

THE TRANSCENDENT WAY OF KNOWLEDGE

TUDOR B. MUNTEANU

A critical review of *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato's Practice of Philosophical Inquiry* by Francisco J. Gonzalez (Evanston, Illinois: SPEG Studies in Historical Philosophy, Northwestern University Press, 1998).

...And the goddess greeted me kindly, and took my right hand in hers, and addressed me with these words: 'Young man, you who come to my house in the company of immortal charioteers with the mares which bear you, greetings. No ill fate has sent you to travel this road—far indeed does it lie from the steps of men—but right and justice. It is proper that you should learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, and the opinions of mortals, in which there is no true reliance. But nonetheless you shall learn these things too, how what is believed would have to be assuredly, pervading all things throughout.'¹

Plato's dialogues are fundamental to western philosophy, as Whitehead famously expressed it: 'The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato.'² Philosophical dialogue, the paradigmatic activity established by Socrates, moves toward the goal of the inquiry through dialectic, a vigorous method of debate that refines systematic reflection. Socrates used it to distinguish philosophy in relation to the true wisdom of God, and in opposition to the false 'wisdom' of man. Nevertheless, the striking contrast between the rich content and the aporetic outcome of Socratic dialogues, later developments within the Academy and outside it (for example, Neoplatonism) and the significant place of 'dialectic' in the grand systems of Kant and Hegel, with their mutually opposed goals and assumptions, require a clarification. This must include an account of the purposes and possibilities of dialectic, a discussion of the various aspects and means involved and a careful examination of its results.

¹ Parmenides' Hexameter Poem, from G.S. Kirk, J.E. Raven and M. Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge University Press, 1983).

² Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Corrected Edition (New York: The Free Press, 1978), p. 39.

The best place to start is Plato's work, and the obvious method of investigation is dialectic itself. This is the approach taken by Francisco J. Gonzalez in his excellent book on the practice described in Plato's dialogues. The author has engaged all major interpretations of Plato in a forceful debate that consolidates a new avenue of Platonic scholarship. Gonzalez resolutely called it *The Third Way* in a previous volume he edited under this title³, designating an alternative to the skeptical and dogmatic interpretations of the dialogues. Chapter One of *Dialectic and Dialogue*⁴ is a careful examination of several interpretations and their relationship with Schleiermacher's work. Special attention is given to the esotericist interpretation of the Tübingen school⁵ and to the developmentalist approach of scholars like Gregory Vlastos. Gonzalez analyzes the premises standing behind these two efforts and distances himself from the underlying assumptions, while asserting his adherence to a few basic principles, notably: faithfulness to Plato's own standpoint ('answers') as presented in the dialogues, the inseparability of the method and philosophical content of the investigation and, most importantly, a commitment to the value and autonomy of philosophy as an objective and disinterested activity.

The book's perspective follows the preliminary lines that deserve to be presented and briefly commented here. Its chapters conform to the following order of inquiry:

'(1) There are three major means employed by dialectic in its search for truth: verbal analysis, arguments and images' discussed in Chapters 3, 4 and 5 through the *Cratylus*, *Euthydemus* and the Tenth Book of the *Republic*. These means correspond to the discursive part of Plato's outline of knowledge in his *Seventh Letter* (the philosophical digression of the *Seventh Letter* is translated and analyzed in the last chapter.) '(2) This study portrays dialectic as existing between everyday (naïve) discourse and sophistic (technical) discourse.' Indeed, dialectic is in the middle of these forms of discourse, but overcomes them, as Gonzalez ascertains in Chapter 2, an examination of the *Laches* and the *Charmides*. He finds that Plato's dialectic is much closer to rhetoric than it is to eristic, because it differs from formal logical methods—developed later by

³ Francisco J. Gonzalez (ed.), *The Third Way*, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1995).

⁴ Henceforth page references to this work will be included in brackets in the text.

⁵ This approach has gathered additional momentum after the publication of Giovanni Reale's book, *Toward a New Interpretation of Plato* (Washington D.C.: Catholic University of America Press, 1997).

Aristotle, and also by the Stoic philosophers. ‘(3) This study seeks to understand the relation between dialectic in the “early” dialogues and the hypothetical method in the “middle” dialogues’ (as elaborated in chapters 6, 7 and 8 through a discussion of the *Meno*, *Phaedo* and the *Republic*.) The author's initial emphasis on the content that makes possible the dialectical movement of thought and its essential importance for philosophy implies a qualitative superiority over the hypothetical method. Dialectic can evaluate the accidental usefulness of hypotheses, a very important characteristic which separates it from modern scientific inquiry, placing dialectic in the noetic section of the Divided Line.

