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THE SOCRATIC CHALLENGE

Reinventing Socratic Irony’s Educational Character

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THE UNIVERSITY OF EDINBURGH

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2020
To my husband, my pillar.
ABSTRACT

Irony is commonly defined as ‘the use of words that say the opposite of what you really mean, often as a joke and with a tone of voice that shows this’ (Oxford, 2000). Expanding the term’s focus from being merely linguistic to also including ironic action and serving philosophical conceptualisation, the same applies for Socratic irony (eirôneia), which is furthermore traditionally related to mockery and deceit and, therefore, inextricably connected to a negative overtone and an unfavorable portrayal of Socrates when he exercises it.

My research aims to reevaluate the significance of the philosophical use of eirôneia as a phenomenon in Socrates’ methodology and support the claim that Socrates used all his tools – eirôneia included – in an attempt to serve a novel pedagogical scheme, that of building his interlocutors’ epistemic character. This thesis attributes to Socratic eirôneia a definitional refinement and a justified characterization as an epistemic device that can and should be fruitfully inserted in contemporary education. Socrates’ methodology is chiefly pedagogical but not in a conventional way since Socrates admits that he was not a teacher – at least not in the ordinary sense (“I have never been anyone’s teacher”, Apology 33a). He was, however, a certain type of educator, an ‘architect’ of the interlocutors’ intellectual character. In this epistemic mechanism eirôneia works as a ‘sting’ and serves the purpose of enhancing the agent’s motivational feelings not to give up inquiry – after the state of aporia created by the elenchus hits them – but rather to eagerly desire to keep searching for truths.

Firstly, my thesis focuses on eirôneia’s refinement and presents a defense against the misjudgment of the concept as a linguistic phenomenon, which merely indicates a twist between words, actions and meanings with a connotation of mockery, deceit or humiliation. I will develop the unpopular theory that well-known scholars suggested when they innovatively separated the concept of eirôneia from mockery and brought it closer to its interpretation as a device for profitable philosophical quest. And since in philosophy novel interpretations tend to flag disputes, I present an overview of the debate on whether eirôneia can have constructive applications or not.
Second, I proceed in justifying *eironeia’s* beneficial character through Aristotle’s understanding of Socrates as an *eiron*, focusing on *eironeia’s* function as a speech act and delineating its motivational aspect when employing it in a conversation with an agent, or a student. I establish that Socrates was not an arrogant boaster, as often stated, but rather a self-depreciator who intentionally understates his authority as part of his method.

After embracing *eironeia’s* positive nature, my thesis moves on to defend Socrates’ knowledge of the good (*aretē*) against the assertion that his ignorance was honest and, consequently, his *eironeia* not significantly deep. For the purposes of this argumentation I appeal to Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics and his particularist understanding of morality, which further illuminates Socrates’ method when considering the nature of virtue, hence the nature of his subject teaching.

Finally, this brings my thesis to the position of defending Socrates as a teacher not in the commonly held sense but as a peculiar type of educator that builds our epistemic character. The last section of this research enhances our understanding of Socratic Intellectualism and the crucial role it plays in decoding his technique, especially when camouflaged behind the *eiron’s* mask. Conclusively, I introduce Socrates as an *Intellectual Character Builder*, who uses *eironeia* essentially as a motivational tool to enhance the addressee’s disposition to discover truths and not give up in their inquiry. I shall call his technique *The Socratic Challenge.*
Lay Summary

Socrates has been widely – although not unanimously – acknowledged as a teacher. However, he has been misunderstood as a teacher of moral education. This thesis embarks embracing the educational applications of the Socratic method, introducing him as a peculiar and unique type of educator, who targets the students’ intellectual character; Socrates is an Intellectual Character Builder. Therefore, he uses epistemic tools (i.e. dialectic, elenchus, irony) to ‘train’ the addressee’s character and enhance their desire towards knowledge of moral truths.

The significance of Socratic irony, as such an epistemic tool, is vivid. When the interlocutors create inconsistencies with the answers they provide in the dialogues and are, therefore, in a state of bafflement, giving up their searching journey is highly likely. Irony works as a ‘sting’ towards the addressee’s dispositions. In the Apology Socrates describes his ironic attitude as the effect that a gadfly exerts to a horse: “I was attached to this city by the god – though it seems a ridiculous thing to say – as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly.” (Ap. 30e). Similar to the horse that is stirred up by the gadfly, the interlocutor is stirred up by Socrates’ irony. This is not a typical irony, commonly related to deceit, humor or mock humility. This thesis proves that Socrates’ irony (eironeia) is, as defended by Aristotle, a self-deprecation, an understatement on behalf of the authority and a disavowal of their intellectual superiority. Undermining the authority can have rather rewarding results in a modern classroom. It gives the students the necessary push to outdo the teacher’s expertise, thus exercising their intellectual character and dispositions towards finding the truths on their own.

Introducing Socrates as an Intellectual Character Builder and decoding his ironic attitude as a tool with epistemic and educational purposes achieves three things: (1) training our intellectual character (i.e. our cognitive virtues) (2) training our dispositions towards rational desires (3) potentially attaining moral self-improvement, since the subject-teaching is still ethical. Moral improvement is not excluded from his method, as the subject of his teaching is virtue. He ‘trains’ his students’ intellectual character, as a coach trains an athlete, in pursuing moral truths. And he ‘trains’ the students’ desires...
towards this direction. Afterall, maybe Socrates was inspired by his own mother to contemplate such a technique; her name was Phainaretē (Φαιναρέτη), she who brings virtue to light.

This thesis concludes that this self-deprecating mechanism of ‘irony’ can be effectively applicable in modern Formal Education and renames it to Socratic Challenge.
First and foremost, I want to thank my supervisor Prof. Theodore Scalsas for his constant guidance and support throughout this experience. I believe I owe my progress as a thinker and writer to his philosophical intuitiveness and insightful supervision. He has been an exceptional mentor to me, and my thesis has benefitted greatly from his expertise and philosophical mastery. In a way, he practiced Socrates’ method; he ‘shaped’ me into the philosopher I am today. I always enjoyed our long, productive meetings on the 6th floor in Dugald Stewart Building – and the view helped a lot! He was always available to deal with my queries, my struggles, my ideas, my disappointments. This journey has been rather challenging, and I was fortunate enough to have worked under his supervision.

I am very grateful for all the faculty members of the Philosophy Department at PPLS. I want to particularly thank Prof. Pauline Phemister for taking over my supervision so willingly, when Prof. Scalsas retired. She made me feel safe and eagerly covered my queries. During my studies in Edinburgh I was also lucky enough to practice my passion for teaching. For that I want to extend my appreciation to Michael Ridge and Guy Fletcher for their guidance as Course Organisers and to all my students. Special thanks to Katie Keltie for being the most helpful and caring Postgraduate Administrator.

I would like to thank my colleagues in 2.16 Dugald Stewart Building. Anna Ortin, Giada Fratanonio and Nick Rebol are my dearest “pals”. I owe them so much; from the way I think as a philosopher to the person I am today. There will always be a very special place in my heart for these people. All three of them have so generously and attentively helped me overcome any obstacle this PhD road has presented. And special thanks to Alkis Kotsonis for being such a helpful colleague and so easy to work with. PhD road is lonely, but I believe Alkis and I made a great team.

When I lived in Edinburgh, I was lucky enough to meet and love people, whom I ended up considering my “second family”. They have all been next to me through this
journey, which wouldn’t have been the same without them. Ioanna, Vassilis, Lenia, Effie, Alex, Koko, Vaso, Pepi made Edinburgh feel like home away from home.

I want to thank all my friends in Greece, whom I have known for so many years. My relationship with each one of them has defined me as a person. Therefore, special thanks to Dimitris (Jimakos), Michaela, Nelly, Dimitris, Dimitra, Alina, Matina, Efstathia, Alkistis, Alkistis, Katerina, Theodoros (Paras), Vassilis (Tsele), Charis, Ioanna, Vassilis (Akrivos), Giannis, Mirto, Anna, Korina, Giannis (Moustakalis) and my oldest friends Phaedra, Rena, Eleni.

This endeavor would have been impossible without my family by my side. My parents have been such great supporters of my Academic career practically, financially, affectionally. My dad, Dimitris, was the first to point me towards this direction, when I was 18 and we had a precious father-daughter moment by the sea, which to this day I nostalgically recall. He is always so confident in me that I can work patiently and accomplish anything I put my mind on. I hope to prove him right. I want to deeply thank my mom Maria, for this thesis wouldn’t have happened without her daily devotion and support to my tough schedule. I believe she is the reason for my thirst in philosophy. She is a sophisticated spirit, always into arts and literature, and since philosophy starts from home, I was blessed with a privileged starting point. I want to express my love for my younger sister, Helena, who has grown up to be an inspiring young woman, whom I admire and constantly look up to. There is no better gift my parents could have given me, but her. And my grandma, Sotiria, whom I only recently lost and miss deeply. She had the kindest soul and I am blessed and honored to carry her name (the Greek name Σωτηρία means salvation).

I saved for the end the 2 most important people in my life, whom I wholeheartedly adore; my precious daughter, Marina and my amazing husband, George. I started this PhD journey in 2014 with George by my side as my partner. By the end of it, we are blessed with a beautiful marriage of 5 years, which was completed on the 14th of November 2018 with the arrival of our beautiful daughter. Marina, you are the light of my life. You are my strongest motivation without even knowing it. You are the reason I struggled patiently to finish this endeavor. You are the reason that kept me up on my feet, to become a better version of myself and create for you a role model of
which you could be proud. I can’t wait to make up to you for all these past lost hours and teach you anything a mom can teach to a daughter. You are my most treasured person and my biggest accomplishment. George, there are no words that can captivate my gratitude and love. None of this would have ever happened without you in my life. You have been my pillar, the strongest supporter of my work and mind as a philosopher and of my role as a wife and mother. You never seize to remind me how strong I can be as a person, how passionate about my work, how caring as a wife and mother. I want to be proven worthy of that trust and I want to make you proud every day. Constantly admiring my work has kept me sane through this tough journey. Your kind soul and your unconditional support are so rare, and I am very lucky to have known and loved you. I owe what I am to you.
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# LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

## PLATO’S DIALOGUES

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<td>Ap.</td>
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<td>Charm.</td>
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<td>Alc.</td>
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ARISTOTLE’S WORKS

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<tr>
<td>D.A.</td>
<td>De Anima [On the Soul]</td>
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<td>E.E.</td>
<td>Eudemian Ethics</td>
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<td>H.A.</td>
<td>History of Animals</td>
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<td>M.M.</td>
<td>Magna Moralia [Great Ethics]</td>
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<td>Metaphysics</td>
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I first moved to Edinburgh for my PhD studies in September 2014, very confident about my Classical background and my knowledge in Ancient Philosophy. However, I came to realise from my very first meeting with my supervisor that Philosophy is much more than good knowledge of its history and adequate understanding of its premises; it is a way of living.

