Criteria of Fallacy and Sophistry for Use in the Analysis of Platonic Dialogues

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CRITERIA OF FALLACY AND SOPHISTRY
FOR USE IN THE ANALYSIS OF
PLATONIC DIALOGUES

In recent years considerable attention has been focused on the question whether Plato ever uses arguments he knows to be sophistical, especially whether he puts such arguments into the mouth of Socrates. Though differing views have been held, at the present time the majority of scholars seem to believe that Plato does not.[1] Though I disagree with this position, I will not attack it directly in this paper. Instead I will discuss what I take to be an important preliminary matter, establishing criteria that can be employed in order to assess the claim that one of Plato's characters does or does not argue sophistically. Since the case of Socrates is by far the most important, I will limit discussion here to the question whether Socrates ever uses sophistry.

I think it can be seen that the question of criteria is important. Since scholars are often reluctant to believe that Socrates would ever use sophistry,[2] they frequently go to considerable pains in order to construe arguments he uses that appear to be sophistical as actually valid. An extreme instance of this kind of interpretation is found in a well-known article by Vlastos on the unity of the virtues in the *Protagoras*. In this piece, Vlastos vigorously asserts his belief that Socrates does not cheat in argument:

> It is widely assumed that, for good purposes (pedagogical or polemical) of his own, the Platonic Socrates does not scruple to profess to believe propositions he thinks false and to defend them by sophistical arguments. I reject this assumption, holding it to be inconsistent with what we learn in the Platonic corpus about Socrates' conception of the philosophic life and about his personal character. I count it a merit of the interpretation I shall be defending that it does not require us to suppose that Socrates would ever (knowingly and in a serious vein) assert categorically a false premise or endorse a fallacious argument.[3]

When it comes to the analysis of various arguments employed by Socrates, Vlastos is sorely taxed to remove the appearance of absurdity,[4] but he eventually succeeds in presenting an account in which Socrates stands absolved of using obvious sophistry.

This kind of situation strikes me as troublesome. If, in fact, Socrates does occasionally use sophistry,[5] this would be difficult to demonstrate if scholars are free to take large liberties in interpreting his arguments. For by unearthing suitable tacit premises, a determined scholar would be able to absolve *any* argument of this charge, no matter how sophistical in appearance. The purpose of this paper, then, is to

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[1] See the remarks of G. Vlastos, C. C. W. Taylor, M. A. Stewart and I. M. Crombie, quoted in this paper (see below, pp. 363, 369–70, 373). For the contrary view see R. K. Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy* (London, 1962); and Plato's Sophistry', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, *Suppl.* 51 (1977), 45–61; and G. Klosko, 'Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 61 (1979). See also note 24, below.

[2] cf. the remarks of Sprague, *Plato's Use of Fallacy* 81.

[3] G. Vlastos, 'The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*', in *Platonic Studies* (Princeton, 1973), 223 n. 5. Vlastos' position is endorsed by T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* (Oxford, 1977), 293 n. 1.

[4] In Taylor's words (*Plato: Protagoras* [Oxford, 1976], 119), Vlastos' interpretation 'requires the reader to read an enormous amount into the text without any guidance'. See esp. Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* 253, where the 'surface grammar' of portions of the text must be set aside.

[5] It should be noted that the argument of this paper does not require that Socrates *does* use sophistry, but only that he could conceivably do so.

establish some limitations upon the liberties a scholar may take in interpreting Socrates' arguments. In criticisms of the article discussed above, Vlastos is faulted for reading too much into the text (above, note 4). What I hope to show is how much a scholar should be allowed to read into the text while still maintaining that Socrates does not argue sophistically.

Before beginning it is necessary briefly to say something about the terminology I will use. As we shall see, the question of Socrates' use of sophistry involves considerations of two kinds, (a) logical or philosophical, and (b) of fairness. (a) will be discussed in Sections I and II, and (b) in Section III. It seems to me that these different considerations are frequently run together by scholars, and so in order to keep them separate as much as possible, I will use different terms for each. In regard to (a), standard logical usage will be adhered to. By a 'fallacious' argument I mean one in which the conclusion does not follow from the premises, and by a 'valid' argument one in which it does. Valid arguments in which at least one premise is false will be described as 'unsound', while in a 'sound' argument all premises are true and the conclusion can be deduced from them. Since many of the arguments encountered in Plato's dialogues are imprecisely formulated, in the case of questionable arguments it is often difficult to determine whether the logic or the premises are at fault. In cases such as this, I will generally assume that it is the logic, and arguments of this type will be called 'fallacious', or 'invalid', though perhaps in a somewhat extended sense.