The entire argument stands on the epistemological account of the foundation, justification and goal of Socratic inquiry. Gonzalez confronts the paradoxical nature of Socratic knowledge—a difficult issue, and a stumbling block for many interpreters. His distinctions are extremely valuable: this knowledge is described as non-propositional, practical and reflexive. Such characteristics elucidate Socrates’ strong refutation of sophistic claims and his insistence on self-awareness. Indeed, true knowledge cannot be conveyed by definitions, but it may be experienced through recollection and investigated by reflective thinking, which aims at pure contemplation. The origin and final purpose of knowledge is the Good, instantiated through unconditional goodwill in the existential fulfilment of values. From this viewpoint, all allegations of reification and inconsistency raised against Plato look like projections of false presuppositions and superficial misunderstandings. The forms are not objects or concepts, and any consideration of a method, theory or system in Plato’s philosophy must recover the original meaning of such terms, along with the positive content uncovered by dialectic, and its capability to edify.

The author focuses on the ethical and formative aspects of Plato’s ‘early’ and ‘middle’ dialogues, through Socrates’ examination of his fellow Athenians’ intense preoccupation with education, virtue and justice. In the first part of his book, ‘Dialectic In Between Ordinary And Sophistic Discourse’, Gonzalez investigates in great detail how Socrates confronts various opinions and elaborate techniques of disputation, engaging young men who like argumentation and warriors who prefer action to debates, or respected citizens and astute sophists—but none of them can avoid his stinging probe into the hidden depths of reason, transcending habits, illusions, and the desire for money, power and fame which yields extremes.

By taking into account every aspect of the dialogues, including those pertaining to their literary form, the author argues that Socrates positively shows

how these challenges are surmounted—but his demonstration is not strictly theoretical, or technical. Virtue is manifested in Socrates' manner of inquiry about virtue, displaying the reflexive character of his practical knowledge (Chapter 2, 'Dialectic at Work in the *Laches* and the *Charmides*'). Gonzalez maintains a fundamental distinction between science and technique, on one hand, and the practical self-knowledge of philosophy, on the other: while sciences hold 'objects' such as numbers, and the arts (*techne*) produce things, the reflexive knowledge of philosophy is like the good, which can only be enacted because it is not a thing or an object. Therefore, he determines, Plato's choice of a dramatic form like the dialogue is most appropriate, even necessary, to convey Socrates' essential way of philosophizing.

I welcome this conclusion; the words theory and theatre are obviously related, through *theôria* (speculation, contemplation, spectacle) and *theaomai* (to view). The unity of seeing, thinking, knowing and acting so characteristic of the Athenian spirit is seldom noticed, but Gonzalez has not failed to emphasize it. In Chapter 3, containing an analysis of the *Cratylus*, he underlines the possibility of manifesting things by using words correctly, in opposition to pure etymology, which leads to absurdity—as shown in Socrates' ironic attempt to construct an ideal formal language. This possibility is given by an assumption of the unchanging essence of the named objects—justifying the dialectician's capability to go beyond common opinion or the formal duplication of sophistical statements, to overcome eristic, and to reach for the truth.

In the following chapter, the author explains why eristic is related to formal logic and how philosophical discourse resembles rhetoric: symbolic logic, as any similar, 'perfect' technique (like eristic) is empty of content and lacks the dialogical ability of philosophy to question, show and persuade, where even flaws have an occasional part to play in conjunction with a higher principle. The eristic brothers Euthydemus and Dyonisodorus are unable to fulfill what they claimed when Socrates asked them to convince the young Cleinias of the necessity to philosophize and to concern himself with virtue. The literary quality of Plato's dialogues is once again emphasized: the eristics are portrayed as skilled in legal warfare and the art of fighting in armour, but essentially homeless, undetermined, willing to go anywhere, like their diverging, 'universal' knowledge which is meant to defeat any contrary opinion. Their interlocutors are silenced, not persuaded, as the two brothers fail to establish anything. Because it cannot follow the upbuilding, virtuous, middle way of dialectic, eristic finds the form of the unlimited, the cause of total destruction.

Gonzalez's similar analysis of imitation and the philosophical use of images is outstanding. In Chapter 5, he describes Plato's dialogue as a form of imitation which does not try to hide its flaws, transcending itself, unlike the poetic imitation criticized by Socrates. A passage mentioned in this context illuminates how an image can express what is beyond it:

When a person sees something and thinks, 'what I now see, while striving [*bouletai*] to be like [*hoion*] something else, falls short [*endei*] and cannot be like that thing, but inferior', do we not agree that the person who thinks this must already know [*proeidota*] the thing to which he compares what he sees in saying that the latter resembles [*proseioikenai*] it, but only deficiently [*endeesterôs de echein*] (*Phaedo*, 74d9–e4)

Gonzales writes:

It is important to note the tension here: on the one hand, our idea of equality is not *derived* from sensible images insofar as it transcends anything contained in these images (thus the need for presupposing that we already have this idea and need only 'recollect' it); on the other hand, we come into explicit possession of this idea only through the perception of its images. What enables us to acquire knowledge that transcends the sensible images with which we start is a recognition of their defects, a recognition that is itself made possible by our prior possession of an implicit knowledge of the original. In general, philosophy's use of imitation is characterized by this tension between the necessity of starting with appearance and the goal of transcending appearance. Essential to this use is a recognition of deficiency. Only someone who recognizes that imitation copies nothing but an appearance quite unlike the original nature can use it to intimate what lies beyond this appearance. *This is why Socrates' critique of poetic imitation must precede his use of it.* (Gonzalez, 143-4).

This paragraph goes beyond a clarification of Socrates' criticism of the poets, the subject of many distorted interpretations. Along with an assumption of the stable essence of objects, the prior possession of an *idea* anticipates Kantian epistemology. Experience is an *occasion* to use the implicit knowledge we try to bring into expression with the discursive means we have at our disposal. Words, sentences and representations are combined to evoke common experience, to spark our inner knowledge and to relate experience to knowledge in understanding. The purpose of discursive means is to establish a place

(*chôros*) and an opportunity (*kairos*) for the occurrence of insight; dialectic uses these means to distinguish (*diairesis*, division) and gather (*synagoge*, collection), through the constant application of pre-existing knowledge, to reflect and try to grasp clearly, as the enduring movement of thought that aspires toward truth. It is the method of purification, appropriation, and ultimately, awareness.

However, an understanding of images and words might fail to occur. As Gonzalez observes, ‘reason alone seems incapable of bridging the gap’ between the nature of something imitated and its imitation (146). What manifests the truth, if not an experience, or the descriptive combination of words and representations? This happens when aspiration encounters inspiration: the author quotes to great effect a passage from the *Phaedrus* (249c4–d3), illustrating the ecstatic character of philosophy and setting the stage for the second part of the book, ‘The Method of Hypothesis’.

A hypothesis is an educated guess during an attempt at discovery. This notion, like that of *anamnesis*, appears prominently in the *Meno*, the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In Chapter 6, ‘Failed Virtue and Failed Knowledge in the *Meno*’, Gonzalez perceives the resemblance between Socrates’ inquiry into virtue and the geometry problem found in the *Meno*, noticing that many commentators have missed a peculiar detail: the answer to the problem is an irrational number. It allows us to see why questions like ‘What is the length of each side of a square having an area of eight feet?’ and ‘What is the nature of virtue?’ cannot be answered directly. The side in question can be found to measure between two and three feet, being equal to the diagonal of a square with an area of four feet. We can say what kind it is, just as we affirm that virtue is good—getting a better insight by purifying our beliefs.

This analogy illustrates the predicative character of hypotheses, as determined by Gonzalez: after gaining some acquaintance with the situation by falsifying beliefs, through trial and error, like *Meno*’s slave, one cannot express what (*ti*) something is, only how it is qualified (*poion ti*). The hypothetical method ‘assumes a relation between different properties of a thing so that, if the thing is agreed to have one, it can be concluded to have the other’ (174)⁶. The process of reasoning from hypotheses obtains the synthetic unity of a judgment. Repeating it will result in ‘true opinions’, but the goal of philosophy, what

⁶ This is essentially Kant’s description of the hypothetical judgment, see Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A73, B98, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, (New York: St. Martin’s Press), p. 109.

Socrates means by knowledge, is properly speaking, full awareness. The method of hypothesis is only the superficial, discursive, incidental aspect of dialectic, a circumstance to justify true beliefs with the insight offered by *anamnesis* (this is why science is subordinated to philosophy, and why contemplation is the purpose of philosophy). The inquiry can obtain knowledge of the subject only by an insight into its nature, the ‘cause’ of its properties, as Gonzalez interprets the expression ‘*aitias logismos*’ (‘reasoning out of the cause’).

He calls the emergence of truth resulting in true beliefs ‘inspiration from within’, identifying it with the inspiration mentioned in Chapter 5. This is contrasted with the inspiration of the poets, ‘from without’, and of the oracles who, as Plato describes them, speak the truth without knowing anything. What separates these kinds of inspiration is the dogmatic character of ‘inspiration from without’.

Plato ends the *Meno* with an important conclusion:

Socrates And the women too, I presume, Meno, call good men divine; and the Spartans, when they eulogize a good man, say—‘He is a divine person’.

Meno And to all appearance, Socrates, they are right; though perhaps our friend Anytus may be annoyed at your statement.