My research proposal evolved around the idea that Socrates’ irony was misinterpreted and inadequately examined. Prof. Scaltsas urged me towards analytic philosophical paths and guided me to go after deeper linguistic, epistemological and educational implications of Socratic irony’s phenomenon. He constantly commented that this research should not be another analysis on Socrates’ method or Socrates’ ironic attitude. There was something within Socratic irony’s phenomenon that everyone was coming back to, but still everyone was missing.

I scrutinized Plato’s and Aristotle’s works, which both appeared to present a conceptual pattern when irony was used by or referred to Socrates; it was ennobled and refined. However, the key element was not clear yet. What did Plato and Aristotle see in Socrates’ attitude and his use of irony that made their approach lenient? The answer was lying in Plato’s *Apology*:

> For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly *to care about the greatest improvement of the soul*. [...] *This is my teaching* [...] (Ap. 30a6)
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I was attached to this city by the god – though it seems a ridiculous thing to say – as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfil some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company. (Ap. 30e1)

I have never been anyone’s teacher [...] I offer myself to both rich and poor alike for questioning, and if anyone wishes to hear what I say, he may answer me. (Ap. 33a6)

Socrates denies that he is a teacher. And it is not only in the *Apology* that he disclaims this characterisation. He rejects the label of the teacher several times in the Platonic dialogues. However, he does admit that he has a certain, peculiar teaching technique. He is devoted to interacting with young or older Athenians to make them effectively care about the greatest improvement of their soul. And he does so by ‘annoying’ them and ‘rousing’ them like a gadfly does to a horse. Socrates is not a teacher; he is an *Intellectual Character Builder* and his irony is an essential epistemic tool employed in this peculiar teaching technique in order to ‘sting’ and ‘stimulate’ the students-interlocutors to inquiry.

The ultimate aim of the thesis is to defend Socrates’ method as an educationally applicable and epistemically effective contemporary teaching methodology. ‘Socratic irony’ plays an essential role in decrypting his method; for its effective results of Emotional Intelligence within the student have not been recognised in literature. My approach defends Socratic *eironeia* as an educationally beneficial epistemic tool.

This thesis couldn’t have developed in a more fortunate way. My devotion to Philosophy had finally met my passion for teaching. Influencing, inspiring and shaping the character of young students (either moral or intellectual) has always overwhelmed me. I have never felt so empowered as when I finalised a methodology that allows us to intrigue their Emotional Intelligence and “architect” within them an active Intellectual Character.
Chapter 1

This study begins with a historical overview of irony’s development as a term and a philosophical phenomenon. A universal, catholically conventional comprehension of the concept of irony was particularly ambiguous, setting the importance of irony’s understanding beyond question. Irony, a phenomenon so popular, appeared to be also mysteriously opaque, even though it had been internationally long established as a technical term. Therefore, this Chapter presents the versatility of dictionary entries comparing their definitional differences. Irony appeared to have many faces: pretense, mockery, deception, opposite meaning, sarcastic comment, dissembling utterance, ignorance, self-deprecation; and the list continues.

Since irony’s first written appearance in Aristophanes, the concept of irony seems to evolve and transform into a philosophical concept in Plato’s dialogues and Aristotle’s works, when related to Socrates’ figure. The unfavorable connotations from the Aristophanic plays are marginalized in the Platonic corpus and eliminated in Aristotelian works; and Socrates had everything to do with it. Thus, this Chapter examines thoroughly every textual appearance of the term irony (in particular the word ἔρωνεία – and the like – from Plato’s Classical Greek texts) in order to prove that, whenever the term carried a negative overtone it was not associated to Socrates. The majority of reprehensible instances of irony in the Platonic dialogues single out the sophists. And since the ultimate aim of the thesis is to defend ‘Socratic irony’ as an educationally acceptable epistemic tool, refuting irony’s negative overtone (the way Socrates’ used it) is essential.

Similarly to the concept of irony, the indicated literature does not provide a unanimous understanding of Socrates’ irony either. It is not common ground that Plato contributes to irony’s refinement nor that Aristotle embraces it as fair self-deprecation. Therefore, I present a collective comparative method between studies and interpretations that do have a common field (i.e. ‘Socratic irony’ and its philosophical significance) but conclude to juxtapositions.
The historical overview concludes describing the transition from the classical Greek εἰρωνεία to the Latin ironia as introduced by Cicero and Quintilianus and then briefly examines the scholarly appreciation of the concept of irony in Early modern and contemporary bibliography. In addition, before I move on to the next Chapter, I determine ‘Socratic irony’s’ key features and declare that I will be consistently using the term eironeia (εἰρωνεία’s transliteration) when referring to a philosophical concept which employs self-disparagement and promotes it to an epistemic device (as Socrates did).

Chapter 2

This chapter is an extended version of my published paper The Moral Status of the Εἰρων according to Aristotle: Motivation, Distance, Perception. As this thesis embraces the Aristotelian understanding of Socratic irony as self-deprecation, Chapter 2 is committed to exclusively focus on the philosopher’s references of the term. Aristotle defends the moral refinement of self-depreciating eironeia with his theory on the ‘Golden mean’ and the triptych eiron (εἰρων) – truthful man (ἀληθής) – alazon (ἀλαζών). He argues that between the two vices, the deficient eiron (represented by Socrates) and excessive alazon, the former (eiron) is constantly preferred. The reason behind this preference lies within the eiron’s motive. While the alazon is being untruthful in order to show off his superiority, the eiron demotes himself against the interlocutor in an attempt to enhance the latter’s commitment to the inquiry. My writing proceeds to the justification of the aforementioned distinction through the examination of the Aristotelian corpus and the ‘ironic’ instances discussed.

In this Chapter eironeia is determined as a unique speech act, which entails the intentions and motives of the user (eiron) within its locutionary and perlocutionary function. I examine 3 key features of the semantic and the performative behavior of the speech act: a) the perception or awareness of eironeia – representing the authority of the audience (Section 2.1), (b) the distance (from the truth) and how the eiron uses it –

1 Lytra, 2019.
representing the authority of the speaker (Section 2.2), and (c) the motivation of the eiron (Section 2.3). The motivation of the eiron, which ends up within an epistemic and educational spectrum, justifies Socrates as an ennobled ironic character. I argue that Socrates uses eironeia as an epistemic tool with the intention to motivate the addressee to desire knowledge and seek for answers; an interpretation perfectly delineated in Aristotle’s works.

Aristotle’s understanding of the phenomenon eironeia develops into a philosophically, epistemically and pedagogically promising ground for this research. Socrates has been recognized in literature as a figure with pedagogical qualities. Nevertheless, he has been misunderstood as a moral educator. The next Chapter describes Socrates’ quality as a unique educator and sets the ground for his identification as an Intellectual Character Builder.

Chapter 3

Eironeia as self-depreciation qualifies Socrates as someone who shows less of what he possesses, disclaims his merits, disavows his knowledge and embraces his ignorance. Therefore, Socrates’ eironeia and atopia (strangeness, disavowal of knowledge) are inextricably related. This Chapter examines Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and his practices as a teacher. Since the accusations on Socrates’ ignorance being honest and truthful are vivid, this Chapter provides a counter-argumentation. For if Socrates’ ignorance is honest, then his eironeia is empty and the eiron has no educational motives; only pure oblivion.

Socrates chooses to camouflage his knowledge and put on the mask of ironic ignorance. He renounces several times throughout the Platonic dialogues that he has the relevant knowledge in the inquiry and refuses that he is a teacher; particularly a teacher of moral virtue (aretē). I shall discuss two reasons for his disclaimers: (1) The particularist nature of morality (Chapter 3) and (2) Socratic Intellectualism (Chapter 4).

Chapter 3 presents a thorough discussion on Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics and Particularism Theory. Due to this interpretation, moral knowledge is constituted non-
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transferable from one agent to another, from a teacher to a student in the conventional, propositional way of teaching. Morality does not provide explicit, catholic answers or norms that can be merely transmitted from a teacher to a student, fulfilling the latter’s need for answers. Thus, this Chapter supports that Socrates does not advertise his knowledge of aretē because his knowledge is of no use to his interlocutors. Additionally, it uses Aristotle’s Function Argument and his theory on endoxa (the respected opinions of society) as Criteria of Objectivity to defend a Realist, Non-Subjective ethical theory. This Chapter paves the way towards establishing Socrates’ method as educationally applicable and, in doing so, focuses on ensuring his knowledge of moral truths and his character as an educator.

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 begins with a citation of a forthcoming publication, co-authored with my supervisor Prof. Theodore Scaltsas, my peer Dr. Alkis Kotsonis and Professor Duncan Pritchard: Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder. This paper introduces Socrates not as a teacher – and principally not a teacher of moral truths – but rather as the very first Intellectual Character Builder. The Chapter moves on to discuss the philosophically, epistemically and educationally significant notions introduced in the paper: Intellectualism, Dialectic, Elenchus, Eironeia.