In regard to (b), I will use terms such as 'unfair', 'deceptive' and 'sophistical'. Arguments that merit these designations must be not only fallacious but deliberately so, and intended to deceive people at whom they are directed. In order to avoid the complex difficulties associated with determining whether any given fallacious argument is intentionally so, I will concentrate on a fairly extreme (purely hypothetical) case, about which there can be little doubt. But first we will discuss logical considerations.

I

Because of complexities associated with Plato's use of the dialogue form, one reason why it is often difficult to decide whether a given argument employed by Socrates is fallacious is that it is difficult to say exactly what the argument is. As an example of the kind of problems that can be encountered here, let us look briefly at Terence Irwin's analysis of Socrates' proof at *Gorgias* 460b, in his recent commentary on the *Gorgias*. Socrates' proof here is familiar; it is rooted in the Socratic paradoxes and was probably used by the historical Socrates.[6] Its basic structure is as follows (*Gorg.* 460 b 1–7):

(1.1) whoever has learnt building is a builder.

(1.2) whoever has learnt music is a musician.

(1.3) whoever has learnt medicine is a medical man.

This principle is now generalized:

(1.4) whoever has learnt a particular subject has the quality conferred on him by his knowledge of that subject (460 b 4–5; tr. following Dodds).

From this principle the conclusion follows:

(1.5) whoever has learnt justice is just.

The proof of course does not hold; the induction on which (1.4) is based is inadequate. The analogy between justice and craft knowledge is rooted in the notorious Socratic psychological view that knowledge alone is a sufficient condition for virtue (taking this moral knowledge as of the same kind as craft knowledge), and

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[6] See Aristotle, *EE* 1216 b 6; Xenophon, *Mem.* 4. 2. 20.

has been roundly criticized since the time of Aristotle.[7] I think this is generally recognized, and I will not discuss it here in depth. What I do, however, find interesting is part of Irwin's commentary on the proof:

> The argument againt Gorgias is *illegitimate* as it stands, since it depends on (1) and (2) above [two assumptions Irwin has isolated and discussed], which are not obvious, which Gorgias has been given no reason to accept, and which have not yet been proved in the argument so far. The argument is therefore *elliptical* rather than *purely fallacious*;...[8] (my italics).

With Irwin's characterization of the argument as 'illegitimate' I have no quarrel. I do however wish to examine his distinction between 'elliptical' and 'purely fallacious'. The word 'purely' indicates that Irwin is not entirely comfortable saying that the argument is not 'fallacious' pure and simple. My hunch is that he senses that it is (speaking loosely) fallacious *in some respects* but in others not. But surely, one would object, how can an argument be fallacious in some respects and valid in others? Either an argument is valid or it is not; either its conclusions follow from its premises or they do not.

I believe that Irwin's remarks give evidence of serious problems in analysing Socrates' arguments throughout the dialogues. The first problem is that arguments must be identified before they can be analysed. All premises must be clearly laid out before it can be determined if they entail the conclusion – and before one can decide whether all of them are true, whether or not they entail the conclusion. One problem that should be noted immediately is an ambiguity present in the word 'argument'. The word has a narrow, relatively technical sense: (a) a logical construction in which a set of premises is used to infer some conclusion. In discussing Plato especially it also has a wider, less technical sense: (b) a body of material presented by one character in the dialogue, generally Socrates, in order to prove some point to his interlocutor. (It also has a still wider sense: (c) the material presented by both parties to the discussion in some portion of the dialogue; here it is similar in sense to 'debate' or even 'discussion'.) Clearly distinguishing these senses should help us to avoid some confusion throughout the body of this paper. And so we will reserve the word 'argument' for sense (a). For sense (b) we will use the words 'proof' and 'refutation', depending upon the purpose for which the material is presented, and for (c), which concerns us less, we will use 'exchange'.

Once these distinctions have been made, I think some commonly encountered difficulties will be seen to evaporate, among them the objection raised on the last page. For one reason why some of Socrates' arguments might appear (speaking loosely) to be both fallacious and valid, or fallacious in some respects and valid in others, is that they are not 'arguments'. They are 'proofs', and it is often difficult to specify exactly what arguments they contain. In many troublesome contexts the reader is confronted with a somewhat loose presentation of material driving towards a conclusion, but *exactly* how the conclusion is reached is not clear. This sort of problem is not the main one in *Gorgias* 460b, but other passages in the dialogues contain more obscure refutations. Some of these have successfully resisted numerous attempts at scholarly explication. For example, the passage at *Protagoras* 349e–350c, in which Socrates attempts to prove the identity of wisdom and courage, has remained obscure, even though Protagoras explicitly diagnoses and criticizes his proof. And, of course, until a clearly formulated argument can be extracted from this proof, the question of validity or fallaciousness cannot be settled.[9] Another example, perhaps the most notorious in