Socrates For my part, I care not. As for him, Meno, we will converse with him some other time. At the moment, if through all this discussion our queries and statements have been correct, virtue is found to be neither natural nor taught, but is imparted to us by a divine dispensation without understanding [*aneu nou*] in those who receive it, unless there should be somebody among the statesmen capable of making a statesman of another. And if there should be any such, he might fairly be said to be among the living what Homer says Teiresias was among the dead—‘He alone has comprehension [*hoti oios pepnutai*]; the rest are flitting shades’. In the same way he on earth, in respect of virtue, will be a real substance among shadows.

Meno I think you put it excellently, Socrates.

Socrates Then the result of our reasoning, Meno, is found to be that virtue comes to us by a divine dispensation, when it does come. But the certainty of this we shall only know when, before asking in what way virtue comes to mankind, we set about inquiring what virtue is, in and by itself. It is time now for me to go my way, but do you persuade our friend

Anytus of that whereof you are now yourself persuaded, so as to put him in a gentler mood; for if you can persuade him, you will do a good turn to the people of Athens also. (99e-100c)⁷

We are reminded that Anytus was one of Socrates' accusers—representing the politicians and the craftsmen during his trial. In a footnote related to these paragraphs, Gonzalez (who doesn't quote them) deems the inspiration possessed by statesmen as dangerous, because it is dogmatic—and could be used mindlessly. Without any doubt, history can offer us many disturbing examples of this. Nonetheless, he overlooks the last hypothesis: Socrates imagines one particular leader endowed with wisdom, who is able to educate other statesmen; like Teiresias advising Ulysses, this exceptional man would be perpetually aware, informing and guiding his kindred. Socrates' non-dogmatic conclusion means that virtue is given by grace. If good opinion is acquired through inspiration, this certain, permanent and good knowledge must *be* revelation, whose active presence in the 'one' would determine other statesmen to *become* educated. It is remarkable that Plato, realizing the weakness of the hypothetical method through the critical force of dialectic, tries to overcome it with the vigor of poetry and mythology, which contain the uncanny intimations of humanity. The similarity with the *Republic* is obvious in Plato's quotation of Homer⁸. The Good is revealed like the Sun, and the one who upholds it within his spirit is the same, uncorrupted self even in Hades, seeing everything. This ideal may be considered along with Socrates' characterization of philosophy as 'the practice of death' (*Phaedo* 81a), the harmonious purification of the soul—like a flame aspiring to burn brighter and to meet with the sun.

In Chapter 7 of *Dialectic and Dialogue*, the author examines the method of hypothesis as applied by Socrates in the *Phaedo*, to investigate the ultimate causes of being. In this last dialogue with his friends, Socrates argues for the immortality of the soul. His companions, obviously distressed by the impending event, are not satisfied with the initial arguments and tend to lose all their trust in argumentation. Gonzalez's remarks about this 'crisis' could apply just as well to the purpose of his approach, 'The Third Way':

Socrates makes the important observation that misology, like

⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 99e–100c, translated by W.R.M. Lamb (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, 1924).

⁸ See *Odyssey* 10.475 and *Republic* 514a–517b.

misanthropy, has its origin in *excessive trust*, a trust which, given the imperfect natures of both human beings and arguments, will invariably be disappointed and thereby become its opposite: absolute distrust [89d–90c]. This observation defines Socrates' very difficult project for the rest of the dialogue: he must show that there is some reliability in arguments while at the same time drawing attention to their necessary limitations. Only by thus steering a course between excessive trust and complete mistrust can this new Theseus save his companions from the Minotaur of misology. (189)

Instead of diminishing Socrates' critical sense, the nearness of death seems to sharpen it. He continues the dialogue by evoking his youthful preoccupation with the natural sciences and the ensuing disappointment with their reductionism and the illusory character of their objects. Science studies objects by analyzing their parts, but a whole is more than the addition of its parts or, as Gonzalez formulates it, the parts are necessary, not sufficient conditions of a being, so they cannot be proper causes. Socrates heard about Anaxagoras' cosmology, where the mind is posited as the fundamental principle. Since mind acts according to what is good, Socrates assumes the good is the principle of unity in plurality. To elucidate the nature of the Good and to escape the 'blinding' of the soul with illusions, he found it necessary to 'take refuge in propositions', to 'examine in them the truth of beings.'

Gonzalez translates and comments on the fragment containing Socrates' superb analogy between propositions and the image of the eclipsed sun in water, as someone would observe an eclipse to avoid blinding (*Phaedo* 99d4–100a3). The eclipse stands for the 'physical object' and its reflection corresponds to propositions. Indeed, a *phainomenon* (appearance), like an eclipsed sun, is a dazzling object that does not reveal its being—the moon is dark during an eclipse—and the reflection is like a representation to which we apply concepts. This should be compared with the narrative of the ascent [*anagô*] in the allegory of the cave⁹.