Socratic Intellectualism has been indicated as the second reason why Socrates denies he is a teacher of aretē. Chapter 4 argues to this direction. Socrates was not a teacher; he was an Intellectual Character Builder. For his educational tactics did not target our morality but our intellect. Socratic Intellectualism supports the premise ‘virtue=knowledge’ and determines that everyone desires the good. Therefore, there is no moral knowledge to teach. The question arises: Since everyone desires the good why aren’t we all virtuous beings? This Chapter moves on to examine the distinction between the phenomenal and the real good. It is only through our epistemic training that we will be able to discern the two and acquire aretē. Socrates’ method reduces morals to rationality and encapsulates moral development within cognitive development.
Introduction

The aim is not to establish that Socrates was the first philosopher to fully develop an epistemic approach of our cognitive or moral character. It is not even implied or suggested that Socrates introduced or grasped for himself the distinction between intellectual and moral character. It was years later that Aristotle developed his theory on the moral character, which Socrates couldn’t have possibly known. Rather the aim of this Chapter is to show that Socrates was the first to conceive a uniquely successful method towards stably and methodically gaining knowledge of the good by ‘building’ our character and ‘training’ our intellect towards that direction. And precisely because Socrates had not discerned the intellectual from the moral character, his method affected both our cognition and our morality. The intellectual and the moral character, being inevitably interconnected in Socrates’ thinking, were also inevitably introduced as such in his method.

The results of my research, which bring my analysis to the domain of Formal Education, are incorporated in the last Section of this Chapter. Socrates was a unique type of educator and he used eironeia as an epistemic tool to get his interlocutors smitten and hooked in a continuous inquiry for moral truths. The line of his methodology is a mosaic of Socratic techniques: he delves into dialogues with the interlocutors; he practices the elenctic, leading the interlocutors to a filtering process of their belief system and shaking their confidence when they realise their false beliefs; the interlocutors, being in state of bafflement, need a stimulation, a ‘sting’ to keep them active; eironeia exercises on the interlocutors the ‘Gadfly effect’; Socrates’ self-depreciation works as a motivator for the interlocutor to outdo the philosopher and provide the answer he claims he doesn’t possess. This line of methodology I name The Socratic Challenge.

The concluding remarks of this research is that Socratic Challenge is an enhanced interpretation of Socratic Virtue Epistemology, which exercises the students’ Emotional Intelligence in order to aid and further motivate them in their pursuit of epistemic goods. In this tactic the epistemic tool of eironeia as a speech act is irreplaceable, for it is the key feature which generates the desired dispositions. Eironeia’s function as the self-depreciation of the authority with educational, epistemic and dispositional motives unfolds the method altogether and promotes the ‘building’ of the
intellectual character. Since contemporary Education is currently focusing on the character of the students, employing a method that targets the intellectual character, exercises emotional intelligence and pursues moral self-improvement shall have pivotal educational effects.

The aim of this thesis is to present a fruitful application of the Socratic Challenge in modern Systematic Education; I hope for this work to have met these expectations.

METHODOLOGY AND LIMITATIONS

I shall bring to the reader’s attention that while this thesis will be focusing extensively on the Socratic persona as presented in the Platonic dialogues – and to some extent on the Aristotelian portrayal of Socrates and understanding of his irony – the center of attention will be rather consistently on decoding a methodology, which can be reevaluated and effectively utilized in contemporary philosophical, epistemological and educational fields. By the end of this research I shall have established a terminological characterization of his method as the Socratic Challenge.

I. The Socratic Heritage

Socrates is the philosopher with no written record to present. And it’s not because his writings were lost through the years, something very common among ancient writers. Socrates has nothing to present because he bequeathed any written legacy. As is well-known he never wrote anything, leaving the descendant scholars in a literary whirlpool, trying to infer the core of Socrates’ original views from the works by his contemporaries, for he appeared variously as a character in them. These works are
widely known as Socratic accounts, or *logoi Sokratikoi*.\(^2\) Aristophanes, Xenophon, Plato and Aristotle are the most significant sources. However, since Socrates is introduced as an *eiron* (ironic man) in Plato and Aristotle only, the thesis’ focus will mainly be on the Socratic figure as presented by them. Aristophanes’ plays will be examined for the very first terminological appearance of the word ‘irony’, which, however, does not entail the philosophical connotations incorporated in ‘Socratic irony’ as a phenomenon. Xenophon, on the other hand, presents a configuration of Socrates that does not serve the purposes of this research. In his *Memorabilia* we come along a confident Socrates, free from perplexity about the questions he raises and filled with cliché advice; “e.g. he knows what the virtues are, equating them with obedience to the law.”\(^3\)

**II. First Limitation: Socrates and Plato’s Socrates**

Socrates’ voice is indubitably most clearly and loudly heard through Plato’s dialogues, since the former preferred the sharp “silence” of leaving behind no manuscript, not a single piece of written work. However, this has often anticipated criticism that, since Socrates did choose “silence”, nothing can be wholly and unconditionally attributed to him. Plato is present everywhere in what we choose to examine as a ‘Socratic corpus’ and, therefore, shall not be excluded from any notion, stance or concept addressed in the Platonic dialogues, Early Socratic dialogues included. In occasions, it is not very clear whether Plato is using Socrates as a mouthpiece of his own philosophical views or espousing the actual ideas of his teacher. And at the same time, one cannot say with

\(^2\) A significant part of *logoi Sokratikoi* has naturally not survived. To name a few Aeschines of Sphettus wrote seven dialogues, all of which have been lost. Also, very little survives from the dialogues of Antisthenes, to which Diogenes Laeritus (6. 10-13) attributes a number of views that we recognise as Socratic, i.e. that virtue is sufficient for happiness or that the wise man is self-sufficient. Phaedo of Elis also wrote two dialogues, Euclides of Megara wrote six dialogues and, lastly, Aristippus of Cyrena is alleged to have written a work entitled *To Socrates*. (Ambury, n.d., accessed: 07/01/2020).

\(^3\) In *CDP* we also read “Xenophon’s Socrates is sometimes too good to be true” (Audi, 1999 p. 860). Søren Kierkegaard when commenting on Xenophon’s Socrates concludes that his persona is so indifferent and unattractive, that he probably wouldn’t have been executed, were this version of him the real Socrates (see p.16 n.17 for more information on S. Kierkegaard’s thesis).
certainty whether or not Socrates’ speech can be taken to be reporting his own voice or Plato’s ideas.¹

It is for all the aforementioned reasons that I will completely refrain from any attempt to sharply distinguish the two, precisely because I recognise the difficulty this endeavor entails. The aim of this thesis is to present a thorough and intelligible account of a novel understanding of Socrates’ technique, even if sometimes it might feel that Plato had something to do with it. I do not intend to present a portrayal of the historical Socrates, nor do I wish to defend a methodological approach strictly attributed to Socrates’ actual persona of the 5th century B.C. Besides, if I have learned anything from the years I have been concerned with the classical texts, it is that no one could have been better in attributing Socrates’ thoughts than Plato has – maybe even better than Socrates would have done for himself – and that no one exerted more influence on the Platonic thinking than Socrates did.

I do, of course, acknowledge the philosophical views that have been accepted as purely Socratic, such as Socratic Intellectualism, and differentiate him completely from essentially Platonic concepts, such as Plato’s metaphysical belief system, the Theory of Forms or the immortality of the soul. My arguments crucially rely on Socrates’ thinking and can be justified by Socrates’ philosophical system. For example, Socratic Intellectualism generates his paradoxical view that everyone desires the good and one does wrong only due to ignorance (Protagoras, 485d; Meno, 77c). This thesis does not dismiss the Socratic paradox, but rather it embraces it since this represents Socrates’

¹ M.F. Burnyeat makes a ground-breaking claim in his paper Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration, according to which midwifery as a technique used by Socrates to educate the younger was inspired by Plato. This powerful image was successfully transferred in the Platonic dialogues and through them to the readers and their consciousness. (see Burnyeat, 1977). This theory on the invention of the midwife technique is also embraced by G. Vlastos in Socrates Ironist and Moral Philosopher, in which he mentions: “His paper on Socratic Midwifery’ had established conclusively that the metaphor is a Platonic invention, foreign to the Socrates of Plato’s earlier dialogues – a thesis I had expounded myself at Princeton and at Berkeley, albeit without the subtlety of textual analysis and power of critical argument now deployed in this paper” (Vlastos, 1991 p. 17). Considering now the number of scholars that arguably attribute the midwife comparison to the historical Socrates, the issue of historically distinguishing Plato’s from Socrates’ philosophical ideas seems to be a daze. I will list here the scholars as indicated by Burnyeat. I do not examine the sources but I take his credibility for granted: “Thus e.g. A.E. Taylor, Varia Socratica (Oxford 1911), 148ff.; John Burnet, The Doctrine of the Soul, Proc. Brit. Acad. 7 (1916): cited from his Essays and Addresses (London 1929), 161; Francis Macdonald Conford, Plato’s Theory of Knowledge (London 1935), 28; W.K.C. Guthrie, A History of Greek Philosophy iii (Cambridge 1969), 397 n.1, 444; also Jean Humbert, Socrate et petits Socratiques (Paris 1967), 90-3.” (Ibid. 14)
understanding and, by extension, the tools for decrypting his method (Chapter 4). Yet, at the same time, this thesis constantly uses the terms ‘Socrates’, ‘Socratic method’, ‘Socratic irony’ etc. without further-examining whether the occasional particular reference concerns the historical Socrates or Plato’s Socrates or results from their perfect amalgam. I will be closely examining a technique, which is attributed to Socrates as introduced by his student; Plato. And, therefore, my main focus will be on the Early Platonic dialogues, hence the Socratic ones, which are also the dialogues where the reader can experience irony’s dominance.

This limitation further applies to the distinction between ‘Socratic irony’ and ‘Platonic irony’. Although scholars present generous argumentation on the matter, my research concerns a very specific type of irony; the *eironeia* as Socrates used it in Plato’s dialogues, underestimating his own merits, disavowing knowledge and praising the interlocutors’ skills. It is crucially this type of irony that my thesis addresses and it is only through a novel interpretation of this ironic attitude that we can defend its modernisation and effective application in contemporary education. Examining every instance of irony as expressed by Plato or Socrates was never the intention of this venture, nor is there enough space in the current research for such a thorough discussion. Nevertheless, I suggest that this could be a subject worth pursuing in future projects.

