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decisiveness, while Nicias's army allows the enemy to get entrenched and spends two days beating its head against the wall raised against it. In sum, Brasidas has control of the situation throughout and his men are the agents of his control; one never has this feeling with Nicias.

Reading these four passages with their interesting parallels one concludes, in fact, exactly this: Thucydides is here (and, I would argue, throughout his *History*) preoccupied with the possibility or difficulty of controlling events, both in the military and the political sphere. He is constantly interested in exposing a politician or a commander at a critical moment, and testing the degree to which his intelligence, foresight and will measure the situation and communicate themselves to the body of men awaiting his word. The qualities Thucydides is interested in are found to be rare, and in diminishing supply under the pressures of war. Order and disorder are pivotal concepts in judging the degree of control and measuring its slippage. But I find that nearly *all* the principal leitmotifs or categories of Thucydides' thought are, as it were, carefully orchestrated ideas bearing on the central concept, the *idée Maîtresse*, of control. Practical intelligence (*xunesis*), plan or intention (*gnomē*), skill or technique (*technē*), foresight (*pronoia*), chance (*tuchē*), incalculable event (*paralogos*), as well as order and discipline (*kosmos, taxis*), and their opposites (*ataxia, stasis, thorubos* etc.)—all these are applied in season to the pressure points of an action's development, and give us advance warning whether it will be successfully brought to heel, or slip away out of control to disaster.

It is easy to speculate on the reasons behind this consuming interest of Thucydides. In part it may be provoked by his experience of democracy, about which he expresses some scepticism, and of which the clumsy diffusedness always raises the question 'How do you get the thing to work?' On a slightly different front, his consternation at the entropy undoing Athenian power and prosperity (as I argued in *The Necessities of War*) prompted questions for him about how you build things up, and why they fall away, and how you arrest the process. Finally, his personal history and the loss of Amphipolis to Brasidas, for which he was exiled, would keep in the forefront of his mind such questions as 'How could I have taken control of the situation? How could I have been out in front of events with foresight (*pronoia*), instead of allowing them to dictate to me, and becoming their victim?' The pressure of such questions would revise his received notions of what history is about, and how it is made.

As it happened he was removed from the world of action, and for the rest of the War had to content himself with words, and here his control is complete. No one ever wrote history with a greater concentration on the precisely ordered deeds, events and arguments of his subject, and no one ever bound a reader to his words with greater intensity, or stronger insistence on the great significance of what he had to tell.

Peter R. Pouncey

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## RATIONAL PERSUASION IN PLATO'S POLITICAL THEORY\*

George Klosko

The idea that political reform can be accomplished through the use of rational persuasion is common in the history of political thought. It is probably most closely associated with the utopian socialists, but is also frequently encountered in liberal political theory. On reflection, however, it can be seen that rational persuasion has limited potential; it can be effective only under specific and unusual circumstances. My purpose in this paper is to examine these circumstances. I will discuss: (a) the kind of conditions that must be met in order for persuasion to function as a vehicle of reform; and (b) the unlikelihood that they can easily be met. As we shall see, simply to spell out (a) is to make (b) apparent. In this paper I will approach (a) and (b) indirectly, by examining Plato's treatment of them in several dialogues. It will be seen that Plato has developed views concerning the possibilities of persuasion, which connect up with important themes in his political thought.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as is frequently the case, Plato's treatment of this issue has a good deal of obvious weight and plausibility. It is a notable contribution to a critique of the political theory of rational persuasion.

### I

Plato is interested in the political possibilities of persuasion because the avowed purpose of Socrates' mission (as presented in the 'Socratic dialogues'<sup>2</sup>) is to persuade his fellow Athenians to 'care for their souls', by which he means in part that they should reform their values and conduct. It can hardly be doubted that Plato's Socrates is engaged in a mission of this

\* I am pleased to dedicate this paper to Herbert Deane to whose patient teaching and model of sound historical scholarship I owe a great deal. The themes discussed here were first presented in my dissertation, which was written under the guidance of Herbert Deane and Julian Franklin. A draft of this paper was delivered at the Northeastern Political Science Association meeting on 16 November, 1984, in Boston, Massachusetts. I am grateful for a 1984 University of Virginia Summer Grant, which facilitated the writing of this paper.

<sup>1</sup> For discussion, see G. Klosko, 'Plato's Utopianism: The Political Content of the Early Dialogues', *Review of Politics*, XLV (1983), pp. 483-509; G. Klosko, 'The Insufficiency of Reason in Plato's *Gorgias*', *Western Political Quarterly*, XXXVI (1983), pp. 579-95; G. Klosko, 'Implementing the Ideal State', *Journal of Politics*, XLIII (1981), pp. 365-89; G. Klosko, *The Development of Plato's Political Theory* (New York, 1986), ch. 4.

<sup>2</sup> For chronological matters concerning the dialogues, see W.K.C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy* (Cambridge, 1962-81), Vol. IV, pp. 41-56, and discussions of the individual dialogues in Vols. IV and V; and W.D. Ross, *Plato's Theory of Ideas* (Oxford, 1951), ch. 1.

kind. In the *Apology* he explicitly says that this is what he does,<sup>3</sup> while in the *Gorgias* he describes his activity as practice of the 'true political art'.<sup>4</sup>

Though considerations of space preclude detailed discussion here of Socrates' mission, a few brief points should be made.<sup>5</sup> First, Socrates pursues his mission through the use of persuasion alone, without resorting to more traditional, i.e. coercive, means. He is able to do this because of his extremely intellectualistic psychological views, which we will discuss briefly below. The particular means Socrates employs is the elenchus, which is designed to overcome the condition of ignorance from which Socrates believes the Athenians to suffer.<sup>6</sup> For all intents and purposes the elenchus is the Socratic method of moral reform.