The pivotal step across the separate sections of the Divided Line is not explained very clearly in this chapter. After descending from objects to images, Socrates frames these into hypotheses through the corresponding concepts (of the dark object and its background), hoping that an inversely proportional

⁹ See *Republic* 516a–c, where Plato writes about discerning reflections in water, before the 'eyes' can gradually see beings directly.

ascension would result in knowledge. This is justified by the analogy between reflected images and the projection in memory of objects seen in perception, and the possible recollection of the Forms (*eide*) through their similarity with the distinct concepts predicated of representations. The translated portion ends with Socrates' hesitation:

But perhaps my analogy is in a way not quite accurate, for I do not at all agree that someone who examines beings in propositions is examining them in images any more than someone who examines them in things [erga]. (99e6–100a3)

The 'truth of beings' (*ontôn tên alêtheian*) is still darkened in the reflection. Gonzalez tries to solve the apparent 'disanalogy' and gets carried away by his interpretation:

The general point here seems to be that physical things are no less images than are propositions. But then *of what* are physical things images? Since both they and propositions are equally images, we can suspect that they are images of the same thing, that is 'the truth of beings'. If the 'truth of beings' is identical to the ultimate cause that Socrates has identified as the good, then both propositions and physical things are images of the good. I do not see what else physical things could be images of in the present context. (194)

The premise of this hypothesis, like the underlying assumption, is unwarranted. Socrates simply points out that the 'truth of beings' is not to be found in the concepts predicated of images any more than it is found in things. The truth of beings is in the *eide*, revealed by the light of the Good that shines throughout, showing their content; within the Good stands its own Truth as the ultimate Being, in exalted radiance. Physical things are *phainomena*, not quite 'images of the good', but shadows of their being. Like any projection, their reflection conserves the encompassing relation which cannot be seen directly in the confusion of the *phainomenon*. Concepts are empty, imagined substitutes of the *eide*, conforming to the representation of the appearance. The 'eclipse' is very startling to the eyes, and the sun behind it is covered and diffuse, but the corresponding being may be perceived through a different kind of value. To make another analogy, if a being is closer to the Good, it is also warmer (more intelligible).

The author closely follows Socrates' ensuing hypothetical argument called 'the second sailing', analyzing every step in detail. To elucidate the problem of causation, Socrates supposes the forms of things and their relation to sensible particulars: participation in the corresponding form would be the cause of a thing's 'suchness'. As Gonzalez explains, the advantage of this supposition is the avoidance of reductionism (this is a problem within the lower part of the Divided Line), for example a certain color is not sufficient for a thing to be beautiful, a thing is beautiful because it participates in beauty, but it does not give us any insight into the form. That would require going from hypotheses to intelligibles—a very difficult, or even impossible task, because concepts are abstract 'shapes' we use to predicate to other concepts.

In a hypothetical argument, the forms are used only as 'logical explanations'—like Aristotle's species or genera, although 'Socrates considers the forms to be real entities, not logical classes' (203) (the analogy presupposes their reality). Obviously, the value content—the heat—is lost in the cold reflection, which does not mean we cannot predicate it somehow. The distinction between fact and value (which Gonzalez rightly considers 'anachronistic') was upheld by G. E. Moore to prevent a naturalistic definition of the good, and members of the analytical school relegated values to the subjective domain, for their own reasons that should be obvious in this context. Moreover, all facts are true, but not all truth is fact, not all knowledge is a knowledge of facts; the transcendental truth belongs to the second domain of the Divided Line, in understanding (*dianoia*, *Verstand*).

Accordingly, Socrates proves the soul's immortality, concluding that the soul necessarily participates in life. This is a convincing judgment only because the logical relation between the terms has been explored consistently (the foreground shape participates in the background), but it shows the inherent limitations of coherent systems, like Hegel's. As Simmias puts it, 'we should sail through life on the least refutable account we can find.' (Phaedo 85c7-d4)¹⁰ It is the best one can do by hypothesizing, just as the 'second sailing' can be a useful substitute for the real thing: when the sails of a ship are not picking up enough wind, one could use the oars. Here, the author makes another disanalogous interpretation, by identifying the wind as the Good; the wind is inspiration—Socrates ironically mentions external as well as internal inspiration

¹⁰ Quoted by Gonzalez in *Dialectic and Dialogue*, Chapter 7, 'A Second Sailing in the *Phaedo*', p. 195.

(99c6-d2)—and the hard work involved in rowing is the method of hypothesis, which can only go so far.