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[7] See *EN* 1129a5–16; 1140b22–25; *Metaph.* 1025a6–13.
[8] Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias* (Oxford, 1979), 127.   [9] See Taylor, *Protagoras* 150–61.

the entire corpus, is the so-called 'third-man argument' in the *Parmenides* (*Parm.* 131e–132b). Here too a good deal of the seemingly endless controversy this passage has raised is due to the fact that scholars have been unable to agree as to what argument is contained in Parmenides' refutation.[10]

To discuss this matter rather more abstractly and systematically, it seems clear that in many contexts throughout the dialogues the reader has a good deal of trouble identifying the precise logical structure of the arguments Socrates uses in order to establish conclusions. What the reader encounters is something along the following lines.

Socrates asserts (let us say) A_1 and A_2 and concludes B. Thus the argument appears to be:

(2) $(A_1 + A_2) \rightarrow B$.

But in many cases B does not seem to follow from A_1 and A_2, and so the reader must either identify additional premises or supply tacit ones.[11] Once the lid on this Pandora's box begins to move, a whole range of possibilities emerges. Some of these are as follows.

The reader supplies a tacit premise, A_3; thus the argument is:

(3) $(A_1 + A_2 + A_3) \rightarrow B$.

Here let us say that B can be validly deduced from A_1, A_2 and A_3.

But tacit premises need not play so straightforward a role. It is possible that (4), the combination of A_1, A_2 and the tacit premise does not allow the valid deduction of B, in which case the argument would be fallacious.[12] Still another possibility is (5), that the combination of A_1, A_2 and the tacit premise does entail B, but the tacit premise is demonstrably false, though perhaps something which Socrates believes to be true. (5) is therefore unsound; though the conclusion follows from the premises, at least one premise is false.

These examples of course merely scratch the surface; specific cases vary in ways too numerous to recount.[13] The main point, however, should be clear. Our assessment of an obscure proof depends upon the specific argument it is believed to contain. Deciding exactly what the argument is is often a problem of interpretation – frequently a messy, uncertain one – which is not only not susceptible to the precise logical methods that can be used to analyse the resulting argument, but is also necessarily prior to such analysis. And unless this step is performed correctly, the reader will undoubtedly misconstrue Plato's text.

Of the different structures mentioned, the passage from *Gorgias* 460b probably matches up most closely with (5). But this finding alone does not settle the question

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[10] See esp. Vlastos, 'The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', rpt. in R. E. Allen, ed., *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics* (London, 1965); a partial list of articles on this controversy is found in Vlastos, *Platonic Studies* 361–2.

[11] e.g., 'Now if this is all we had to go by, [(1)] in the first step, and [(2)] in the second, could anyone say that the Third Man Argument was logically valid? Clearly there must have been something more in Plato's mind than the information supplied at [(1)], which made the transition to [(2)] appear to him not only permissible but plausible. What could this be?' (Vlastos, 'The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', 236). See also 'The Unity of the Virtues in the *Protagoras*', 242 and n. 57.

[12] Taylor sees the proof at *Prt.* 351b–360e along these lines (*Protagoras*, 191–2).

[13] To cite one particularly unusual construal of an argument, Vlastos holds that the third man argument is logically valid, but in 'a very odd way'. He reads its structure as something like: $(A_1 + A_2 + A_3) \rightarrow B$, where A_2 and A_3 are tacit premises, which, Vlastos holds, contradict one another. And so the conclusion of the argument follows from the premises, 'for we are working with inconsistent premises...and we should not be surprised to see them justify all kinds of contradictory conclusions' ('The Third Man Argument in the *Parmenides*', 239).

of interpreting the passage. As we shall see in the next section, even if tacit premises can be identified with some assurance, their role in the argument must be analysed. To make matters worse, as we shall see below, in order to be understood properly, many proofs must be viewed as containing multiple arguments, which turn on different sets of tacit premises. And again one central purpose of this essay is to impose limitations upon the kinds of tacit material that can be incorporated into an argument that still merits the designation 'valid'.