The dictionary definition of 'elenchus' is 'argument of disproof' or 'refutation'. As practised by Socrates, refutation is a distinctive argumentative technique. I reproduce Richard Robinson's brief account of it:

[Socrates] is always putting to somebody some general question, usually in the field of ethics. Having received an answer (let us call it the primary answer), he asks many more questions. These secondary questions differ from the primary one in that, whereas that was a matter of real doubt and difficulty, the answers to all these seem obvious and inescapable . . . In other words, they are not so much requests for information as demands for an assent that cannot very well be withheld . . . [A]t last Socrates says: 'Come now, let us add our admissions together' (*Prt* 332d); and the result of doing so turns out to be the contradictory of the primary answer. Propositions to which the answerer feels he must agree have entailed the falsehood of his original assertion.<sup>7</sup>

In Socrates' hands, this logical procedure is practised as a method of moral reform, and as such it rests at the heart of his mission.

In order for the elenchus to succeed as a method of moral reform it must work in a particular way. In his role as gadfly to the Athenians, Socrates uses the elenchus to rouse his subjects from the lethargy of their ignorance. Thus it must be able to produce a strong reaction. In any given encounter Socrates

<sup>3</sup> Esp. 29d–e, 30a–b.

<sup>4</sup> *Grg* 521d.

<sup>5</sup> Socrates' mission, and Plato's movement away from it in the middle dialogues are discussed in Klosko, 'Plato's Utopianism'; and Klosko, *Development of Plato's Political Theory*.

<sup>6</sup> *Ap* 20d–23b.

<sup>7</sup> R. Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic* (Oxford, 2nd edn., 1953), p. 7; for more recent discussions of the elenchus, see G. Vlastos, 'The Socratic Elenchus', *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy*, I (1983), pp. 27–58, 71–4; and the response by R. Kraut in the same issue (pp. 59–70).

must do more than merely win an argument and refute a belief. The belief he refutes must be so important to his subject that having it refuted causes shock and consternation—the sting of the 'torpedo-fish' that Meno is made to feel.<sup>8</sup>

The most striking example of a successful elenchus in Plato's corpus is found in the *Alcibiades I*.<sup>9</sup> Under Socrates' questioning in this work, Alcibiades' assurance crumbles. The principles according to which he has been living are refuted, and he is transformed before our eyes (see below, pp. 25–26). Generalizing from this particular case, we can see how the successful elenchus is used to change its subjects. Like Alcibiades, they are shown that their present lives are not worth living. Socrates believes that the shock of discovering they have been wrong will lead them to search for true values. They will dedicate their lives to this search, and so will begin to care for their souls.

Socrates' faith that the elenchus can succeed is bound up with his intellectualistic psychological views. Put very simply, Socrates believes that people's actions bear an intimate relationship to their general moral principles. In the *Crito* he says: 'I am not only now but always a man who follows nothing but the reasoning which on consideration seems to me best.'<sup>10</sup> In simple terms, Socrates sees the behaviour of other people as similarly motivated.<sup>11</sup> Since Socrates sees behaviour as so tightly bound up with moral principles, he believes that the elenctic examination of a person's moral principles is an examination of his life as well. This is described by Nicias in the *Laches*:

whoever comes into close contact with Socrates and has any talk with him face to face, is bound to be drawn round and round by him in the course of the argument—though it may have started at first on a quite different theme—and cannot stop until he is led into giving an account of himself, of the manner in which he now spends his days, and the kind of life he has lived hitherto; and when once he has been led into that, Socrates will never let him go until he has thoroughly and properly put all his ways to the test.<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> *Meno* 80a–b.

<sup>9</sup> I assume that the *Alcibiades I* is genuine; this position is held by many scholars. For a brief discussion, with numerous references, see P. Friedlander, *Plato*, trans. H. Meyerhoff (Princeton, NJ, 1958–69), Vol. II, ch. 17.

<sup>10</sup> *Crito* 46b. I do not follow J. Burnet's reading of 46b4 (see his note, *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, and Crito* (Oxford, 1924), ad loc.); I use the more commonly accepted reading, found, e.g. in J. Adam, *Platonis Crito* (Cambridge, 2nd edn., 1891), text and ad loc.

<sup>11</sup> Socrates' views receive their fullest elaboration at *Protagoras* 351b–360e; on this see Klosko, 'On the Analysis of *Protagoras* 351B–360E', *Phoenix*, XXXIV (1980), pp. 307–22; cf. Aristotle, *EN* 1145b25–33, discussed by Klosko, 'Plato's Utopianism', p. 489.

<sup>12</sup> *Lach* 187e–88a.

Because of the intimate connection between principles and lives, Socrates believes that to refute a person's moral principles is to refute his life as well. For this reason refutation will produce shock and shame which will be directed back at the subject himself, as he comes to realize that his moral convictions are flawed and so he has not been living as he should.

The elenchus will be able to bring about these results only if the subject meets a number of requirements. In the form of these requirements Socrates' psychological assumptions manifest themselves and play an important role in many of the dialogues.