III. Second Limitation: Dividing the Dialogues

The second limitation resulting from the thesis’ methodological approach is the chronology of the dialogues’ composition dates. The opinions on the chronological taxonomy of the Platonic corpus varies crucially. Ancient sources based their ordering on thematic lines, whereas today research focuses principally on stylometry. Not only this, but the discrepancy is still vivid amongst scholars who have widely examined stylometry, still missing a unanimous consensus. A stylometric analysis of the dialogues

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3 See Rowe, 1987; Griswold, 2002 C. There is plenty of discussion on the different types of irony in Plato, which differ widely, especially on the aims and account of the notion: Griswold, 1986, see esp. Introduction; Edmunds, 2004; Wolfsdorf, 2007; Gottlieb, 1992; Gordon, 1996.
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has particularly presented substantial difficulties for numerous commentators, thus I dare not bring such an issue to the current research.\(^6\)

For purposes of inclusiveness, I shall, however, introduce here a list of the chronological division of the Platonic dialogues, as presented by Andrew S. Mason in Plato, which is in agreement with most accepted chronologies of Plato’s works, including The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy.\(^7\)

**Socratic dialogues (also known as Early Platonic dialogues)\(^8\)**

- Alcibiades*
- Apology
- Charmides
- Crito
- Euthydemus
- Euthyphro
- Gorgias
- Hippias Major*
- Hippias Minor
- Ion
- Laches
- Lysis
- Menexenus
- Meno
- Protagoras

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\(^6\) The best source from antiquity would be Aristotle (Politics, 2.6.1264b24-27), Diogenes Laertius (discussion at 3.37, 56-62) and Olympiodorus (Prol. 6.24). As for the state of contemporary analyses on the burden of stylometry, the bibliography is quite extensive. See here an indicative overview of the problem on chronology in Plato: Press, 1996; Thesleff, 1982; and later on again struggling on the matter Thesleff, 1989; Howland, 1991; and, finally, fruitfully insightful Zuckert, 2009.

\(^7\) See Mason, 2010 pp. 207–8 and Audi, 1999 pp. 709–10.

\(^8\) The dialogues are indicated in alphabetical order. The asterisks mark those dialogues whose authenticity is disputed but are nevertheless widely thought to be Plato’s, as Mason points out (2010 p.
Platonic dialogues (also known as Middle Platonic Dialogues)*

- Cratylus
- Parmenides
- Phaedo
- Phaedrus
- Republic
- Symposium
- Theaetetus

Later Platonic dialogues**

- Critias (incomplete)
- Epinomis*
- Laws
- Philebus
- Sophist
- Statesman (also called Politicus)
- Timaeus

The current thesis uses various dialogues and does not merely focus on the Socratic ones, which are arguably the most ironic. On the grounds that Socratic eironeia,** which is examined as a unique methodological phenomenon, does not vanish in the Middle or the Later dialogues, and since it is already established that the thesis’ methodology...
does not encourage sign-posting the core differences between the two philosophers, all Platonic corpus is considered relevant. Even though the chronological order is currently based on stylometric determinants, the limitations are not adamant, particularly when philosophical content is involved. It is, for example, true that although *Meno* is widely listed in the category ‘Socratic dialogues’, the instance in which Socrates questions the slave-boy on a geometry problem, is considered evidence to support the theory of recollection; a purely Platonic doctrine (*Men.*, 82b-86b).

IV. Third Limitation: The ‘Socratic Problem’

It is apparent by now, that my research emerges from the character Socrates more than the historical Socrates. Thus, the thesis avoids entirely any argument regarding the Socratic Problem. The German classical scholar Friedrich Schleiermacher in the 19th century generated this speculation when he argued that Xenophon, the until then exclusive source on which scholars relied to identify the real Socrates, was not a philosopher and his lukewarm portrayal of Socrates hardly grasps the reputation and influence his life exerted to his contemporaries. According to Schleiermacher, Plato conducts a much better portrait of Socrates’ existence.

Because the attempts to reconstruct a historical (and philosophical) figure of Socrates is based on various and contradictory sources, it has always been a riddle whether one can arrive to a sufficient understanding and pure knowledge of the historical Socrates. The puzzlement is sometimes so frustrating that makes scholars even wonder whether Socrates was a work of fiction and nothing more. W.K.C. Guthrie, in his authoritative study on Socrates' sources and his report on the Ancient Greek Philosophy from Thales to Aristotle, expresses the problem with concise clarity and a hint of pessimism: “Any account must begin with the admission that there is and always will be a ‘Socratic

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12 It is for such reasons that some scholars further-categorise the Platonic dialogues to early transitional and late transitional dialogues, including *Meno* in the early transitional list. See, for example, Vlastos, 1985 p. 1], who gives a stricter stylometric taxonomy based on the method and doctrines (the moral philosophy as he names it) of the historical Socrates. See, Vlastos, 1985.

13 From Schleiermacher, 1833.
Problem’. This is inevitable since he wrote nothing.”

It is widely accepted that finding the original Socrates may be impossible but there have been fruitful attempts to reach the closest possible approximation. The most thorough study I came across is Gigon Olof’s work Socrates, Sein Bild in Dichtung und Geschichte. And the most striking testimony on the matter came from G. Vlastos when he asked himself: “Why not bypass [...] the bugbear of Platonic studies, the so-called ‘Socratic Problem’? Why not let the historians have the Socrates of history all to themselves, keeping for myself that enchanting figure whose challenge to philosophers would be the same were he historic fact or Platonic fiction?” (pp. 45). Fortunately, he admits that his interests were not purely philosophical, enhancing our bibliography with his contribution to the matter in ‘Socrates contra Socrates in Plato’.

Vlastos’ admission urged me to admit that there is room for future research on the matter, particularly because he insists that the question ‘Socrates or Plato’s Socrates’ will follow you forever. For now, I neither delineate the historical Socrates, nor do I try to create a clearer image of the Platonic protagonist. This research submits a more thorough understanding of the phenomenon ‘irony’, and particularly ‘Socratic irony’, as a perfect combination of the persona Socrates was and of the literary character Plato created. I loyally focus on the philosophical significance of the phenomenon and its intellectual and pedagogical uses it encloses. Diving into the Socratic problem or trying to separate the historical Socrates from the Platonic one every step of the way would have been a much greater and perplexing quest and would have misguided greatly the

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15 G. Olof concludes that the search for a genuinely historical Socrates is eventually proven futile, due to non-existing bibliography of Socrates himself. All the writers, whether it is Plato or Xenophon, or Aristotle, etc. present a Socratic figure as a protagonist of their writings, enhanced with their understanding of Socrates and their literary skills. I used the Greek translation of his book Ολόφ, Ζιγκόν, Σωκράτης. Η Εικόνα του στην Ποίηση και στην Ιστορία, Μητρ. Άννα Γεωργίου, Εκδ. ‘Γνώση’, Αθήνα, 1995. Some additional bibliography includes: W. K. C Guthrie, Socrates, Cambridge University Press, 1971, giving a pessimistic note that “Any account must begin with the admission that there is and always will be a ‘Socratic Problem’” (Ibid. 6); Ross, William David, 1933; Kahn, 1998, especially the chapters Sokratikoi Logoi: The Literary and Intellectual Background of Plato’s Work (pp. 1-35), The interpretation of Plato (pp. 36-70) and Socrates (pp. 71-100 – page numbers match the online publication, November 2009); and Taylor, 1979.

16 Chapter 2 in his book Socrates Ironist and Moral Philosopher (Vlastos, 1991). Chapter 3 (The Evidence from Aristotle and Xenophon) is equally important. For Vlastos, the ‘real’ Socrates is revealed only in Plato’s earlier dialogues, whereas the rest of the Platonic corpus presents thereafter a “namesake”, who expounds Platonic views (Ibid. 11).
philosophical focus of this venture. Therefore, I face Socrates holistically as a philosophical figure, a figure enhanced by a heritage of immeasurable value.

Anticipating counterarguments according to which Socrates’ irony wouldn’t exist without Plato’s skillful writing, I gather that Kierkegaard’s assessment that the historical Socrates can only be understood as ironic shall suffice.17

17 Søren Kierkegaard wrote his doctoral dissertation The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates in Danish. The work was submitted in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts on the 3rd June 1841 and formally accepted on the 16th of July 1841 by F. C. Sibbern. A translation of his academic dissertation in English is presented by Lee M. Capel: Søren Kierkegaard, The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates, 1966.
Introduction
The Socratic Challenge: Reinventing Socratic Irony’s Educational Character
CHAPTER 1

THE HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF IRONY’S DEVELOPMENT AS A TERM AND A PHILOSOPHICAL PHENOMENON

0. INTRODUCTION

One of the most controversial cases in the history of philosophy along with the terminological clarification of philosophical terms has been the attempt to fully comprehend and provide unanimous definitional answers for the concept of irony; researchers never reached consensus, and the struggle is still on. Furthermore, when the terminological entry of irony is associated to the philosophy and life of Socrates, decrypting the implications of this linguistic and philosophical phenomenon becomes even more perplexed.

It is for all these reasons that in this first chapter I present a brief historical overview of the term’s evolution. Firstly, without firmly associating it to Socrates, Section §1 provides a range of definitional attributions of irony in contemporary bibliography. However, this endeavor does not intend to cover the term’s overview in its wholeness, nor does it suggest that this is an exhaustive source on irony and its types in the history
of philosophy. Section §1 succeeds in creating a useful chrono-diagram, a guide to ease the reader into the subject and highlight the definitional fog irony involves.

After the aforementioned is presented, the focus of Section §2 orientates towards the analysis of the philosophical applications ‘Socratic irony’, as a phenomenon, uncovers. Irony is a notion firmly attached to Socrates’ figure, whether we are considering historical Socrates or the character in the ancient literary corpus. Therefore, examining the verbal occurrence of the term irony in literature, gives a fruitful understanding of irony’s conceptualisation into a philosophical phenomenon. Section §2 is the most essential and, thus, most extensive. The concept of irony is examined primarily before Plato’s usage, in Homeric and Aristophanic works, in which the negative appreciation is apparent (Section §2.1). The unfavorable perceptions are marginalized in the Platonic corpus. Section §2.2 scrutinizes εἰρωνεία’s verbal appearance in the Platonic corpus, determining the refinement of the concept when employed by Socrates. The acknowledged philosophical debate regarding the nature of ‘Socratic irony’ and the beneficial or the unfavorable applications it has, calls for a parallel analysis of the contradicting views. The type of research followed is a collective comparative method between studies and interpretations that do have a common field (i.e. Socratic εἰρωνεία and its philosophical significance) but reach opposing conclusions (i.e. G. Vlastos and Al. Nehamas). Section §2.3 concisely covers the terminological appearance of ‘irony’ in Aristotle’s corpus. This thesis embraces the Aristotelean understanding of Socratic irony as self-depreciation and, thus, chapter 2 will exclusively focus on this study. And, finally, Section §2.4 describes the transition from the classical Greek εἰρωνεία to the Latin ironia as introduced by Cicero and Quintilianus.