<p style="text-align:center">II</p>

In order to appreciate the full complexity of Socratic proofs, it is necessary briefly to discuss two related matters as background material. First, we must introduce a distinction, a rather obvious one but one which seems to be overlooked frequently in practice. This is the difference between the author of Plato's dialogues and the characters he depicts. It seems to me that the proofs Plato puts into the mouth of Socrates – and of his other characters as well – function on different levels. They are, of course, the main vehicle for Plato's teaching, often conveying this in a straightforward fashion, though the reader should be wary of assuming that Plato believes everything he has Socrates say. On another level, however, Socrates' statements are elements of dramatic compositions. They are the actions of a dramatic character, and in order fully to comprehend them, one must reconstruct the intentions of the agent who performs them. Socrates' proofs have meaning for Socrates as well as meaning within the context of the dialogue as a whole, and it is necessary to realize that these two meanings do not always coincide.

In addition to being *Socrates'* proofs, the material found in the early dialogues is generally directed at other characters, intended to refute them, within the context of the Socratic *elenchos*. The situations with which we are concerned in this paper are uniformly *elenchoi*, but as Robinson says, '[the *elenchos*] is so common in the early dialogues that we may almost say that Socrates never talks to anyone without refuting him'.[14]

An *elenchos* is a particular kind of refutation. It is the refutation of some *thesis* held by Socrates' interlocutor, and so the dramatic depiction of an *elenchos* normally involves two steps. In the first stage, Socrates asks a question or series of questions (call these the 'primary questions'[15]) in order to establish his opponent's view on some topic, or his 'thesis'. In the next stage Socrates demolishes that view, again through a series of questions (call these the 'secondary questions'). As Robinson notes, the nature of these two sets of questions is generally rather different. The primary questions appear to be genuine requests for information, most notoriously for the definition of some moral term – the 'What is X?' question.[16] The secondary questions appear to be different in that they generally require only 'yes or no' answers, which appear to be obvious, even inescapable. As Robinson says, they are more demands for assent than requests for information.[17] And then, of course, the key to the *elenchos* is that Socrates is able to use these assents to prove the contradictory of his opponent's thesis and so to refute him.

It is important to bear the *elenctic* context in mind when examining various arguments. The main problem it causes is the fact that a single Socratic proof (or refutation) can be viewed differently from different angles. In keeping with the terms

[14] R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed. (Oxford, 1953), 7.
[15] Following Robinson; Robinson gives a good brief account of the *elenchos* (loc. cit.).
[16] Ibid. Ch. 5, 49–60.   [17] Ibid. 7.

introduced in the last section, a single proof can be viewed as presenting at least two distinct arguments, depending upon point of view. And we must attempt to distinguish Socrates' point of view from that of his interlocutor.

Not only can a single proof contain different arguments, but these can differ in regard to validity. A proof is especially difficult to assess if one party can construe it as containing a valid argument while the other sees it (or more exactly, *should* see it) as containing one that is fallacious. For purposes of illustration Socrates' proof at *Gorgias* 460b is rather too complex. Let us examine instead a purely hypothetical refutation directed at some interlocutor, Charicles:

> (6.1) Socrates: Does the man who behaves justly behave nobly ($\kappa\alpha\lambda\hat{\omega}s$ $\pi\rho\acute{a}\tau\tau\epsilon\iota$)?
> Charicles: Yes.
> (6.2) Socrates: If he behaves nobly, he behaves well ($\epsilon\hat{v}$ $\pi\rho\acute{a}\tau\tau\epsilon\iota$)?
> Charicles: Yes.
> (6.3) Socrates: Then he is happy ($\epsilon\dot{v}\delta\alpha\iota\mu\text{ov}\epsilon\hat{\iota}$)?
> Charicles: So it seems.

This proof is not unlike many encountered in the dialogues.[18] The problem with it lies in ascertaining how (6.3) follows from (6.1) and (6.2), while one reason why interpreting it is difficult is that Socrates and Charicles can be said to view it differently.[19]

To put matters as starkly as possible, this proof can be said to contain at least two distinct arguments. Assuming that we wish to give Socrates the benefit of the doubt and view him as not using sophistry, we are able to interpret the proof in such a way as to yield a valid argument. We can call this *Argument S*. If we wish, we can doubtless say that this is the argument he actually believes the proof to contain.

Argument S is a valid argument. Socrates can be said to deduce (6.3) from (6.1) in conjunction with (6.2), which he sees as a proposition about the consequences of a certain kind of behaviour. The sense of (6.2) as he sees it could be more clearly expressed in an expanded reformulation:

> (6.2a) Being virtuous is a necessary and sufficient condition for being happy; virtue and happiness coincide, as do lack of virtue and unhappiness.[20]

If we substitute (6.2a) for (6.2), we have *Argument S*, the proof as Socrates understands it. There are obvious advantages to this interpretation. (6.2a) is, of course, a common Socratic doctrine. Because we find Socrates saying things like this elsewhere in the dialogues, we can safely read it into the proof and absolve Socrates of arguing sophistically.