The first requirement pertains to attitude. The successful elenchus cannot take place in a vacuum. It requires a pre-existing state of mind in its subjects, that they be willing to be examined. As Schaerer says: 'Like certain psychiatrists of today, Socrates asks his "patients," before every treatment, a serious question of principle: "Do you wish to be cured?"'<sup>13</sup> If the 'patient' does not wish to be cured, Socrates can do nothing to help him. Here we can detect the first signs of a great wave of paradox running through Socrates' theory. In order for people to be refuted they must be willing to cooperate in being examined; they cannot be set upon the road to knowledge unless they submit to the elenchus. Socrates believes that if people can be brought to understand that it is good for them to discuss the questions he is always raising they will be willing to converse with him, and so one essential function of his exhortation is to convince people that it is in their interest to answer his questions.

Once he has induced a subject to submit to his questioning Socrates can begin to awaken him to the importance of his soul. But in order for the elenchus to work properly the subject must meet additional requirements. Though these are never explicitly discussed by Plato they can be surmised.<sup>14</sup> In order for the elenchus to work the interlocutor must take it seriously. More than this, he must demonstrate a strong commitment to the process of rational discussion and be impressed by the logical authority possessed by the discussion's results. In the ideal case the subject would be fully committed to the results and prepared to abide by them in his future life. Only if people care deeply about rational discussion is it possible to change their moral principles by arguing with them, and so change their lives.

Other factors are also required. The interlocutor must approach the discussion with feelings of caring and trust—which Socrates must reciprocate. Stated negatively, attitudes of hostility and suspicion make it impossible for fruitful discussion to proceed. And so the interlocutor must be without these. In addition, there is an obvious need that he be open-minded to some

<sup>13</sup> R. Schaerer, *La question platonicienne* (Neuchâtel, 1938), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> Three of the major requirements—intelligence, good will and frankness—are mentioned in *Gorgias* 487a, though the passage is ironic.

extent. He must be willing to listen to views that conflict with his own and to follow the discussion wherever it leads. Ideally the interlocutor would be motivated by Socrates' critical spirit and regard the elenchus as an opportunity to have his beliefs tested, in keeping with the principle that it is better to be refuted than to refute.<sup>15</sup>

A certain degree of frankness is also necessary. As we have seen, the successful elenchus must result in shock and shame in addition to mere refutation. In order for the interlocutor to feel that his cherished convictions have been refuted, Socrates must be able to draw forth his actual convictions. In questioning his subjects Socrates assumes that the interlocutor is responsible for the doctrine produced.<sup>16</sup> If the *logos* can be reduced to absurdity the interlocutor is said to contradict himself. It is essential, then, that the interlocutor give the argument his strictest attention and answer each question according to his actual convictions. One essential function of Socrates' irony is to lull people into revealing their true convictions.

Even granted sufficient intellectual seriousness, good-will and frankness, the successful elenchus also requires a certain degree of intelligence, especially knowledge of basic logic. Socrates' method is striking and perhaps unparalleled in the history of philosophy in the extent to which it relies on logic. Socrates not only sees moral principles as central to people's lives, but he believes strongly in the motivational power of often abstract considerations of deductive logic, especially consistency and inconsistency. The efficacy of the elenchus rests upon the belief that individuals will find the possession of inconsistent moral principles intolerable and so will be led to rethink them. Thus it is necessary that the interlocutor be aware of basic techniques of drawing inferences and rules concerning contradiction and non-contradiction. That Socrates' interlocutors must be able to follow the permutations of often complicated elenctic arguments should not be overlooked.<sup>17</sup>

At this point we should have an adequate idea of the Socratic method, of what Socrates wishes to accomplish and how the elenchus is meant to work. We have also noted some important psychological assumptions upon which the method rests and that it cannot succeed unless its subjects meet certain

<sup>15</sup> Esp. *Grg* 458a-b; see Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, pp. 107-8; and Klosko, 'Provisionality in Plato's Ideal State', *History of Political Thought*, V (1984), pp. 171-93.

<sup>16</sup> *Alc I* 118b; see 112c-13a, 116d, 118b; *Grg* 472b-c, 482b-c, 516d.

<sup>17</sup> Socrates' task is complicated by the fact that his interlocutors often believe that he argues unfairly against them. As Robinson says: 'The Socratic elenchus looks to the ordinary observer like nothing so much as an obstinate determination to disprove whatever the other party says' (*Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, p. 86). For one circumstance under which Socrates uses fallacies, see Klosko, 'Towards a Consistent Interpretation of the *Protagoras*', *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie*, LXI (1979), pp. 125-42.

requirements. It is not generally recognized that the Socratic elenchus requires so much of its subjects, and so it is important to bear in mind exactly what the elenchus demands and why it cannot work unless these demands are satisfied.<sup>18</sup> As we shall see, one great failing of the elenchus as a method of moral reform is that it makes demands of its subjects that they are often not able to meet.

Putting aside all other concerns for the moment, let us suppose that the interlocutor is able to live up to the requirements of the elenchus. He is therefore able to follow the course of Socrates' arguments, and so can be refuted and experience the benefits that refutation incurs. As practised by Socrates the elenchus is meant to produce a conversion—to sting people into an awareness of their souls on the one hand, and their ignorance on the other. The successful elenchus is meant to produce an ally in the search for truth. As Friedlander notes, the learning experience is often likened by Plato to a journey;<sup>19</sup> Socrates' goal is to induce others to travel with him. It is not clear that Socrates believes that the search for moral knowledge can ever entirely succeed, but the pursuit itself is central to caring for one's soul.