In Section §3 ‘Socratic irony’ is arguably transliterated into Socratic εἰρωνεία. A first presentation of εἰρωνεία’s characteristic features are briefly addressed. This thesis determines Socrates’ εἰρωνεία as a philosophical concept which employs self-disparagement and promotes it to an epistemic device. The eiron Socrates is introduced as a self-depreciator, who understates his own merits, disavows knowledge and embraces his ignorance in an attempt to build the interlocutor’s epistemic character.
Finally, Section §4 concludes the historical overview, referencing significant scholarly appreciation of the concept of irony in Early modern and contemporary bibliography, such as F. Schlegel, D.C. Muecke and S. Kierkegaard.

**Expository Remarks**

Throughout this chapter different terminology on irony is employed to serve the purposes of each case: *εἰρωνεία* is used where the Classical Greek textual reference is discussed; ‘irony’ is used to denote the Classical Greek term in its English translation; *irony* is used as a general description of the concept throughout history; and, finally, ‘Socratic irony’ or ‘eironia’ is a transliterated term introduced to refer solely to the philosophical concept of irony as employed by Socrates.

**SECTION 1. IRONY: A MULTIFACETED PHENOMENON**

While examining irony as a phenomenon, it is not particularly ambitious to realise that a universal, catholically conventional comprehension is ambiguous, setting the importance of irony’s understanding beyond question. Etymological and Philosophical dictionaries present entries with definitional variations, even though irony has been internationally long established as a *terminus technicus* (technical term). This versatility was the initial reason to attract my attention and the motive that generated the purposes of this thesis. Irony is a phenomenon so peculiarly familiar to literature, theatre, everyday life or ordinary conversation, which, nevertheless, seems to be also mysteriously opaque. It is almost with no exceptions that in everyday life we come across verbal irony and ironic situations, not only as receivers of an ironic utterance or protagonists of an ironic circumstance, but also, as ‘transmitters’ and users of the phenomenon, unintentionally creating in our conscience the impression that we have
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an adequate understanding or that we can handle it proficiently. However, this occurring terminological disagreement affirms the opposite. D. C. Muecke's claim that if you want to give someone a headache you should have them define irony, is insightfully precise.

Even though when asked to present a simple definition on irony, one would almost instinctively answer “saying the opposite of what one really means”, such a definitional attempt would be entirely insufficient for the multiple applications the concept of irony entails. This stems from the fact that irony is not and should not be considered a simple phenomenon.

Indicatively, an overview of the most important and popular definitions is included in this analysis.

The Penguin Dictionary of Philosophy:

1) the mocking or complaining use of words to convey the opposite of their literal meaning. 2) more generally, distancing oneself, from the message one

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1 I intentionally dismiss a further examination of the distinction between irony and sarcasm, two concepts fallaciously linked in our understanding, on the grounds that sarcasm is not a notion with significant philosophical importance. Sarcasm employs irony to convey contempt, with the intention to criticize either in a humorous manner or, more regularly, in a hurtful way. It is more similar to a verbal attack, creating a bad joke, and an indented lie to be cutting. Irony, and especially the type of irony — Socratic *eironia* — I am arguing for in the current thesis, is far from malicious (the justification will gradually appear in the following chapters). Additionally, irony is not merely verbal — as supposedly is sarcasm —, but also situational, dramatic, emotional, theatrical, etc. For more on the types of irony see Muecke, 1982. A brief reference on the most important types of irony is included in Section 4 ‘Early Modern and Contemporary Irony; a Brief Overview’.

2 D. C. Muecke wrote extensively on irony. See also Muecke, 1969.

3 Besides Muecke, Paul de Man also admits the difficulties this endeavour entails. He writes: ‘It seems to be uncannily difficult to give a definition of irony’, (de Man, 1996); the Chapter The Concept of Irony is based on a lecture in the University of Ohio, 1977. The definition Paul de Man ends up giving to irony, even though he reckons it wouldn’t make us wiser on the matter, is the following: ‘Trope means “to turn”, and it’s that turning away, that deviation between literal and figural meaning, this turning away of the meaning, which is certainly involved in all traditional definitions of irony. […] Irony seems to be the trope of tropes, the one that names the term as the “turning away”, but that notion is so all-encompassing that it would include all tropes.’ (ibid. 164–65). Paul de Man seems to be influenced by Quintilian’s definition on ‘irony’, who also called it a ‘trope’, a rhetorical move in which the meaning of the words used changes. More on Quintilian’s ‘irony’ in Subsection 2.4 ‘The Greek *Eironia* Codified: Cicero’s and Quintilianus’ *Deoría*’. 
conveys. 3) in a wider sense, the irony of a situation, or in a sequence of events, consists in there being a striking contrast between two of its salient features.

The *Merriam-Webster* dictionary:

1) a. the use of words to express something other than and especially the opposite of the literal meaning. b. a usually humorous or sardonic literary style or form characterised by irony. c. an ironic expression or utterance. 2) a. (1) incongruity between the actual result of a sequence of events and the normal or expected result; a. (2) an event or result marked by such incongruity. b. incongruity between a situation developed in a drama and the accompanying words or actions that is understood by the audience but not by the characters in a play – called also *dramatic irony, tragic irony*.

3) a pretense of ignorance and of willingness to learn from another assumed in order to make the other’s false conceptions conspicuous by adroit questioning – called also *Socratic irony*.

The *Liddel & Scott Greek-English Lexicon*:

1) pretense or pretended ignorance for the purposes of examining or confusing the addressee; a way of communicating through interlocution often used by Socrates when confronting the sophists; not to be confused with ἀλαζονείαν (arrogance). 2) anything pretended or feigned, especially when someone is initially appeared to be prone to a certain situation but then withdraws.

The *Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*:

(Gk ‘dissimulation’) First recorded in Plato’s Republic (4th c. bc), where it has approximately the meaning of ‘a glib and underhand way of taking people in’. In the Platonic dialogues, Socrates himself takes on the role of ἐἰρών or ‘dissembler’ and, assuming a pose of ignorance, asks seemingly innocuous and naive questions which gradually undermine his interlocutor’s case and trap him into confronting the truth. Hence what is known as dialectical or Socratic irony (q.v.). For the Roman rhetoricians (in particular Cicero and Quintilian) *ironia* denoted a rhetorical figure and a manner of discourse in which, for the most part, the meaning was contrary to the words. The double-edged nature seems to be a continuing feature of irony.

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6 Liddell and Scott, 2007 p. 36.
The review of the term’s definitional etymology in contemporary dictionaries fixates our attention in the two following aspects. First of all, as anticipated, consistency amongst the root features of the term is evidently absent. Highlighting the traits with philosophical significance, there is very little agreement regarding the notions ‘mockery’, ‘pretense’, ‘opposite meaning’, ‘humor’, ‘incongruity’, ‘ignorance’, ‘pretended ignorance’, ‘underhand way’ and ‘dissembling’. Keeping the perspective of linguistic sentiment, it is not that rare for certain terms and conceptions to experience verbal transition and diversity. Afterall, languages are considered ‘living organisms’, for they diachronically appear to change, they evolve, they spring, they progress, and they even get extinct. Therefore, discrepancies while employing a historical overview throughout centuries are subject to normativity. On the contrary, inconsistencies in contemporary approaches are subject to investigation.

The second significant characteristic is that ‘Socratic irony’ plays a crucial role in the concept’s formation. It seems that, in several occasions, irony cannot be defined without a reference to Socrates and to the influence he exerted on irony’s evolution. It is also already apparent that ‘Socratic irony’ systematically asks for a distinct definitional attribution, associated to Socrates and his imprint on the ironic conception, indicating that the differences between ‘irony’ and ‘Socratic irony’ are vital. *Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* does not even present ‘irony’ as a unique entry. It is either connected to Socrates entering ‘Socratic irony’ or to Friedrich von Schlegel and German Romanticism entering ‘Romantic irony’. I will return to the distinction between ‘irony’ and ‘Socratic irony’ when the historical overview of the term’s etymological evolution is complete, precisely due to the philosophical importance of their separate categorisation. This thesis results in a novel interpretation of the phenomenon that is the ‘Socratic irony’, which includes most of the traits the aforementioned definitions convey, but, at the same time, does not identify with any of the existing etymologies.

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8 Audi, 1999 p. 861, 818 I shall revisit *CDP*’s definition in Section 4 ‘Early Modern and Contemporary Irony; a Brief Overview’. For the history of it: ‘Schlegel, Friedrich von (1772-1829), German literary critic and philosopher, one of the principal representatives of German Romanticism’ (ibid. 818).
SECTION 2. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW: FROM ΕΙΡΩΝΕΙΑ TO IRONY

This Section scrutinises the entry εἰρωνεία from its first appearance in antiquity (Homer, Aristophanes, Plato, Aristotle) to its transition into the Latin term ironia (Quintilianus, Cicero), concentrating on the conceptual change the term undergoes. The main focus of this Section is to examine εἰρωνεία’s attitude in reference to Socrates in the Platonic dialogues.

2.1 IRONY BEFORE PLATO: HOMER, ARISTOPHANES, XENOPHON

As already indicated in DLTLT, the term’s first written appearance was in Plato, and, specifically Plato’s Republic. However, some instances of the term’s root already appear in Aristophanes’ writings before Plato’s references. There are 3 existing bibliographical quotations in Aristophanes’ plays that prove the term’s historical pre-existence as an entry before Plato used it. More specifically in Νεφέλαι, 449: “[...] μασθλής, εἰρων, γλοις, ἀλαζών, [...]”;10 in ጆρνθαι, 1211: “ἥκουσας αὐτής, σὸν εἰρωνεύεται;”;11 and in Σφήκαι, 174: “οἷαν πρόφασιν καθήκετον, ως εἰρωνικός.”12 Aristophanes’ plays are prior to Plato’s works. Since they were all performed for the first time before the estimated date Plato wrote the dialogues, their estimated composition date is also anterior. In addition, there is also strong indication that irony as a phenomenon precedes its verbal appearance. It

9 Plato’s Republic is most likely to have been written within the second period of Plato’s literary activity (388-367 B.C.) after his first journey to Sicily and Italy (early 390 B.C. to summer 388 B.C.).