The problem, however, is that this is not the way Charicles views the proof, nor would he assent to it if it were presented to him in this fashion. Power politician that he is (see Xenophon, *Mem.* 1. 2. 33–7), Charicles would scoff at (6.2a), perhaps attempting to unmask it as 'slave morality' (cf. *Gorg.* 483b–c). And so the question arises why Charicles assents to the proof.

The answer lies in the fact that *Argument S* is not the only way to view the proof. It also contains a rather different argument, which we can call *Argument C*, which

[18] e.g. *Rep.* 354a; *Charm.* 172a; *Gorg.* 507c.

[19] In the following paragraphs I speak of Socrates and Charicles as having perceptions and pursuing trains of thought. It should be made clear that their 'behaviour' is only imputed to them by the commentator, in accordance with what he takes to be the most likely reconstruction of their debate.

[20] For the sake of simplicity and clarity, I ignore various matters touching on the moral claims advanced in the proof, unless these substantially influence its logic.

is the one perceived by Charicles. The key to *Argument C* lies in the fact that (6.2) can be viewed as containing an equivocation. The phrase *eu prattein* is ambiguous. It can mean: (a) to perform well in a moral sense (i.e., nobly, virtuously, in which sense *eu* is synonymous with *kalōs*); or (b) to do well in terms of personal well-being (i.e., to prosper, in which sense the phrase is synonymous with *eudaimonein*).

Returning to *Argument C*, it seems that Charicles is taken in by the equivocation. He sees (6.2), quite differently from Socrates, as a proposition about the use of language. He believes that *eu prattei* is simply another way of saying *kalōs prattei*. Overlooking the ambiguity, Charicles sees *eudaimonei* as simply another way of saying *eu prattei*. (6.3) then follows by definition. To flesh out *Argument C*, Charicles in effect sees (6.2) as containing two premises:

(6.2b) *eu prattei* is another way of saying *kalōs prattei*.

(6.2c) *eudaimonei* is another way of saying *eu prattei*.

Thus we see that our hypothetical proof contains two different arguments. *Argument S* is valid – and sound, assuming that the tacit premise, (6.2a),[21] is true. *Argument C* is of course fallacious. Speaking somewhat loosely, then, our hypothetical proof is either fallacious or valid, depending upon one's point of view. I think that this is the kind of situation Irwin sensed in *Gorgias* 460b. Like that proof, our hypothetical proof is 'elliptical' – in so far as (6.2a) requires explicit introduction and defence. And though from another point of view the proof is fallacious, it is not 'purely fallacious', in so far as (6.2a) can be made explicit and defended.

III

Having demonstrated that a single proof can simultaneously contain valid and fallacious arguments, we turn to questions of fairness, i.e., to whether Socrates should properly be said to argue fallaciously and sophistically in this proof – or in *Gorgias* 460b, which I believe is a substantially similar case. There are two separate questions to be considered here, the first pertaining to fallacy and the other to sophistry. First is the question of 'translation', whether the proof should be translated into the valid *Argument S* or the fallacious *Argument C*. If we decide on *Argument C*, we can move on to the question of 'intention', whether Socrates employs the fallacious argument knowingly and intentionally. An affirmative answer is required in order to find him guilty of using sophistry. We can best consider the two questions in turn.

Beginning with the question of translation, I believe the proper translation of our hypothetical proof is *Argument C*. To defend this position, I refer to the grounds commonly used to contend that Socrates does not knowingly use fallacious arguments. In the passage reproduced at the beginning of this essay, Vlastos avers that such argumentative behaviour is unworthy of Socrates, that it conflicts with what we know of his character and his conception of the philosophic life. Vlastos, then, denies Socrates' use of sophistry on the basis of considerations of morality. Vlastos' claim that sophistry necessarily entails immorality cannot be pursued here,[22] but he is not alone in making this kind of claim. In his commentary on the *Protagoras*, C. C. W. Taylor rejects an otherwise plausible interpretation of one of Socrates' proofs as an intentional fallacy that is countered by Protagoras, because 'it seems incredible that Plato should

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[21] This is a 'tacit' premise even though it appears in the argument. It appears in only a formal sense; the substance of (6.2a) is not stated.