## II

We have seen that before the elenchus can work Socrates' subject must meet a number of conditions. Otherwise stated, the interlocutor must stand in a certain relationship to Socrates and must maintain that relationship throughout the conversation. Now, as a necessary component of his dramatic depiction of the Socratic mission, Plato depicts the relationships between Socrates and various interlocutors. By examining just how Plato depicts these relationships we may be able to get an idea of Plato's views concerning the possibility of Socrates' basic requirements being met.

Before we undertake this examination we require some criteria for evaluating relationships. Without recourse to such means attempts to decide whether (say) Socrates and Protagoras are very hostile or merely hostile are bound to be fruitless. However, the foundation for such evaluations has been laid. Though the major conditions the elenchus demands are attitudinal and so not easily assessed the attitudes of the different interlocutors are reflected in the way they respond to Socrates' questions. We have noted that the interlocutor must bring to his responses qualities of intellectual seriousness, good will, frankness and intelligence. He must be serious about rational discussion and willing to consider opinions that conflict with his own. Ideally, he would also be committed to the results of the discussion and willing to abide by its conclusions.

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Vlastos, who notes only the requirements that the subject 'refrain from speechifying' and answer what he thinks ('Socratic Elenchus', p. 35).

<sup>19</sup> Friedlander, *Plato*, Vol. I, pp. 65–7.

In order to make our inquiry manageable we will assume that if the elenchus is to work a few basic procedures must be adhered to. (P1) The interlocutor must be willing to answer Socrates' questions. (P2) He must be willing to state his actual beliefs. (P3) The rules of elementary logic must be respected. If the interlocutor is willing to abide by (P1), (P2) and (P3), we can be fairly safe in assuming his intellectual seriousness and good-will.

We must now introduce a concept which, for want of a better name, we shall call the 'dialectical relationship'.<sup>20</sup> Put very simply, the dialectical relationship is that minimum relationship characterized by intellectual seriousness, mutual trust and a certain degree of open-mindedness and receptivity that must exist between the participants in a dialectical discussion if the elenchus is to be able to do its job—if the discussion is to yield philosophically fruitful results. Because such things as intellectual seriousness, open-mindedness and mutual trust are not easy to measure we will assume that, in general, the dialectical relationship exists whenever the interlocutor is willing to abide by (P1), (P2) and (P3).

The dialectical relationship is, however, more than these procedures. Though, for convenience, throughout this essay I will speak as if the dialectical relationship and the interlocutor's adherence to these procedures are more or less synonymous, it must be realized that they are not. To use the language of Montesquieu (as a metaphor), while (P1), (P2) and (P3) are the institutions or laws of dialectical discussion, the dialectical relationship must also contain the 'spirit of the laws' (*l'esprit des lois*)—the principle or spring by which the necessary institutions are activated.<sup>21</sup> More precisely formulated, (P1), (P2) and (P3) are necessary but not sufficient conditions of dialectical discussion. Not only must they be kept, but they must be kept with an attitude of seriousness and good faith. But we can generally assume the existence of this attitude if they are adhered to. In general, if in a given discussion (P1), (P2) and (P3) are maintained, we will assume that the other sufficient conditions are present as well.

Though interpreting Plato's dialogues is inherently imprecise, the identification of these necessary conditions gives us a handle on evaluating the relationships Plato depicts. The crucial point is that whenever we see (P1), (P2) or (P3) violated we can be sure that the dialectical relationship does not exist. In other words, in these cases the necessary conditions for logical persuasion have not been met and Socrates' mission cannot succeed.

Our account of the dialectical relationship presents a simplified view of the necessary conditions for rational persuasion in Plato's dialogues. I believe

<sup>20</sup> A preliminary sketch of the dialectical relationship is presented in Klosko, 'Insufficiency of Reason', p. 586.

<sup>21</sup> *The Spirit of the Laws*, trans. T. Nugent (New York, 1949), Books I and III and Author's Explanatory Note.

that these conditions have important implications. To some extent the precise form the conditions assume in the Socratic dialogues is determined by the unique character of Socrates' mission—especially the need for the interlocutor to respond to questions and to have some grasp of basic logic. But on the whole any attempt to persuade other people to alter their conduct would appear to presuppose a network of attitudinal requirements similar to those crystallized in the dialectical relationship. Any attempt at logical persuasion presupposes strong elements of good faith, intellectual seriousness and commitment to the results of rational discussion. As we shall see below, Plato makes it quite clear that these attitudinal factors were not easy for Socrates to come by. Having seen the range of factors his mission required one should not find this surprising. Nor would one expect other attempts at moral persuasion to be successful if they presuppose similar attitudinal requirements. Thus I believe that something important can be learned about moral persuasion in general from the fate of Socrates' mission. We will return to this theme below.

Before moving on to look at particular dialogues, we must note one additional aspect of the dialectical relationship. As we have indicated in quoting Montesquieu, in certain respects a dialectical discussion can be likened to a political body—a city. (P1), (P2) and (P3) are the institutions of this city, while an entire rubric of attitudinal requirements serve as the principle or spring that activates these institutions. In order for the elenchus to work properly the interlocutor must be willing to abide by the dialectical relationship, and so one essential component of Socrates' task is establishing the dialectical relationship as a necessary preliminary to the successful elenchus. Here we can detect a paradox. If the interlocutor is not willing to abide by the dialectical relationship Socrates is helpless. The subject cannot be *convinced* to accept the dialectical relationship, for his very refusal to accept it precludes the effectiveness of logical persuasion.