10 Aristophanes, Clouds, 449: ‘[...] slippery as an eel, an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain’. Εἰρον is the adjective of the term’s root (εἰρωνεία being the noun) and is translated here as an ‘the artful fellow’ (Aristophanes, Anonymous tr., n.d.).

11 Aristophanes, Birds, 1211: “You hear how she holds us in derision”. In this case the verb εἰρωνεύομαι (=hold in derision) is used in third person singular – (translation: The Internet Classics Archive, accessed: 04/04/2016). And an alternative translation: “Listen to her – how she feigns ignorance” (online translation by Johnston, 2017 – accessed 16/01/2020). However, the latter translation indicates influences of contemporary understanding of the concept of irony and what it has come to represent. I reckon that Aristophanes manner is a lot more caustic and his writing more vulgar, and, therefore, the translation of ‘derision’ seems to be a more accurate fit.


13 The Clouds was first performed in 423 B.C.; the Wasps in 422 B.C.; and the Birds in 414 B.C.
is argued that indications for irony's pre-existence as a phenomenon are firmly placed in Homeric poetry and the great works of *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.\(^\text{14}\)

As far as irony in Homeric poetry is concerned, the realisation that ironic instances, and therefore irony as a phenomenon, precedes irony as a term is rather exciting. The phenomenon existed in Homer’s reality and realm without a verbal attribution of it. To cite such an instance, the suitors are being ironic towards beggar Odysseus and his ostensible incompetence to use the arrow, an irony somewhat related to the regular definitions that are included above (i.e. mockery).\(^\text{15}\) The conceptualisation of irony is present, but it hasn’t been yet identified. The phenomenon irony will lead eventually to the concept irony through the type, the linguistic term (*éironía*) [from phenomenon \(\rightarrow\) to term \(\rightarrow\) to concept]. Besides that, the study of Homeric poetry has little to offer to the current endeavour. ‘Socratic irony’, which is the main concern of this thesis is not present neither in the *Odyssey* nor the *Iliad*. The irony we come across in Homer is more closely related to what we call Sophoclean irony, or dramatic irony, or tragic irony,\(^\text{16}\) which is incarnated through the audience and their perception of the ironic situation, while the protagonist is completely unaware of the truth\(^\text{17}\) (e.g. Penelope, as opposed to the audience, is entirely oblivious of the fact that Odysseus is in the palace disguised as a beggar).\(^\text{18}\) Although J. Canavan lightly argued for instances of ‘Socratic irony’ in Homer, they do not contribute to the philosophical decoding the ‘Socratic irony’ this thesis supports and, therefore, I will not further examine them.\(^\text{19}\) Homeric poetry can only be considered the very first and immature implication of ‘Socratic irony’ and nothing more. However, I admit that a novel study of this peculiar function

\(^{14}\) The chronology of the poems can only be estimated by the indications regarding Homer’s life. Herodotus argues that Homer lived 400 years before his own time, placing him circa 850 B.C. The majority of modern researchers also place Homer in the 7th or 8th century B.C.

\(^{15}\) Homer, n.d. bk. 21.

\(^{16}\) ‘Tragic irony, then – which can be considered a subcategory of dramatic irony (g.v.) – describes a situation where an audience appreciates the incongruity of a character’s words or deeds in the light of his or her fate, whereas the character does not.’ DLITL, 2013, pp.372.

\(^{17}\) For the role of the audience and the different levels of understanding in irony see Chapter 2.

\(^{18}\) Homer, n.d. bks. 17–18.

\(^{19}\) For more on ‘Socratic irony’ in Homer, see Canavan, 1946, especially ‘The Nature and Types of Irony’, pp. 1-14. See also: Wolfe, 2008 pp. 151–86, especially pp. 176-177;
Chapter 1: The Historical Overview of Irony’s Development

of the phenomenon pre-existing the terminological conceptualisation could be subject for future research, within the field of Philosophy of Language. It is possible that this preceding of irony as a notion before its terminological attribution could be examined as a speech act’s unique function.

Regarding Aristophanes, as already clarified, the term εἰρωνεία per se does not yet appear as such but there are three different references of the term’s root (i.e. εἴρων, εἰρωνεύομαι, εἰρωνικός). Therefore, the first verbal incarnation of irony should be detected in Aristophanes’ plays and not Plato, unless we strictly desire preciseness and we value a verbal embodiment of the phenomenon irony through the noun εἰρωνεία only. I reckon there is no particular reason for such a constraint.

Accepting that the first written appearance of the phenomenon irony is in Aristophanes’ plays, it should be stressed that irony’s debut occurred within an extensively negative overtone, which makes sense considering that vulgar dialogues is a characteristic of Aristophanes’ writings. When Aristophanes makes use of the term it indicates either the deceiving man (εἴρων), or a devious and crafty manner (εἰρωνικός), or the intention for derision (εἰρωνεύομαι). Since Socrates is one of the main characters in Aristophanes’ Clouds my main concern will be on examining the use of the word εἴρων in this play. First of all, considering the theme of the play, it aims to be amusing but also caustic regarding the radical ideas that were arising in Athens at the time. Through Aristophanes sarcastic theatrical pen, Socrates is presented as a blasphemous Athenian against Zeus and the Gods of Olympus, since he only worships the clouds. There is an emphatic implication throughout the play that these new, innovating ideas are a threat to the values and the morals of Athens. However, although Aristophanes constantly ridicules Socrates in an attempt to undermine his new teaching, when it comes to derision and mockery, he targets the Sophists. When Strepsiades, the protagonist of the Clouds, says “So let them do me as they will […] an artful fellow, a blusterer, a villain” (Clouds, 437-450) he is referring to the Sophists.

As the leader of Aristophanes, Clouds, 437-455: “So let them do with me as they will; I yield my body to them. Come blows, come hunger, thirst, heat or cold, little matters it to me; they may flay me, if I only escape my debts, if only I win the reputation of being a bold rascal, a fine speaker, impudent, shameless, a braggart, and adept at stringing lies, an old stager at quibbles, a complete table of laws, a thorough rattle, a fox to
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the chorus earlier suggested, Sterpisades will commit himself to the Sophists to learn how to turn bad lawsuits to his own advantage and slip through the fingers of his creditors (Clouds, 433-4). Thus, the term εἰρων in the Clouds refers to the Sophists and not Socrates. Socrates is still negatively portrayed, for his ideas pose a threat to the state of Athens and its function. One may even argue that Aristophanes actually treats Socrates and the Sophists in the same manner. It is worth mentioning that Socrates is presented to offer his teaching in exchange for a hefty tuition fee, something that Socrates was appalled by and is constantly argued as one of the core differences between him and the Sophists. But still, the εἰρων (the deceiving man) is not Socrates here. It is for all these reasons that Kierkegaard’s perception of the Aristophanic Socrates caught me by surprise. He claimed that The Clouds present a revealing and somewhat accurate Socrates, depending on certain features of his idiosyncrasy (i.e. contemplating, standing still on his feet and having a mystic relationship with the divine deity).21 My understanding of the ‘accurate Socrates’ categorically differs.

The other two references in Birds and Wasps are also negatively charged. However, it does not appear that they are connected to Socrates and his attitude, rendering them irrelevant for the current research. Conclusively, the very first instance of irony as a term may have appeared in Aristophanes, but since none of them occurs in relation to Socrates, it can be safely inferred that ‘Socratic irony’ was not yet formulated in or by Aristophanes’ scripts.

It is for the same reasons that Xenophon’s corpus shall not be included in my analysis. Neither Xenophon nor Aristophanes ever used the terms εἰρωνεία or εἰρων in reference to Socrates. The negative overtone, however, is present in both writings. The only

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21 “The first thing of importance is to become convinced that it is the actual Socrates which Aristophanes has brought on to the stage. As one is reinforced in this conviction by the traditions of antiquity, so a multitude of Socratic traits are to be found in this work, which are either historically certain, or appear to be thoroughly analogous to what we otherwise know about Socrates.” (Kierkegaard, Capel tr., 1966 p. 161).
Chapter 1: The Historical Overview of Irony’s Development

thing slightly peculiar and worth noticing here is that Vlastos uses Xenophon’s works, *Memorabilia* and *Symposium*, to justify his original interpretation of Socrates’ irony as ‘complex irony’, according to which “what is said both is and isn’t what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another”. Vlastos’ account on ‘complex irony’ shall be further discussed, especially for its applications in Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and his denial that he is or ever has been a teacher. The same applies for Theophrastus (371 B.C. – 287 B.C.) and his references on ‘irony’. Even though the latter was a student of Plato’s, and one might assume that Plato’s more delicate approach towards the concept – my thesis argues for exactly this refinement of irony in Plato’s hands –, would have been a catholic influence, this is not the case.

Although these sources, and particularly Homeric poetry and Aristophanic comedy, present an interesting twist for irony’s nature as a term and its verbal existence – or pre-existence –, I maintain that ‘Socratic irony’ is not present in the aforementioned works (poems or plays). Nevertheless, ‘Socratic irony’ is arguably a phenomenon that gradually and methodically shaped to what we can interpret today as an essential tool for educational and epistemic enhancement and, therefore, credit must be given to any

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22 Vlastos, 1991 pp. 30–32. Vlastos, for example, discussed Xenophon’s *Symposium*, in which Socrates “challenged to a beauty-contest by the handsome Critobulus (5.1 ff.), he pleads the superior beauty of his own ugliest features – his snub nose, his oversized flaring nostrils – on the ground that useful I beautiful (5.6). […] when he (Socrates) says that his flat, pushed-in nose, his protruding eyes, and his large, flaring nostrils are beautiful, he does not, and yet does, mean what he says. In the ordinary sense of the word he would be the first to deny that they are. But if by ‘beautiful’ he were allowed to mean ‘well made for their required function’ (5.4), then he would have us know that his particular sort of eyes and nose are superlatively beautiful.” (Ibid). Still, even if we were to accept this as accurate, it is an ironic situation and not a verbal instance of **εἰρωνεία**, which this chapter is currently focusing on.