[22] For one set of circumstances under which the use of sophistry does not seem to be immoral, see Klosko, 'Toward a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*'.

wish to represent Socrates as arguing in such a morally and intellectually discreditable fashion and as being detected in such a humiliating way'.[23] It should be noted, however, that other scholars have long held that Socrates is not above arguing sophistically on certain occasions.[24]

Thus the claim that Socrates does not intentionally argue fallaciously is frequently a moral claim about Socrates' behaviour. It should be noted that this moral claim can often (if not generally) be supported philosophically; a resourceful commentator, believing that Socrates does not argue sophistically, can frequently construe some proof that appears sophistical in such a way as to wrest a valid argument from it. But as I said at the beginning of this paper, the moral and philosophical aspects of the question of sophistry should be kept distinct. There is, however, one important respect in which moral considerations are relevant to the assessment of Socrates' proofs. A closer examination of Socrates' behaviour shows that it places limitations upon the commentator's freedom to reconstruct suspect proofs.

The most important limitation is that the commentator cannot introduce material into some proof that takes him beyond the point of view of Socrates' interlocutor. In other words, I believe that questionable proofs should be assessed *from the point of view of the answerer of Socrates' questions.* If from this point of view proofs contain fallacious arguments, Socrates should be judged guilty of arguing fallaciously; if these arguments have the other attributes discussed above, Socrates should be judged guilty of using sophistry. The 'criteria of fallacy and sophistry' mentioned in the title of this paper centre upon the fact that proofs employed in *elenctic* contexts should be assessed from the point of view of the answerer. This position can be defended on various grounds.

To begin with, in so far as the claim that is made concerns the behaviour of Socrates, it is necessary to take into account one particular aspect of Socrates' philosophizing, its personal character. Arguments that are developed in the Socratic *elenchos* are not general proofs. They are directed at specific interlocutors, designed to refute them.[25] As Aristotle says, an *elenchos* is a specific kind of proof, a proof of the contradictory of the thesis of one's opponent.[26] Along similar lines, Aristotle says that a sophistical *elenchos* is not simply a refutation, but a refutation directed *at* a specific person.[27]

The personal character of the *elenchos* imposes restrictions on the questioner. He is forced to receive his opponent's assent to a given proposition before he can

[23] Taylor, *Protagoras* 158.

[24] See, for example, P. Friedländer, *Plato*, 3 vols., H. Meyerhoff, tr. (Princeton, 1958–69), II, 19, 181, and elsewhere; W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy*, 6 vols. (Cambridge, 1962–81), IV, 246, 195, 143–50, and elsewhere.

[25] See Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* 15–17: 'By addressing itself always to this person here and now elenchus takes on particularity and accidentalness, which are defects. In this respect it is inferior to the impersonal and universal and rational march of science axiomatized according to Aristotle's prescription' (*PED* 16). See also the articles cited in n. 27, below. Cf. the different, and I believe misleading, account of *elenchos* in Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory* 37–41.

[26] ὁ γὰρ ἔλεγχος συλλογισμὸς ἀντιφάσεως (*SE* 168a36–7); also 164b28–165a3; 170b1–3; 171a1–5; and in other works, e.g. *An. Pr.* 66b11–12.

[27] Ἔστι δ' ὁ σοφιστικὸς ἔλεγχος οὐχ ἁπλῶς ἔλεγχος ἀλλὰ πρός τινα· καὶ ὁ συλλογισμὸς ὡσαύτως (*SE* 170a13–14); see also *Top.* 155b7–16; *SE* 170b12 ff. On the similarities between the *elenchos* and the more fully developed form of dialectic discussed in Aristotle's *Topics* see P. Moraux, 'La joute dialectique d'après le huitième livre des *Topiques*', in *Aristotle on Dialectic: The Topics, Proceedings of the Third Symposium Aristotelicum*, G. E. L. Owen, ed. (Oxford, 1968), esp. 304, 297–8; E. Weil, 'The Place of Logic in Aristotle's Thought', in *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol. 1: *Science*, J. Barnes et al., eds., tr. by the editors (London, 1975), esp. 102–3; E. Kapp, 'Syllogistic', in *Articles on Aristotle*, Vol. 1, tr. by the editors, esp. 40, 47.

incorporate it into his proof. It is for this reason that it is a common Socratic dictum that the answerer – not the questioner – is the author of the *logos* that emerges in the *elenchos*.[28] Socrates declares repeatedly in the *Gorgias* that in his discussions with interlocutors their assent or lack of it is the sole criterion for the success or failure of his proofs (472b–c, 474a–b), and should he fail to receive his interlocutor's express confirmation, 'I consider I have achieved nothing of any account towards the matter of our discussion, whatever it may be' (472b–c). We can take it as established, then, that the questioner is justified in incorporating into his refutations only material to which his opponent has assented.