We can complete the metaphor of the dialectical discussion and the city. Like a city, a discussion can be corrupted and break down. According to Montesquieu, the corruption of every government generally begins with the corruption of its principle.<sup>22</sup> The same could be said of a discussion. If the dialectical relationship breaks down discussion is futile. As is true in the case of a city the only way to overcome the corruption of a discussion is to restore its lost principle.<sup>23</sup> But one cannot do this through discussion, for the very corruption of the dialectical relationship renders discussion futile.

### III

Plato shows his concern with dialectical relationships in a variety of ways in different dialogues. For reasons of space we will confine our attention to

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.1.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.12.

those cases in which he is concerned with the shortcomings of the Socratic elenchus as a method of moral reform. Though it is not often realized, the failure of Socrates' mission is a major theme in an entire series of dialogues. It is also an important element of the *Republic*, and connects up with the development of Plato's political theory from the early to the middle dialogues.<sup>24</sup>

We begin with two simple cases in which relatively little attention is given over to the dialectical relationship. In the *Ion*, Ion is quickly and sharply characterized as pompous and stupid, exactly the kind of person the Socratic elenchus is tailor-made to deflate. But being refuted has no effect on Ion, and he is able to leave the discussion with his ignorance and composure intact.<sup>25</sup> Clearly, Ion does not demonstrate the necessary commitment to rational discussion.

The *Euthyphro* is similar to the *Ion* in paying little direct attention to the nature of the discussion it depicts. However, Socrates' inability to reach his interlocutor here is of ominous significance. Euthyphro, though depicted as comically vain and foolish, is also depicted in the pursuit of serious business: he is about to prosecute his father for impiety, for the murder of a slave. This activity is of dramatic significance as Socrates encounters him on the way to meet the indictment Meletus has drawn up against him (Socrates) for impiety, and Plato draws the parallel clearly.<sup>26</sup> In this work too the elenchus is unsuccessful. Being shown to be ignorant about the nature of piety does nothing to weaken Euthyphro's determination to persist in his prosecution. The fact that Euthyphro is so clearly unaffected by Socrates' arguments does not bode well for the outcome of Socrates' indictment.<sup>27</sup>

Socrates' lack of success in reaching various hearers is also explicitly connected with his trial and death in the *Meno*. In this work Socrates encounters a figure of great historical importance, Anytus, who was his chief accuser.<sup>28</sup> Anytus sits down beside Socrates and Meno midway in their discussion, and Socrates questions him. Anytus dislikes Socrates' proof that the Sophists are the true teachers of civic virtue,<sup>29</sup> though he has had no

<sup>24</sup> See esp. *Rep* 327c (discussed in Klosko, 'Insufficiency of Reason', pp. 582–5); see also, Klosko, 'Plato's Utopianism', pp. 497–504; Klosko, *Development of Plato's Political Theory*, ch. 4, sec. 3.

<sup>25</sup> *Ion* 541e ff.

<sup>26</sup> Esp. *Euthyph* 5a–d.

<sup>27</sup> Concerning Socrates' trial itself, it is interesting to note the series of outbursts by the jurors and Socrates' repeated difficulties in making himself heard (*Ap* 30c, 20e, 21a, 27a–b, 17c–d). Socrates' trial looms ominously at the close of the *Theaetetus* as well, casting a shadow across the otherwise idyllic philosophical conversation depicted in that work.

<sup>28</sup> On Anytus, see R.S. Bluck, *Plato's Meno* (Cambridge, 1961), pp. 126–8.

<sup>29</sup> *Meno* 91c.

direct contact with Sophists and is not interested in first-hand knowledge.<sup>30</sup> Anytus believes that the true teachers of virtue are the Athenian gentry,<sup>31</sup> though this belief rests on no logical foundation. When Socrates produces an argument against Anytus' view, he becomes angry, even threatening:

Socrates, I consider you are too apt to speak ill of people. I, for one, if you will take my advice, would warn you to be careful: in most cities it is probably easier to do people harm than good, and particularly in this one; I think you know that yourself.<sup>32</sup>

That is the last we hear from Anytus. But once offstage, he is not forgotten. Like other works—e.g. the *Charmides* and the *Alcibiades I*<sup>33</sup>—the *Meno* ends on an ominous ironic note. Socrates' concluding remark to Meno:

It is time now for me to go my way, but do you persuade our friend Anytus of that whereof you yourself are now 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.<sup>34</sup>

But as we have seen—and Anytus' subsequent conduct reveals—he is beyond the possibility of being persuaded.

The *Philebus* unmistakably communicates similar concerns, while in this work the dialectical relationship receives considerable attention. The *Philebus* depicts a lengthy and one-sided discussion between Socrates and Protarchus, who has inherited his part in the argument from Philebus. The relationships in the dialogue are cordial. Socrates asks Protarchus whether he will take the argument offered to him; Protarchus accepts,<sup>35</sup> and proves to be a fine interlocutor.