23 See Chapter 3 ‘Saving Socrates’ Appearances’ and Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’.

24 Vlastos mentions in his vivid description: “In Theophrastus the *eirōn* is flayed mercilessly, portrayed as systematically deceitful, venomously double-faced, adept at self-serving camouflage.” See Vlastos, 1991 p. 24, for the textual references in Theophrastus’ writings. For the work of Theophrastus see Diggle, 2004 and Lane, 2006 pp. 53–54 n.12. Nehamas, although he agrees on the purely negative portrait of the ironic man in Theophrastus, he claims, however, that: “Theophrastus’ actual views in his discussion of the *eirōn* in Chapter I of the *Characters* may in fact be difficult to determine. The text is uncertain, and Ussher, 1993 R. Glenn Ussher (The Character of Theophrastus [London: Macmillan, 1960], n. *ad. loc.*) suggests that what we have in our hands today is the result of considerable interpolation.” (Nehamas, 1998 p. 50, n. 14).
source that is considered a contribution to the modulation of the phenomenon’s final form.

Irony in Aristophanes’ consciousness is a concept entirely negative similar to villain, sly, devious and the like. It is of great interest to see why Plato used such a negative notion to describe his beloved teacher. In this thesis I argue for a conceptual refinement of the term primarily in Plato’s and principally in Aristotle’s work. Instances of the negative overtone may have survived in contemporary etymology, as we shall evidently witness by the end of this chapter, but Plato and Aristotle treat the εἰρων (ironic man) and εἰρωνεία (irony) more gently and favorably, especially when and precisely because it is related to Socrates. Therefore, ‘Socratic irony’ is and should be examined distinctly from ‘irony’, as my argumentation shall prove.

2.2 Irony in Plato

I suggest that an introductory clarification for this sub-chapter is of crucial importance. While still examining the linguistic incarnation and transition of the term, this analysis will focus principally on the verbal occurrences of the term ‘irony’ (εἰρωνεία) within the Platonic corpus. I shall present that Plato uses the term εἰρωνεία and other types of the term 13 times in the Platonic dialogues. I shall also examine their potential connection to Socrates, and I will introduce ‘Socratic irony’ the way Plato received and used it. However, I do not suggest that these are the only occasions in which ‘Socratic irony’ is detected in the Platonic dialogues nor does the appearance of the linguistic term guarantee a simultaneous occurrence of ‘Socratic irony’. As already determined this venture concludes that ‘Socratic irony’ and ‘irony’ are two concepts that develop towards different directions. In addition, ‘Socratic irony’ does not only focus on speech (or words), the way this analysis has so far. As Socrates shall suggest in Cratylus, to learn the truth about anything one must go behind words altogether, to examine with their minds. In order to fully perceive the essence of the phenomenon ‘Socratic irony’ represents, one must eventually expand their research to include the possibilities of other cases of ironic action – speech itself, of course, being a form of action –. I shall, therefore, begin now and return to re-examining ‘Socratic irony’ in the Platonic
dialogues on several occasions throughout the thesis. This chapter sums the linguistic occurrence of the concept and paves the way towards determining its philosophical significance as a method. The term’s purification through Plato’s dialogues and Aristotle’s treatise is pivotal for establishing the refinement ‘Socratic irony’ presupposes, when used as an epistemic tool with beneficial educational applications.

In Plato’s epoch the verbal attribution of the phenomenon irony is established, allowing for the phenomenon to become a well-known concept. In the Platonic corpus we come across 13 occasions originating from irony’s (εἰρωνείας) root. I include a list of Plato’s dialogues, indicating those 13 references in alphabetical order:

- *Apology*: εἰρωνευομένη (Ap. 38a1)
- *Cratylus*: εἰρωνεύεται (Crat. 384a1)
- *Euthydemus*: εἰρωνικός (Euthd. 302b3)
- *Gorgias*: εἰρωνεύη (Gorg. 489e1), εἰρωνεύν (Gorg. 489e3)
- *Laws*: εἰρωνικόν (Laws 908e2)
- *Sophist*: εἰρωνικόν (Soph. 268a7), εἰρωνεύςθαι (Soph. 268b3), εἰρωνικο (Soph. 268c8)
- *Symposium*: εἰρωνευόμενος (Symph. 216e4), εἰρωνικώς (Symph. 218d6)

As we study the concept of irony in Plato’s dialogues, ‘Socratic irony’ unravels alongside. It seems quite inevitable that the two phenomena will appear interchangeably. Focusing on each one of the above entries, I will examine the way it was used by Plato after Aristophanes’ negatively charged approach and application of the term. The order of the dialogues on which the following analysis is presented is intentional and will be gradually revealed.

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25 The alphabetical order is preferred over a chronological one, for the burden the chronology of Platonian dialogues entails. For the chronology of the Platonic dialogues, see Introduction ‘Methodology and Limitations’.

26 The dialogue *Lovers* (Ἐρασταί) is sometimes included in the Platonic corpus, although its authenticity is under speculation and has been often doubted. If one were to take the dialogue to be an authentic Socratic dialogue the following entry shall be included in the above list: εἰρωνικός (Lovers 133d8). I will not further examine this entry, nor will I argue for the credibility of the dialogue.
Sophist

In the Platonic dialogue *Sophist*, we come across three references of the term ‘irony’. What is interesting about this particular dialogue is the fact that Socrates is hardly in it. His presence is brief and is merely included in the beginning of the dialogue. After that, the dialogue unfolds predominantly between the philosopher visitor from Elea and Socrates’ Athenian student Theaetetus. And although Socrates’ absence would simultaneously suggest the insignificance of the terminological occurrence of ‘irony’ in the dialogue, we pleasantly realise its valuable contribution to the understanding of ‘Socratic irony’. The *Sophist*’s main theme, set naturally by Socrates, is to identify what a sophist is, what knowledge he possesses and how he differs from the philosopher and the statesman. And even though Socrates is not leading the dialogue, his dialectic method is still intact and quite successfully practiced by the visitor from Elea.

The fact that Socrates is not a leading character in this dialogue and does not actively participate, indicates that the irony referred here is not the ‘Socratic irony’, as employed by Socrates himself. However, having a closer look into those references would paint a broader and more accurate picture of Plato’s attitude towards the concept of εἰρωνεία (irony) and of the general feeling towards the εἰρων (ironic man) at the time of the dialogue (circa 360 BC), giving us a thorough account of the term’s diversity.

The first reference of the term is the following:27

Visitor: Shall we take one of these to be sort of sincere imitator and the other to be an insincere one (εἰρωνικόν)?

Theaetetus: That seems right. (*Soph.* 268a6-7)28

The ancient Greek term ‘εἰρωνεία’ is translated as ‘insincere’ when referring to the imitators and their division between those who possess knowledge and those who are

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27 The translations used for the Platonic dialogues here are from Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 unless indicated otherwise. It should be highlighted that John M. Cooper presents a collection of different translations for the Platonic dialogues. The translators of each work are distinctly listed and acknowledged in the ‘Contents’ of the book (*Ibid*, v-vii). Indicatively, some of the translators are G.M.A. Grube (*Apology, Republic*), Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff (*Symposium*), C.D.C. Reeve (*Cratylus*), Nicholas P. White (*Sophist*), etc.

ignorant but pretend they have knowledge. The visitor from Elea and Theaetetus have reached a point in their discussion, in which they are trying to define the sophist and what their knowledge represents. The visitor philosopher from Elea profitably uses Socrates’ method of inquiry, in an attempt to portray his own conception of the sophist. It goes without saying that in a Platonic dialogue, in which a philosopher leads the discussion, even when this philosopher is not Socrates, this portrayal is most likely going to be quite unfavourable towards the sophist. Right before we reach the above quote, the interlocutors had already agreed that between true-beliefs and knowledge the sophist clearly owns the former and can, therefore, only be considered a ‘belief-mimic’ and not and an ‘informed-mimic’ when it comes to mimicry. The philosopher visitor makes a further division within the belief-mimic; him who “thinks he knows the things he only has beliefs for” (Sophist, 268a) and him who is “suspicious and fearful that he doesn’t know the things that he pretends in front of others to know” (Sophist, 268a). Therefore, the former is a ‘sincere imitator’, since he only has true beliefs on things but sincerely thinks he has knowledge, and the latter is an ‘insincere imitator’ (εἰρωνεύων μιμητήν), who is aware, or at least suspects his ignorance, but still pretends to have sincere knowledge of things in front of others.

It is obvious that the term εἰρωνεύω here has a negative connotation of insincerity and could provisionally include an intention for deception. However, I argue that the irony introduced in the above quote is not the irony Socrates used, nor the irony Plato attributed to his teacher (‘Socratic irony’). And, although Socrates will be mentioned as ‘ironic man’ a few times in the platonic dialogues and will be accused by some of his interlocutors that he is using towards them an insincere and derisive irony, this is clearly not one of these cases. As the dialogue moves on, we come across the term’s second reference:

Visitor: And are there one or two kinds of insincere ones?
Theaetetus: You look and see.
Visitor: I am looking, and there clearly appear to be two. I see that one sort can maintain his insincerity (εἰρωνεύεσθαι) in long speeches to crowd, and the

29 Ibid.
other uses short speeches in private conversation to force the person talking
with him to contradict himself. (Soph. 268a9-b5)

By now, it is absolutely apparent that the interlocutors are using the concept of irony
to describe an action of insincerity, dishonesty and pretense. And since they are not
referring to Socrates and his irony, it is interesting to see who they consider to be
insincerely and deceitfully ironic.