Aristotle's account of sophistry supports this general position. According to Aristotle, a sophistical refutation is distinguished by two basic features: (a) it appears to be a genuine refutation but is not actually; and (b) it is able to succeed because of people's inexperience in argument.[29] In other words, according to Aristotle, (a) such refutations do not contain valid arguments, and (b) they are deceptive and unfair and succeed only because of some interlocutor's shortcomings. The element of deception is especially important for our concerns, as Aristotle's implication is clear: were the interlocutor fully attuned to the proofs directed against him, he would withhold his assent.

Thus Aristotle's remarks confirm that point of view is important in assessing proofs. The sophistical refutation is used to take advantage of the interlocutor. In such a case (a) the material to which he has assented does not yield a valid argument, and so (b) the conclusion of the argument is established unfairly. It should be added that, in saying that a valid argument cannot be constructed from the material to which the interlocutor has assented, I mean that the conclusion is not justified by this material *as the interlocutor understands it*. Though it is not always easy to ascertain exactly how an interlocutor understands some proposition to which he has assented, it is still necessary to interpret his assents from his own point of view. For even if employing material to which he has assented, but in some sense other than what he intended, would allow the construction of a valid argument, this argument was not knowingly assented to. My emphasis on the interlocutor's point of view is especially important if, as Aristotle says, it is central to the role of questioner to create a gap between his understanding of some exchange and that of his opponent, while Aristotle details various strategies of concealment and duplicity that he recommends questioners pursue.[30]

Returning to the question of Socrates' conduct, it seems clear that, if we wish to defend Socrates from the charge of using fallacious arguments, it is not enough to translate his proofs into valid arguments. We must also translate them into arguments that employ only material to which his interlocutors have assented, and only as the interlocutors understand it. In the case of Charicles, then, as we have seen, in assenting to (6.2) Charicles understands the proposition along the lines of (6.2b) and (6.2c). Given his inexperience in debate, he sees the proposition as one 'viewing from a distance' and is fooled by the equivocal use of *eu prattei*. Since he would reject (6.2a) if it were made explicit and put to him in the form of a question, there can be no other

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[28] *Alc. I* 118b; see 112c–113a, 116d, 118b; *Gorg.* 472b–c, 482b–c, 516d; *Euthd.* 293d, 295a.

[29] See esp. *SE* 164b25–27. Plato's discussion in the *Sophist* is similar (esp. 233a–235c, 268d). One can surmise that Aristotle's simile, that victims of sophistry are like those 'viewing from a distance', is taken from *Sph.* 234b–c.

[30] See, e.g., *Top.* 161a24–31. For two specific tactics recommended by Aristotle, see *Top.* 108a18 ff. (ambiguity or equivocation); 156a7–157a5 (concealment). See G. Grote, *Aristotle*, 2nd ed. (London, 1880), 398–403.

explanation for his assent to (6.3). In this proof, then, Socrates argues fallaciously. When the proof is translated into the argument that is perceived by the answerer, it is seen that the conclusion does not follow from the premises.

I think we can draw our main conclusions about the question of translation from this example. Our most important conclusion is the limitation upon tacit material. As we have seen in the last section, though our hypothetical proof is fallacious from one point of view, it is valid from another. The validity of *Argument S* depends upon the employment of tacit premises which are similar to doctrines Socrates frequently expounds and are familiar to all students of Plato. However, tacit material cannot be appealed to in order to defend a questionable proof, unless it would be acceptable to the interlocutor. In the case of questionable tacit premises, it seems to me that the interlocutor can generally be thought to have an interest in not being refuted, and so the burden of proof must rest on the questioner. He must argue for controversial premises he wishes to use, and the fact that some tacit premise he employs is objectionable to the answerer – or would be objectionable if the answerer were more perceptive – is enough to call his argument into question.[31]

Socrates' refutation of Charicles, then, should be judged fallacious. It is clear that Socrates has also argued fallaciously at *Gorgias* 460b. Though that proof is elliptical, as Irwin says, in that Socrates could well appeal to tacit premises to shore it up, the material contained in the tacit premises has not been assented to by Gorgias and would not be if it were made explicit and put to him in the form of a question. Since Socrates has not argued for it, he is not justified in using it. The argument the proof contains, then, is one in which the conclusion does not legitimately follow from the premises.

The question of intention is less clear cut than the question of translation. It is not possible to set down a series of rules that would determine if fallacious proofs were used knowingly or unknowingly. Questions of this sort must be settled on a case by case basis, while one's decision must often rest on subjective considerations. Certain cases, however, can be settled with some assurance, while I believe that these are also the most important. These are proofs in which the arguments perceived from the interlocutor's point of view are extremely poor and so are able to command assent only through the use of sophisms, moves designed to confer the appearance of validity upon invalid arguments. Our hypothetical proof is such a case; *Argument C* obviously rests heavily upon the equivocal use of *eu prattein*. A similar, though not so egregious, case is Socrates' proof at *Gorgias* 460b, which depends upon a faulty analogy. In general, if some argument seen from the interlocutor's point of view is not only obviously fallacious but also seems to rest heavily on duplicitous steps, Socrates should probably be judged to argue not only fallaciously but sophistically.