In fact, Protarchus is so eager to talk with Socrates that he introduces into the dialogue a playful threat of force. He concretizes the intangibles of the dialectical relationship into a mutual contractual obligation. He agrees to listen as Socrates is compelled to present his arguments:

*Protarchus*: Now when these two views had been put forward . . . we threatened you by way of a joke that we would not let you go home until the discussion had been worked out and brought to a satisfactory termination, upon which you agreed to the demand and allowed us to keep you for that purpose. What we tell you now is, as children say, that you can't take back a present once you have duly given it.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, 92b–c.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 92e.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 94e–95a.

<sup>33</sup> *Charm* 176c–d; *Alc I* 135e (see below, p. 26).

<sup>34</sup> *Meno* 100b.

<sup>35</sup> *Phlb* 11c.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 19d–e.

Although it is clear that the threat of force is only a joke, it is a running joke, referred to repeatedly in the dialogue.<sup>37</sup> At the end of the work, after Socrates has apparently lived up to his part of the agreement, he is forced once again to enter into discussion on another topic,<sup>38</sup> and most likely he will be forced to remain and see it through to a satisfactory conclusion.

Though the threat of force is playful there is another aspect of the *Philebus* that is disturbing. An interesting point can be made in regard to the presence of Philebus in this dialogue that bears his name. He contributes virtually nothing to the discussion; what is he doing in it? As has been said, the work opens with Philebus *dropping out* of the discussion and bequeathing his part of it to Protarchus. But he does not depart. He stands by mute, except for a few occasions when he replies to questions. His answers reveal the reason for his presence.<sup>39</sup>

Philebus represents a threat. When Protarchus thinks Socrates is guilty of slandering the young, he replies—of course in jest: 'Let me call your attention, Socrates, to the fact that there are plenty of us here, all young people. Aren't you afraid that we shall join Philebus in an assault on you, if you keep abusing us?'<sup>40</sup>

The threat Philebus represents is found in the doctrine he espouses. The pure hedonism of a Philebus—or a Callicles—represents a renunciation of reason and as such is not susceptible to logical arguments. Like Callicles, Plato's other advocate of unbridled hedonism, Philebus can be silenced, but he cannot be convinced.

Protarchus, on the other hand, is more than cooperative. He invites Socrates to discourse at length: 'Proceed as you like, Socrates, and please feel no concern about being lengthy; we shan't quarrel with you.'<sup>41</sup> But the subsequent discussion is conducted in the presence of Philebus who refuses to pay any heed to it, although—or, perhaps, because—his firmest convictions are being subjected to a rigorous examination.

The final two works we will examine here are the *Alcibiades I* and the *Symposium*. In the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates confronts the young title character for the first time. Alcibiades is depicted as about to embark on a political career, and Socrates believes it is urgent to change his young interlocutor's plans. For Plato, the choice between two lives—the philosophical and the traditional political (a deep concern in many dialogues)—is crystallized in the situation of a promising youth deciding upon the path he will follow. Alcibiades is the very embodiment of this choice. At the beginning of the *Alcibiades I* he stands poised on the crossroads about to choose wrongly, and as Friedlander says, it is only in this dialogue that a character undergoes a conversion, 'an inner change', within the context of a Platonic work.<sup>42</sup>

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 23b, 50d–e.

<sup>38</sup> *Ibid.*, 67b.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 12a–b.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*, 16a.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 28d.

<sup>42</sup> Friedlander, *Plato*, Vol. II, pp. 233–4.

The dialectical relationship looms large in the *Alcibiades I*, as Socrates works hard to get Alcibiades formally to agree to answer his questions.<sup>43</sup> But once the discussion itself is underway the elenchus quickly succeeds. Socrates rebuffs all Alcibiades' attempts to demonstrate his knowledge. Refusing to give up so easily, Alcibiades attempts to shift his ground.<sup>44</sup> When this fails he tries to back out of the discussion. 'You are insolent, Socrates!' he says, and Socrates has to struggle to keep him in the elenchus. The exchange continues:

*Socrates:* This time, at any rate, I am going to have the insolence to persuade you of the opposite of that which you decline to prove to me.

*Alcibiades:* Speak then.

*Socrates:* Just answer my questions.

*Alcibiades:* No, you yourself must be the speaker.<sup>45</sup>

This is a crucial point in the discussion. Alcibiades is either a character of sufficient weight to bear refutation, or simply a buffoon along the lines of Ion or Euthyphro. Unless he is willing to answer Socrates' questions and take the discussion and its implications seriously, Socrates cannot reach him.

But Alcibiades measures up. As Socrates' interrogation is allowed to resume, the knowledge of his former ignorance begins to dawn on Alcibiades<sup>46</sup> and he is finally overcome. He agrees that he must begin to search for truth and to care for his soul.<sup>47</sup> Socrates proposes that they look for the truth together, and he and Alcibiades embark on a common search.<sup>48</sup> The nature of the conversation has thus changed. What began as an elenchus has become a joint inquiry. In the discussion that ensues the importance of knowledge is stressed, and the full folly of his past life dawns on Alcibiades.<sup>49</sup>

As we leave the *Alcibiades I* the elenchus has succeeded. Alcibiades has been transformed; he vows to 'begin here and now to take pains over justice'.<sup>50</sup> But Socrates' response is filled with fear—and Plato's dramatic irony: 'I should like to think you will continue to do so; yet I am apprehensive, not from any distrust of your nature, but in view of the might of the state, lest it overcome both me and you.'<sup>51</sup>

The story of Socrates and Alcibiades is resumed in the *Symposium*. Approximately eighteen years have passed since the time depicted in the

<sup>43</sup> *Alc I* 104d–6b.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 113c–d.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 114d–e.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 116e.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, 124b.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 124b–d.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, esp. 127d–e.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 135d–e.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid.*, 135e.