Gonzalez warns against the possible misrepresentations of Socrates's concluding words:

...when Socrates speaks of pursuing the present account as much as is 'humanly possible', he is not talking about attaining certainty, but only about attaining *as much clarity as the present subject matter and the present method allow*. This passage must be understood in the context of Socrates' overall project in this second half of the dialogue: to counter the danger of misology which faced the interlocutors after the failure of the more dogmatic and presuming arguments of the first half [...] his elenchus in other dialogues, while providing nonpropositional insight into the natures of the different virtues well beyond what the hypothetical method can provide, cannot by means of this insight end the inquiry or offer propositional results. What Socrates is saying here is that we may come to know *as much as we need to know* to be as certain *as our nature allows us to be* of the immortality of the soul.

Thus when he speaks of 'searching no further', he is not referring to the end of dialectic as such, but rather to the end of an inquiry into a specific problem, where this inquiry is understood to be from start to finish 'hypothetical' in the sense defined above, that is, in the sense that, confined to propositions, it cannot provide us with any real insight into the natures of which it speaks (which does not detract from its ability to provide a convincing solution to a specific problem). (206-7)

Descartes has obtained such results in modern philosophy. Kant went further with a balanced, effective approach, using the hypothetical method extensively while pursuing its inherent limitations intensively. Hegel called his sophisticated, hypothetical method 'dialectic', creating a lot of confusion which is perpetuated even today. In science, Gödel and Heisenberg have obtained definitive propositional results, like those characterized in the paragraph above.

This chapter ends with a confident outlook: 'In the *Phaedo*, the hypothetical inquiry into the immortality of the soul comes to end as Socrates drinks his hemlock. One can be assured, however, that Socratic questioning is meant to continue.' (208) After being found guilty of impiety and corrupting the youth, Socrates was condemned to death during the festival of Apollo, the Sun God. His last words were profoundly meaningful: 'Crito, we owe a cock to

Aesculapius. Pay it and do not neglect it.’ (*Phaedo* 118a) In Greek mythology¹¹, Aesculapius, the Son of Apollo, *heals* the sick and *resurrects* the dead.¹²

The book culminates in Chapter 8, ‘Idealization and Destruction of Hypotheses in the *Republic*’, where the author purports to give a full account of the proper relationship between the hypothetical method and dialectic. Previously, he established that dialectic obtains practical, non-propositional reflexive knowledge, while the hypothetical method results in conclusive judgments that qualify the subject under consideration—and preserve the relationship between beings through concepts. It is not difficult to see that all the elements are in place: our practical experience with things, insights into their nature through internal inspiration leading to *anamnesis*, the analogy between beings and concepts through things and their representations, and the relations between concepts, including those standing for the nature of things and the nature (‘cause’) of all being. Gonzalez now argues that some of the results obtained during the process of inquiry implicitly assume the principle of knowledge, which is the same as the principle of being, since an insight into the essence (ontological cause) of a thing means seeing its nature, seeing something as it ‘should be’—therefore the Good is the *Idea* of all *eide*. He describes this as ‘the principle behind all idealization’, that is, the principle of all knowledge.

However, there is a distinction between the principle of knowledge, the Truth, and the principle of all being and knowledge, the Good, corresponding to Plato’s characterization of the Good as ‘beyond being’ (*epekeina tês ousias*) (*Republic* 509b). The previous account of recognition (in Chapter 5) relied on the recollection of the *idea* as the truth of being: we recognize things as such because we possess the *idea* of how their being really is and, according to Plato, there are different such beings established eternally, with their own participation in the Good, as the ultimate cause of this overall foundation and hierarchy, of its

¹¹ Apollodorus, *Library and Epitome* 3.10.3.

¹² Aesculapius, the God of healing, is associated with the the cock and the serpent, signifying awakening and resurrection. The symbol of Aesculapius, a snake coiled on a staff, was replaced by the ‘caduceus’ of the messenger God Hermes, the patron of trade (and protector of thieves, bankers and diplomats). Socrates ironically mentions Hermes in connection with the sophists. The caduceus, a winged staff with two intertwined snakes, has stood for medicine since the 16th century, when it was transferred on medical manuals by the tradesmen who owned the first printing houses—see Darren Nichols, ‘Walk Among Gods’, *Iatros* 10 No. 1 (Fall/Winter 1995), <<http://www.ualberta.ca/~msauofa/iatros/hermes.html>>. A serpent coiled on a pole healed the people of Israel (Numbers 21:8-9) and it is also associated with salvation and resurrection in John 3:14-16.

reality and revelation. It is not obvious how we also recall this order of Being. Another kind of knowledge is compatible with Socrates' analogy, justifying the missing step along the Divided Line: as soon as we manifest true beliefs in hypotheses, through internal inspiration, we feel (recall) the value of beings standing above this uncovering and exercise our knowledge through dialectic, preferring, improving and eventually overcoming the hypothesis that only mirrors their reality.