If our conclusions concerning the questions of translation and intention are accepted, it can be seen that Socrates argues sophistically in a number of dialogues. Though this matter cannot be pursued here, I believe that such argumentation would be found in the *Hippias Minor*, at least once in the *Euthydemus* (301a–c), at several places in the *Protagoras*, and certainly in Book 1 of the *Republic* (see esp. 348b–354c),

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[31] To fill this out a little more, in general throughout the dialogues Plato's use of language is somewhat loose and imprecise. By employing sufficiently rigorous standards, one would be able to find fault with virtually all of his proofs. Accordingly, I think fallacy should be assessed in reference to the *elenctic* context. Fallacious arguments are arguments capable of being objected to, or, more properly I submit, arguments objections to which would require serious restructuring. If the objection were only to the precise formulation of some premise, or something along similar lines, the questioner would be able to recast the premise and make it satisfactory, without being forced to alter his argumentative strategy.

to name only a few. In each of these cases, the arguments seen from the point of view of Socrates' interlocutor are extremely poor, and are able to go through only because of sophisms. In each case, of course, it would have to be shown that Socrates is aware of the poor quality of his proofs, and even granted the presence of obvious sophisms, questions of this sort resist definitive settlement. But in keeping with our discussion of translation, I think it would be seen that the arguments perceived from the interlocutor's position are often shockingly poor – so poor that Socrates could not help but be aware of this. And as we have seen, there are limitations upon tacit material that can be introduced into the proofs to make their arguments seem better.

IV

In closing I will return briefly to the sense in which *Gorgias* 460 b and our hypothetical proof contain valid arguments. For, as we have seen, though on one level Socrates should be seen as employing sophistry, on another level his proofs contain valid arguments.

The contentions of several scholars that Plato does or does not use sophistry seem to be in reference to this side of Socrates' proofs and should, I believe, be assessed accordingly. For instance, M. A. Stewart argues as follows that Plato does not employ sophistry:

There is even less basis for thinking that the bad arguments [in the dialogues in general] were put there knowingly to tease us, since the plain fact is that that is not the usual reason why good philosophers have put forward bad arguments.[32]

Along similar lines, Crombie recommends that we deal with suspect argumentation as follows: 'we shall naturally try, whenever we find a passage the reasoning of which is apparently sophistical, to find an interpretation of it which renders it valid, or at least to reconstruct the valid train of thought the presence of which in Plato's mind allowed the fallacy to pass undetected. In my judgment, one or other of these interpretations will commonly be successful'.[33]

Claims like these, and others one could name,[34] seem to be about Plato the writer rather than Socrates the character. A scholar would be most likely to approach proofs from this angle if he wished to find support for some account of Plato's views, rather than to unravel the structure of different dialogues. In cases of this kind we have no convenient rule of thumb by which to judge tacit material. Establishing precise standards would raise many of the complex difficulties associated with Plato's use of the dialogue form, and so, obviously, such matters cannot be discussed here. It seems clear that here too each case must be assessed on its own merits, while the only criterion that seems applicable is what Plato on the whole knew or believed. In cases of this sort differences between different characters' perceptions of their exchanges are irrelevant, and so there does not seem to be any ready limit upon tacit material that can be brought forward in order to wrest validity from suspect proofs. The only reasonable limit – what Plato believed or knew – is hopelessly vague, and subject to widespread controversy. A scholar who assumes (a) (along with Stewart and Crombie) that Plato did not intentionally put invalid arguments into the dialogues, and (b) that

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[32] M. A. Stewart, 'Plato's Sophistry', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society, Suppl.* 51 (1977), 21.

[33] I. M. Crombie, *An Examination of Plato's Doctrines*, 2 vols. (London, 1962–3), I, 26. Irwin presents a similar statement of policy in the Preface to his edition of the *Gorgias*.

[34] e.g., the position of Sprague (references in note 1, above).

Plato was not a poor logician and so was unlikely to overlook obvious errors of reasoning, is bound to range far afield in order to find evidence to support his views, and in order to make apparently bad proofs good.

But when scholars discuss Socrates the character not Plato the writer, standards can be invoked. Scholars who hold that Socrates does not employ sophistry should be prepared to establish this in reference to arguments as seen from the point of view of his interlocutors.[35]

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