*Alcibiades I*.<sup>52</sup> The years have brought Alcibiades closer to the ambitions he had harboured before meeting Socrates than the resolution formed at the end of their first conversation. He is now a politician—of the worst, least scrupulous kind.

In the encomium on Socrates delivered at the end of the *Symposium*, Alcibiades begins by describing the uncanny effects of Socrates' discourse, how Socrates' words have the power of Marsyas' flute.<sup>53</sup> We have just seen this power at work, and surprisingly Alcibiades says that the power of Socrates has not waned; this Marsyas affects him still:

Even now I am still conscious that if I consented to lend him my ear, I could not resist him but would have the same feeling again. For he compels me to admit that, sorely deficient as I am, I neglect myself while I attend to the affairs of Athens.<sup>54</sup>

The decision made at the end of the *Alcibiades I* has been revoked. Alcibiades' love of fame and glory has proved to be too much. He is the living refutation of Socrates' denial of the existence of moral weakness. Though he knows the better course—though he has been stricken and stung by Socrates' philosophy<sup>55</sup>—he cannot bring himself to pursue it. Because he knows that he is behaving illogically and indefensibly he is unwilling to talk with Socrates. He would rather not be reminded: 'So I withhold my ears performe as from the Sirens, and make off as fast as I can, for fear I should go on sitting beside him till old age was upon me.'<sup>56</sup>

Socrates retains his power. He is able to reproduce the conversion seen in the *Alcibiades I*, but the conversion has proved to be temporary. Once out of Socrates' sight Alcibiades is subject to temptations he cannot resist, and so Socrates poses a problem he must avoid. He is forced to 'take a runaway's leave of him and flee away'.<sup>57</sup> Avoiding Socrates in this fashion, Alcibiades is free to avoid his true good and to pursue his turbulent political career. It is no accident that Plato depicts him here at the very height of his power, only shortly before the disastrous Sicilian expedition for which he must bear a large part of the blame.

<sup>52</sup> The *Alcibiades I* is situated around the year 433, when Socrates was about 37 and Alcibiades about 15 years of age (Friedlander, *Plato*, Vol. II, p. 232). The banquet in honour of Agathon's victory—and so the *Symposium*—took place in 416 or 415 (Guthrie, *History*, Vol. IV, pp. 365–6), when Socrates was around 55 and Alcibiades around 33 years of age. For Alcibiades at this stage of his life, see esp. Thucydides VI, 12–18.

<sup>53</sup> *Symp* 215c–e.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 216a.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 218a.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*, 216a.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 216b–c.



To close this survey of Plato's works we must say something about the *Gorgias*, unquestionably the most important political dialogue prior to the *Republic*. The dialectical relationship is so significant a factor in the *Gorgias* that I have devoted an entire paper to it.<sup>58</sup> Let it suffice to say here that in all three discussions in the work—between Socrates and Gorgias, Polus and Callicles, respectively—Plato pays great attention to the procedures of the discussion. Especially worthy of note is the lengthy passage from 471–4 in the debate with Polus, where Socrates gives the most complete description of something recognizable as the dialectical relationship found in the dialogues. The main point, insisted on at length,<sup>59</sup> is that philosophical discussion occupies a privileged space. Answers to philosophical questions must emerge inside the bounds of the discussion. The only authority to be appealed to is the assent of the discussants; all else is irrelevant.

In addition and most important, Socrates' discussion with Callicles completely breaks down. This is the centre-piece of the dramatic structure of the *Gorgias*.<sup>60</sup> Though Callicles' arguments give Socrates little trouble, Socrates is unable to reach him. Callicles is alternately hostile and truculent. Finally he simply refuses to answer any more questions, and so Socrates must continue alone, answering his own questions.<sup>61</sup> As the work draws to a close it is clear that Callicles remains unconvinced. Though Socrates' position is secured with arguments of 'steel and adamant',<sup>62</sup> Callicles is beyond the reach of reason.

Let us check our totals. Socrates has been seen to be unsuccessful in his attempts to convince Ion, Euthyphro, Anytus and Philebus. In addition we have seen that his success in the *Alcibiades I*—the most conspicuous success in Plato's corpus—is withdrawn in the *Symposium*, and his failure with Callicles provides the centre-piece of the dramatic structure of the *Gorgias*. We have also noted that Plato continues this theme in the *Republic*, and it connects up with the development of his political theory.

Socrates' interlocutors fail to meet the necessary conditions of dialectical discussion in different ways in different works. Ion and Euthyphro lack sufficient intellectual depth, while Anytus appears to dislike arguments that threaten his convictions. Most important from our point of view is the fact that three of Plato's characters, Philebus, Callicles and Alcibiades in the *Symposium* simply refuse to answer Socrates' questions. Thus, clearly, the dialectical relationship and its possible pitfalls is a significant theme in a number of the dialogues.

<sup>58</sup> Klosko, 'Insufficiency of Reason'.

<sup>59</sup> *Grg* 471e–72c, 473e–74b.

<sup>60</sup> Klosko, 'Insufficiency of Reason'.

<sup>61</sup> *Grg* esp. 497a–c, 505c–d.

