of art¹⁰. This means that dialectic is an art, the greatest of all. Its product is

1. PLATO, *Statesman*, 263 b 7-10; 262 a 8, b 2, e 7; *Philebus*, 14 e 1 (μέρη καὶ ἅμα μέλη).

2. PLATO, *Statesman*, 262 a 7 - b 7, *Phaedrus*, 273 e.

3. PLATO, *Sophist*, 253 d, *Theaetetus*, 203 c; cf. F. M. CORNFORD, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge. The Theaetetus and the Sophist of Plato*. Indianapolis B. M. Educational Publishing, 1980 (1957), 186.

4. PLATO, *Philebus* 15 d-e; 18 c-d; cf. J. STENZEL, *Zahl und Gestalt bei Platon und Aristoteles*, Leipzig 1933, 11. H.G. GADAMER, *The Idea of Good in Platonic Aristotelian Philosophy*, Trans. P.C. Smith, New Haven, Yale University Press 1986, 92.

5. PLATO, *Phaedrus*, 249b-c, cf. D. ROSS, *Plato's Theory of Ideas*, Oxford 1951. G. MARTIN, *Platons Ideenlehre*, Berlin 1972.

6. ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, III 2, 1004 b26-34.

7. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 107 b 5-8.

8. PLATO, *Philebus*, 16 b-c, Trans. R. HACKFORTH.

9. PLATO, *Statesman*, 285 a. For the measurement in Plato, see M. J. CRUZ, 'Méthodes d'exploitation et la juste mesure dans le *Politique*', in: *Reading the Statesman*, Ed. J. Row, Akademie Verlag 1995.

10. PLATO, *Timaeus*, 33 d 1.



knowledge of the universe. However, the thinker and his thought are the same, i.e. the thinking being should be assimilated to the thought (τῷ κατανοουμένῳ τὸ κατανοοῦν ἑξομοιωῶσαι)¹. Thus dialectic, universe, mind (νοῦς), Good and one are different names for the same thing.

13. In dialectic we must see "not merely that the one that we started with is a one and an unlimited many, but also just how many it is...", we must not proceed from one straightaway to an infinite number, "allowing the intermediates to escape us, whereas it is the recognition of those intermediates that makes all the difference between a philosophical and a contentious discussion", (διαλεκτική - ἐριστική)². Plato insists that we must in any case be able to avoid confusing dialectic and eristic in the hypothesis procedure³.

14. When Plato says that it is extremely difficult for anyone to make use of dialectic, he means that it is difficult to discover clarity (τὸ σαφές), i.e. to know the truth⁴. As we saw above, it is possible to say that the creator, i.e. the father of the universe (κόσμος), is the mind (νοῦς) and consequently dialectic. On this subject Plato says that it is difficult to discover the father of the universe, "and even if we found him, to tell of him to all men would be impossible"⁵. This means that it is very difficult (ἔργον) to discover dialectic, and impossible to teach it to everybody as not everyone can learn it. Lastly, it must be said that synthesis and division are also called combination and separation, i.e. the ideas are combined and separated (συγκρίνεσθαι-διακρίνεσθαι, σύγκρισις-διάκρισις)⁶.

III E. Hypothesis

Dialectic in the form of hypothesis is of special interest. It is perhaps the best known kind of dialectic but the hardest to understand. It has been used at length and can be found in almost all of Plato's works. It is the subject of the entire second part of *Parmenides*, which has been called a Gordian knot, jeu d' esprit, famous master-

1. PLATO, *Timaeus*, 90 d 4.

2. PLATO, *Philebus*, 16 d - 17 a-f.

3. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 101 d-e. For dialectic and eristic see A. NEKAMAS, Σοφιστική, ἐριστική, ἀντιλογική, διαλεκτική, στὸ: *Διαλεκτική*, Ed. K. Βουδούρης, Αθήνα 1988, 35-41.

4. *Ibid*, 85 c 3-4.

5. PLATO, *Timaeus*, 28 c, Trans. B. Jowett.

6. PLATO, *Parmenides*, 156 b 5.



piece of ancient dialectic¹. It has generally been held that Plato used hypothesis as a "method of thinking", i.e. as dialectic². In this paper I hope to show that Plato continued to use this kind of dialectic in the *Statesman*, one of his later dialogues. The hypothesis procedure involves exploration of the cause.³ The theoretical background of hypothesis and the general instructions on it are given mainly in *Phaedo* and in *Republic*⁴.

1. *Phaedo*

In *Phaedo* Plato gives some important instructions on hypothesis which concern dialectic, such as why, how and when hypothesis must be used. Hypothesis is also applied to geometry⁵, everyday language⁶ and ancient medicine⁷. A presupposition for the use of dialectic is the ignorance due to our inexperience⁸. We use it when we do not know what we are talking about⁹. Dialectic as hypothesis is an indirect way of envisaging the truth¹⁰.

Plato gives some general guidelines concerning the way to apply the method of hypothesis. The user of dialectic must first see whether the consequences resulting from the original hypothesis are in agreement with each other¹¹. This phrase has been interpreted to mean that the resulting consequences may not be contradictory; if they are, then either the hypothesis is at fault and must be rejected accordingly, or the resulting consequences (ὄρμημένα) are wrong. (The Greek word ὄρμη, ὄρμῶ is a *terminus technicus* closely connected with truth, philosophy, dialectic, logos, hypothesis)¹². Otherwise, the

1. G. KOUMAKIS, *Platons Parmenides*, *op. cit.*, 17-19.

2. R. ROBINSON, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, *op. cit.*, 223.

3. H. G. GADAMER, *Platons dialektische Ethik*, Hamburg 1986 (1931), 52, 54. H. WAGNER, *Platons Phaedon und der Beginn der Metaphysik als Wissenschaft*, in: *Kritik und Metaphysik*, ed. F. Kaulbach and J. Ritter, de Gruyter, Berlin 1966, 367-371.

4. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 100 a - 101 e; *Republic*, VI 509 d-511 e.

5. PLATO, *Meno* 86e, ARISTOTLE, *Metaphysics*, IV 2, 1005 a, 11-13.

6. R. J. BLUCK, *Plato's Meno*. (Cambridge: C.U.P., 1964 [1961]) 92.

7. GALEN, *On the Natural Faculties*, Ed. J. Brock, New York 1928, II 3, 82.

8. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 101c 9-d2.

9. PLATO, *Meno*, 87b 2-3.

10. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 99d-100a.

11. *Ibid*, 101d 1-5; cf. D. BOSTOCK, *Plato's Phaedo*, Clarendon Press,^f Oxford 1986, 169, 172.

12. PLATO, *Republic*, VI 487c 6-7; I 336b 1-2; IV 425c 1-2; VI 510d 3; *States-*



hypothesis or the consequences are true. In other words, it is asserted that the assumption and its consequences can be safe and certain, only on the condition that the latter are free from all possible contradictions. Therefore the hypothesis must preclude the possibility of self-contradiction¹. We shall examine this assertion more closely later on. When by this procedure we have arrived at a satisfactory result, i.e. the truth, no further inquiry is necessary². This means that we have achieved our purpose; in other words, when we have found what we were searching for, i. e. the truth, we no longer need to hypothesise on this particular matter. The safety of the hypothesis does not imply that it is safe as such. On the contrary, we are confronted with an unsafe assumption³. The hypothesis as such cannot be safe, because it is merely an assumption and not a categorical fact. It is the method of hypothesis itself which is safe. If we start from Socrates' statement, that we know only that we know nothing (ἐν οἷδα ἔτι οὐδὲν οἷδα), then nothing can be stated categorically. In this case we can speak of something only conditionally, so hypothesis is proved to be the only safe and certain way in which we can express something without being in danger of making a mistake. Plato describes the procedure of hypothesis as follows:

"You ...would hold fast to the security of your hypothesis and make your answers accordingly. If anyone should fasten upon the hypothesis itself, you would disregard him and refuse to answer until you could consider whether its consequences were mutually consistent or not. And when you had to substantiate the hypothesis itself, you would proceed in the same way, assuming whatever, more ultimate hypothesis commended itself most to you, until you reached one which was satisfactory. You would not mix the two things together by discussing both the principle - that is, if you wanted to discover any part of the truth"⁴.

According to this description we have the first or original hypothesis (ἀρχή) and the higher hypotheses which follow it and which

man, 265 a 1; 274 b 1; *Phaedo*, 100 a 2; 101 d 4, e 3; *Theaetetus*, 184 a 3-4; *Sophist*, 228 c 10 - d 1, *Protag.*, 314 b-c.

1. R. BURGER, *The Phaedo: A Platonic Labyrinth*, New Haven, Yale University Press 1984, 154-55.

2. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 107 b 5-10.

3. H. J. KRAEMER, Ueber den Zusammenhang von Prinzipienlehren, *op. cit.*, 404.

4. PLATO, *Phaedo*, 101 c-e, Trans. H. Tredennick.



must presumably be more than one¹. The final one will be the most satisfactory. The method of hypothesis is useful in order to discover something unknown. In this case we start from the first hypothesis (ἀρχή) and go to the end (τελευτή). This is the downward path. But there is also the opposite way, the upward path, which moves from the end to the principle (ἀρχή) in order to have confirmation². Plato describes these two types of dialectic path in his *Republic*.

2. *Republic*

Plato asserts that there is a great difference between the geometrical and philosophical hypothesis. Mathematicians regard mathematical objects (i.e. even and odd numbers, the triangle, the diagonal) as known. Thus they feel no obligation to render an account of them either to themselves or to others, taking for granted that their truth is obvious to everybody. "They take their start from these and pursuing the inquiry from this point on consistently, conclude with that for the investigation of which they set out"³.

On the contrary, the dialectic hypothesis is of a different nature. There assumptions are treated not as absolute beginnings but literally as hypotheses, steps and springboards⁴. The dialectic process of inquiry advances up to the first principle itself, in order to find confirmation there⁵. If however the hypothesis is proved false, then everything that results from it is invalidated⁶.

1. D. BOSTOCK, *Plato's Phaedo*, *op. cit.*, 165.

2. PLATO, *Republic*, VI 510 b.

3. *Ibid*, VI 510 c-d.

4. *Ibid*, VI 511 b-e.

5. *Ibid*, VII 533 c-d.

6. *Ibid*, IV 437 a; cf. B. ΚΑΡΑΣΜΑΝΗΣ, 'Η διαλεκτική μέθοδος και τὸ ἐπιχείρημα τῆς Πολιτείας του Πλάτωνα, στο: *Διαλεκτική*, Ed. Κ. Βουδούρης, Αθήνα 1988, 91-98, *Espec.* 95. For the dialectic in Plato, see also Κ. ΔΕΣΠΟΤΟΠΟΥΛΟΣ, Εισαγωγή στη διαλεκτική τοῦ Πλάτωνα, στο: *Διαλεκτική*, *op. cit.*, 23-24, Κ. ΧΑΤΖΗΣΤΕΦΑΝΟΥ, 'Η ἔννοια τῆς διαλεκτικῆς στὸν Πλάτωνα μὲ εἰδικότερη ἀναφορὰ στὸ Φαῖδρον, στο: *Διαλεκτική*, *op. cit.*, 60-66.

To be continued in the next issue.