The author provides an explanation of the concepts in the dianoetic part of the Divided Line, such as mathematical concepts:

Given the original/image relation that governs the Divided Line, the objects of *dianoia* must be the originals of which sensible objects are the images, while at the same time being themselves images of the forms. What objects, then, would meet these qualifications? If we anticipate what Socrates will proceed to say about mathematics and if we relate what is said here to the hypothetical method as practiced in other dialogues, the answer is not hard to find. The objects of *dianoia* are propositions that mirror the forms in abstract (i.e. not fully explicated or understood) concepts, which, as such, acquire content only when illustrated by sensible objects. (219-20)

The content given to these concepts is in the sensible part of the representation, that is our memory of the sensation, like the light reflected in water, in Socrates' analogy. We imaginatively create (conceive) the concepts and match them with this content, through remembrance, which sparks *anamnesis*, because concepts are like *eide* as images are like things.¹³ This should be taken further, considering that sensation is the lowest type of value, and the strongest *datum*, but not the most compelling. Mathematical concepts, logically stronger, correspond to the content readily available through the senses, moral concepts—logically weaker—to ethical content, which is grasped apodictically, and religious concepts correspond to the divine of whom, after Jakob Friedrich Fries, we have an 'intimation'. The corresponding virtue is piety, and Socrates was aware of its distinct value, as shown in the *Eutyphro*.

Gonzalez proceeds to compare and criticize various interpretations of the ascent beyond hypotheses, after R. Robinson: 'The Synthesis Theory', 'The Analysis Theory', 'Axiomatization Theory', '*Phaedo* Theory', 'The Intuition

¹³ Socrates makes an explicit distinction between memory and anamnesis in the *Philebus* (34b-c). This dialogue can be considered a precursor of Max Scheler's value theory.

Theory’ and ‘The Coherence Theory’. He points out Socrates’s description of the knowledge mathematicians lack, being unable to ‘give an account’ of their hypotheses, only of ‘a tissue of things not really known’, in Socrates’ words. Gonzalez asserts (after Socrates) that knowledge cannot be obtained by adding new premises to such hypothetical systems, only by seeing beyond the system: ‘Knowledge is here a matter of depth.’ (225)

In the remaining section of this important chapter, the author considers the destructive quality of dialectic:

...there are two directions an inquiry can take. It can let be the hypotheses as parts of a self-contained system, concerning itself only with achieving consistency within this system: this is the ‘coherentist’ hypothetical method. Or the inquiry can make these hypotheses open to that which transcends them by, as Socrates puts it elsewhere, *destroying* them [*tas hupotheseis anairousa, Republic, 533c8*]: this is dialectic. (238)

As he points out, this short quote from the *Republic* effectively destroys the ‘progressive’ and ‘coherentist’ interpretations among those mentioned above. Dialectic does not prove the hypotheses by deducing them from a first principle and it is not meant to maintain the coherence of any hypothetical system.

With respect to the imperfect instantiations addressed in hypotheses, the ‘idealization’ described above is also a process of *negation*. As seen in the *Charmides* and the *Laches*, by refuting one-sided and ambiguous hypotheses the dialectician can gain insight into what the form in question really is. Since the form is what is *best* for a thing to be, this process of refutation or ‘purification’ will ultimately lead to an understanding of the *good* itself. Thus in the *Charmides*, by proceeding through the refutations and persisting in the inquiry with unfailing reason, Socrates *reveals* the good, separating it off from the appearances of the good in Charmides and Critias. (239-40)

This is a sinuous account of an act of preference that shows what is good through the immediate knowledge of value, given with heightened awareness by the clarification resulting from the improvement of hypotheses. Without this knowledge, we could not raise above the Aristotelian logic of definitions or the Cartesian rationalistic certainty mentioned by Gonzalez in his criticism of the various interpretations above (the Abstraction Theory and the Intuition Theory, respectively). He concludes by insisting on the necessity of repeating the ascent after the destruction, as we remain dependent on

hypotheses due to the temporary quality of our insight and the discursive nature of our means of expression, and by stressing once again the subordinate relationship of the hypothetical method with dialectic. Keeping this in mind, the practice of philosophy can only prepare us for the ultimate experience of revelation.

The last chapter of *Dialectic and Dialogue* contains the author's translation and interpretation of the 'philosophical digression' from Plato's *Seventh Letter* (341c-344d), which confirms the perfect consistency of this fragment with the dialogues. In this epistle, Plato explains the *means*, the method and the *purpose* of philosophy (true belief [*alethes doxa*], knowledge [*epistêmê*], insight [*nous*]) concerning its *object* (what is true being).