<sup>62</sup> *Grg* 509a.

## IV

Plato's dramatic depiction of dialectical relationships suggests conclusions about important themes in his political theory, particularly its development.<sup>63</sup> In addition, we can extrapolate a few conclusions about the political possibilities of logical persuasion in general from our discussion of Plato.

We have seen that Socrates is frequently unsuccessful at persuading his interlocutors to care for their souls. This is because his method of logical persuasion requires that they satisfy certain requirements which they are frequently unable to meet. A successful application of the elenchus would involve the following steps:

1. the interlocutor begins with his existing moral principles;
2. the elenchus is used to show that these principles rest on ignorance;
3. the experience of refutation is unsettling to the interlocutor and convinces him of the importance of discovering true moral principles: thus the interlocutor is given a commitment to intellectual inquiry;
4. because of this commitment the interlocutor begins to search for true moral principles and so begins to care for his soul.

We have noted that there is a problem with this sequence. (2) requires that the interlocutor satisfy attitudinal requirements. In other words, in order that the elenchus may work, the interlocutor must exhibit a prior commitment to intellectual inquiry. But according to this sequence he only receives that commitment from the successful elenchus. As we have noted above, rational arguments cannot be used to create the commitment to reason; without a prior commitment to reason persuasion cannot succeed. We can call this the 'paradox of reason'.

Our first conclusion is the importance of the dialectical relationship. As we have seen, Socrates' interlocutors must satisfy stiff requirements in order for rational persuasion to work. Not only do Socrates' interlocutors frequently (perhaps generally) fail to measure up but, granted the paradox of reason, in the absence of these requirements persuasion cannot be used to create them.

It seems to me that the concept of the dialectical relationship can be extended beyond the context of Plato's works. Any attempt rationally to persuade another individual of something as important as moral principles requires that he meet stringent requirements—similar to those we have written into the dialectical relationship. Were we to draw up a comprehensive list of these we would see how unlikely it is that they could easily be met, and thus how slight is the prospect of success. We have also noted the paradox of

<sup>63</sup> See the works cited in note 1, above.

reason, that rational persuasion is not capable of creating these preconditions. Without the preconditions persuasion cannot work.

There is some poignancy in the fact that Socrates falls victim to the paradox of reason. Socrates has a fairly sophisticated view of rational persuasion. He recognizes that individuals are ordinarily committed to their moral principles. Thus one cannot simply take individuals (at stage 1) and attempt to convince them of the truth of new principles. Because they are satisfied with the principles they have, they will not be receptive to new principles. Socrates calls their condition ignorance, and as we have seen he developed the elenchus in order to puncture this form of ignorance.

What Socrates does not realize is that the same set of attitudes that leads individuals to believe they possess the truth causes them to fall short of the requirements of the elenchus. Should Socrates somehow manage to secure cooperation sufficient to puncture their beliefs, they will often be unaffected, frequently believing that Socrates has tricked them. Thus though Socrates developed his concept of ignorance to explain people's non-receptivity to new moral principles, he does not realize that ignorance is bound up with an entire rubric of attitudes that work to make the elenchus ineffective.

A second paradox can be identified, which we can call the 'paradox of receptivity'. We have seen that the subject of rational persuasion must meet stiff requirements. The paradox here is that those individuals whom the moral reformer believes to be most in need of reform are especially unlikely to meet the requirements. Stated epigrammatically: individuals who make suitable candidates for rational persuasion are probably not in need of reform.<sup>64</sup>

At the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle briefly discusses rational arguments as devices of moral reform.<sup>65</sup> In light of our discussion throughout this paper it is hard to fault Aristotle's assessment that, because most men are driven by passion rather than reason, arguments cannot succeed.<sup>66</sup> In order that people may be susceptible to the pull of reason, their characters must be shaped from their earliest years. Thus the moral reformer must work through the laws of the state.<sup>67</sup> According to Aristotle, arguments can work only to 'stimulate and encourage generous youths', and can be effective only when 'an inborn nobility of character and a genuine love of what is noble' make people susceptible.<sup>68</sup> These last remarks verge upon a

<sup>64</sup> Cf. the similar point made by Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, Book II, ch. 7.

<sup>65</sup> That Aristotle's criticisms here are directed at the historical Socrates is argued by N. Gulley, *The Philosophy of Socrates* (London, 1968), pp. 135-8.

<sup>66</sup> *EN* 1179b11-20.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 1179b31 ff.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 1179b7-9.

restatement of the paradox of receptivity: individuals susceptible to rational persuasion are not greatly in need of reform.<sup>69</sup>

I believe it can be shown—as I have also argued elsewhere<sup>70</sup>—that Plato came to hold views on the possibility of rational persuasion similar to Aristotle's and that this is a significant theme in his political thought. What Aristotle states abstractly at the close of the *Nicomachean Ethics* Plato illustrates in his depiction of Socrates' mission in the dialogues examined above.

George Klosko

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<sup>69</sup> Along similar lines, though for different reasons, Aristotle says that individuals cannot be instructed in ethics unless they have undergone good moral training and acquired good habits. In other words, the subject matter of ethics can be properly studied only by those in relatively little need of moral instruction (*EN* 1095b4-6).

<sup>70</sup> Klosko, 'Plato's Utopianism', pp. 497-504.



*Herbert A. Deane*

# HISTORY OF POLITICAL THOUGHT



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