[341c] ...Indeed, there neither is now nor ever will be a written work [sungramma] by me on [what I seriously study]. The reason is that this subject matter cannot at all be expressed in words as other studies can, but instead, from living with the subject itself in frequent dialogue [ek pollês sunousias gignomenês peri to pragma auto kai tou suzên], suddenly [exaiphnês], as [d] a light kindled from a leaping flame, [knowledge] comes to be in the soul where it presently nourishes itself [auto heauto êdê trephei].

[342a] ...In relation to each being there are three things that are the necessary means of attaining knowledge, and this knowledge must itself be placed beside them as a fourth thing: the first is the name [onoma], the second is the definition [logos], the third is the image [eidôlon], and the fourth is knowledge [epistêmê]. To these we should add as a fifth thing [b] the being that is known and that is truly being. (248-49)

Gonzalez clarifies why names, propositions and images present only the quality and not the being of a thing: 'A proposition, as well as the names of which it is composed and the images to which it must refer, present us with a multiplicity where what is sought is a unity. [...] Furthermore, chapters 7 and 8 suggested that a thing's unity is to be found precisely in its *good*.' (260) Therefore, propositions are by their nature hypothetical.

In a difficult passage, Plato writes that using all four means (names, propositions, images, and the existing body of knowledge) '*...barely engenders the knowledge belonging to a well constituted nature in someone with good*

intrinsic nature'¹⁴ [*mogis epistêmên enetekeu eu pephukotos eu pephukoti*], and explicates that a good nature is necessary, but not sufficient for the full development of knowledge. Through a different translation, Gonzalez changes the significance of this sentence, which becomes a description of 'dialectic as giving rise to "knowledge of the ideal nature in someone with an ideal nature".' The paragraph explains the ontological reflexivity of knowledge, and *eu pephukotos* may not refer to the teacher (381, note 20), but this is about nature and *nurture* in moral education and science, not the 'knowledge of what a thing truly is'. Gonzalez translates the passage as follows (250-51):

[343e] Yet the process of dealing with all four, moving up and down to each one, barely gives birth to knowledge of the ideal nature [what a thing truly is] in someone with an ideal nature [eu pephukotos eu pephukoti]. If, however, a person's nature is defective, as for most people the state of the soul with regard to learning and so-called [344a] morals is naturally defective (though in some cases this happens through corruption), not even a Lynceus could make people in such a state see. In short, someone who has no affinity with the subject matter will not be made [to see] by memory or an ability to learn, for the principle or source [of knowledge] is not to be found in alien dispositions [*tên archên gar en allotriais hexesin ouk engignetai*]. Therefore, those who are not naturally inclined and akin to justice and other goods, but can quickly learn and retain lesser matters, as well as those who have such an affinity, but are forgetful and find difficulty in learning, will never know as much as is possible the truth of virtue [b] and vice.

After learning 'as much as is possible the truth of virtue and vice', then science ('the truth and falsehood concerning the whole of being'), practical wisdom and theoretical insight will barely begin to manifest 'at the very limits of human possibility' while wearing down hypotheses in cordial refutation. This relates beautifully to the previous passage that describes living with (*suzên*) the subject under consideration, in frequent dialogue (*sunousia*, communion, conversation):

[344b] (cont'd) For these two must be learned together and along with them the truth and falsehood concerning the whole of being, something that requires much toil and time, as I said in the beginning. Only barely

¹⁴ Plato's *Seventh Letter* 343e, my own translation and paraphrase

[mogis] when the [three], that is, names, propositions, as well as appearances and perceptions, are rubbed against each other [tribomena pros allêla], each of them being refuted through well-meaning [nonadversarial] refutations [en eumenessin elenchois elenchomena] in a process of questioning and answering without envy, will wisdom [phronêsis] along with insight [nous] commence to cast its light in an effort [c] at the very limits of human possibility. (251)

The digression in Plato's Seventh Letter describes the process of education, systematic reflection and dialogue driven by dialectic. In the subsequent conclusion to *Dialectic and Dialogue*, Gonzalez presents the three main theses that have guided him all along:

1. Names, propositions and images are incapable of expressing what a thing truly is (*ti esti*) and consequently are always open to refutation.
2. Names, propositions and images are nevertheless indispensable as means of attaining knowledge of what a thing truly is.
3. One can use these three means in such a way as to obtain an insight that transcends them, that is, an insight into that nature which they themselves presuppose but cannot express.

The author has given ample evidence in support of his arguments, bringing an important contribution to the large volume of Platonic scholarship. As he says in one of his notes, 'clearly much more remains to be done' (333, note 11), yet Gonzalez has proved that it could be done in a balanced and focused manner, suitable for works of such greatness as Plato's dialogues. What I believe to be minor flaws should merely induce further investigation into the deepest questions of philosophy. The remarkable value of this book cannot be disputed by anyone who is serious about the practice of philosophical inquiry in the authentic, Socratic sense.