Visitor: How shall we show up the long-winded sort, as a statesman or a as a
demagogue?
Theaetetus: A demagogue.
Visitor: And what shall we call the other one? Wise, or a sophist?
Theaetetus: [...] And now at last I see that we have to call him the person
who is really and truly a sophist. (Soph. 268b7-c4 – my emphasis)

To conclude the Sophist’s analysis and the references of the concept of irony it
introduces, it is the insincerity of the sophist that is pointed out and accused as being
blameworthy. Similarly to Aristophanes’ Clouds the negative coloring of the concept
of irony appears in reference to the sophists. It is their pretense of having knowledge
of things even though they do know they do not honestly possess it. And this pretense
of knowledge instead of accepting and embracing ignorance is a tactic categorically
opposite of the one Socrates used, as I will thoroughly argue for and defend. Socrates
is expressing ignorance whereas the sophists express feigned knowledge. The insincere
pretense of knowledge, a method professionally used by the sophists, is what Plato
comments as reprehensible in the above texts. Crucially, we come to realise that not
only isn’t the reference ‘εἰρωνικόν μμητήρ’ targeting Socrates but it also inculpates a
technique (feigned knowledge) contradictorily opposite to the Socratic method this

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30 Ibid. “Ἐν. Τοῦτον δ’ αὐτῷ τὸ γένος ἐν ἡ δύο φόμεν Ἴθεω. Ἡ όρα σι.’ Ἐν. Ὑποτεῦ, καὶ μικρὸ ὑποτεὐνωθάν τοῖς
τοῦ μὲν ὑποτεύνη ἐκαταβαίνει τοῖς ἀπήδευτον ἄνθρωπον. Τῆς ὑπερτηνην, τῶν ὁ δὲ ἴδε τα καὶ βαρηκὸς λόγος
ὑποτευνεῖσθαι τῶν προφθανόντων οντοτε μεταξύ τοῦ ἀνθρώπου.’ (Soph. 268a9-b5).

31 Ibid. “Ἐν. Ἐν οἷς ἄποφαναιμιθανοὶ μναρκολογοῦτον εἴναι; πότερα πολίτεος ἡ δημολογοῦσιν. Ἐθε. Ἀριστολογοῦσιν.’
Ἐν. Τί δὲ τοῦ ἑτερου ἐρῶς σοφον ἡ σοφιστικάς. Ἐθε. Ἱτ. [...] καὶ σχεδὸν Ἰδὲ καὶ ἰδὲ καὶ σκείδως ἀνεβάλων ἐκάθεν ἄλλων
μεταξύ τῶν προφθανόν λόγων σοφον.’ (Soph. 268b7-c4).

32 I will not include the third reference in my analysis, as it merely summarises the aforementioned. I cite here the quote as a footnote in the English translation (Ibid. 293): ‘Visitor: Imitation of the contrary
speech-producing, insincere and unknowing sort, of the appearance-making kind of copy-making, the
word-juggling part of production that’s marked off as human and not divine. Anyone who says
the sophist is of this “blood and family” will be saying, it seems, the complete truth.’ (Sophist, 268c8-d4).
thesis argues for (admitted ignorance), which is far from faking and overstating his own merits and, in particular, the merit of knowledge.

Euthydemus

The Euthydemus, along with the Euthyphro, are considered two paradigms of Socrates’ ironic behavior in the Platonic dialogues. Therefore, my research will revisit their ironic nature in the following chapters, in which ‘Socratic irony’ will be scrutinized beyond the limits of its verbal existence. The theme of the dialogue is also central, since it discusses ways and gives instructions for attaining ἀρετή (ἀρετῆν). It concerns two sophists, Euthydemus and his older brother Dionysodorus, who having devoted themselves to ‘the combat of words’, they claim that they can make their students paragons of human virtue, if they teach them the ‘eristic’ wisdom of “refuting whatever may be said, no matter whether it is true or false” (Euthd. 272b).33 It is another dialogue in which Socrates is put in a position to defend his method against the sophists’ ‘art’ (σοφιστικήν). Plato presents a rather fine review on the superiority of Socrates’ method, which is ‘protreptic’ and fostering, as opposed to the sophists, whose ‘art’ is constantly ‘eristic’ and refutatory. It has been argued that Euthydemus is one of those dialogues which approaches to a comic poet, precisely because the irony in it is more sustained and Socrates does not seem ever to drop the mask of eiron.

In Euthydemus a terminological reference to irony appears once:

And he pretended (εἰρωνεύως) to pause as though he were contemplating some weighty matter. (Euthd. 302b)34

As it appears, Socrates is the one using the term εἰρωνεύως (in an ironic manner) referring to Dionysodorus and not the other way around. The sophist is described as if he is supposedly contemplating, making a dramatic pause in their conversation, which is perceived by Socrates as ironic. The term εἰρωνεύως involves a touch of pretense, as the translation accurately suggests, since it is inferred that the sophist is not really

33 Ibid. 710.
34 Ibid. 741. “Καὶ δὲ εἰρωνεύως πάνω ἐπιστρόφων ὡς τι μέγα σκοπεύμενος”. (Ευθύδημος, 302b).
contemplating, and a hint of pretentiousness from the sophists’ side, who in this case is being ironic. Overall, it is a reference that depicts the term’s negative nature, since it is treated with contempt. However, Plato once again uses the term to describe the sophist’s attitude and not Socrates’. The term’s negative overtone, although present here, it is not described in relation to the philosopher or his method.

While examining these dialogues I came across an interesting observation. Although Plato often uses negative characterizations to describe the sophists, their ‘art’ and their teaching method – irony being one of them – they are kindly appreciated by Plato, and consequently by Socrates, with respect. Esteemed sophists, such as Hippias, Protagoras and Gorgias are treated with respect despite their substantial differences, for example Gorgias’ obsession over the rhetoric and the supremacy of persuasion rather than the discovery of the truth in an inquiry. Nehamas argues that “Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are the only two characters whom Plato portrays as having no concern for truth.”

**Cratylus**

The Platonic dialogue *Cratylus* is a fine example of literature on the Philosophy of Language. Socrates in this dialogue is asked by Cratylus (most likely a historical figure for whom we have very little information) and Hermogenes (brother of the sophist Callias and one of Socrates’ entourage on the day of his death) and examines the ‘correctness of names’ (περί ὄνομάτων ὀρθότητος), arguing on the philosophical deficiency of etymological principles.

In *Cratylus*, 383b8-384a3 we read:

Hermogenes: Eagerly, I ask him to tell me what he means. He responds sarcastically (σιχωσείται) and makes nothing clear. He pretends (προστοιούμενος)

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35 See the analysis of Gorgias, p. 40.

36 Nehamas, 1998 p. 207 n. 44.
to possess some private knowledge which would force me to agree with him [...]" 37

We see that the above text meets the criteria set by contemporary definitions and the traits ‘irony’ presented in Aristophanes. He who is being ironic (ἐἰρωνεύεται) is sarcastically mocking and comes alongside with pretense and dissimulation. However, although this occurrence of ‘irony’ reflects negative implications, similarly to the Sophist, it is not a description of Socrates. Plato chooses the term ἐἰρωνεύεται in reference to Cratylus, defining him as a reprehensible εἰρων (ironic man). Hermogenes accuses Cratylus that while examining the correctness of names that exists by nature, Cratylus would give vague answers without justification, pretending in a caustic sense that he has private knowledge of certain things, forcing Hermogenes to agree with him on these grounds. It is apparent while the dialogue unfolds that Plato does not think highly of Cratylus and his argumentation, strengthening the assumption that he couldn’t have equated his teacher Socrates to Cratylus through a similar understanding of their ‘ironic’ attitude. Thus, ‘Socratic irony’ is not the ‘irony’ this dialogue presents. Also, the ‘irony’ discussed here, implies that the εἰρων (ironic man) ‘pretends to possess some knowledge’, when in fact he does not. Socrates’ irony is all about his disavowal of knowledge – if anything, he ‘pretends’ to know less. He refuses that he is possession of certain knowledge and definite answers and not the other way around. Even if we accept this as a feature of irony, it is not a feature of ‘Socratic irony’. Nehamas, who is committed to establish boastfulness as an integral aspect of the ironic attitude, is wrong to associate this εἰρων, who pretends to know more than he actually knows, to Socrates. 38

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37 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 102 “Ἐρρ. [...] καὶ ἐμω ἐρωτήθως καὶ προθυμομένω εἰδόναι ὅτι ποτὲ λέγει, αὕτε ἀποσαφεί αὐτόν εἰρωνεύεται τε πρὸς με, προσποιομένος τι αὐτὸς ἐν ἑαυτῷ διανοεῖτθα ώς εἴδως περὶ αὐτοῦ, δ ἐν βολόκτον παρός εἶπεν, ποιήσαν ἂν καὶ ἐμε ἐμολογεῖν [...]” (Κρατύλος, 383b8-384a3).

38 "The εἰρων here seems to be pretending to know more, not less than he says. And Socrates may well have appeared to know more than he said to his contemporaries. [...] Thus, the boastful implication of irony which I have been trying to bring into the foreground, is present in both cases. Kierkegaard, too, saw this point: ‘It can be just as ironic to pretend to know when one knows that one does not know as to pretend not to know when one knows that one knows’ (Concept of Irony, pp. 250-51)." Nehamas, 1998 p. 208 n. 48. Nehamas is also mistakenly using Kierkegaard’s definition as proof. The aforementioned might be a justified description of irony’s function in general, however, Kierkegaard does not give examples of Socrates’ attitude as such.
In addition to the previous three Platonic dialogues, in Plato’s *Laws* the term ‘ironic’ (εἰρωνικόν) is detected but, once again, it is not explicitly connected to Socrates. So far it appears that Plato, when using the instances of the term in a reprehensible, negative and blameworthy manner he does not use it in reference to his teacher. On the contrary; he uses it to describe Socrates’ archenemies – sophists being the most accurate example – or to comment on people whom he considers imposters and situations which he condemns. The same approach is present in the *Laws*:

So, there are many different types of atheists but for the purpose of legislation need to be divided into two groups. The dissembling (εἰρωνικόν) atheist deserves to die for his sins, not just once or twice but many times, whereas the other kind needs simply admonition combined with incarceration. (*Laws*, 908e3-5)\(^{39}\)

This is a harsh accusation on ‘irony’. The εἰρωνικόν (dissembling) attitude towards the love for the Gods is not only blameworthy but worthy of the most distasteful punishment. Additionally, the gradation of the punishment between the two types of atheists underlines the seriousness with which the dissembling atheist must be treated as opposed to the non-dissembling atheist. The negative charge of the former is vivid, delivering a recurrence of Aristophanes’ hostile attitude towards ‘irony’. However, Plato’s *Laws* have no traces of the Socratic figure to which this reference could be potentially connected. The term ‘irony’ appears but the concept of ‘Socratic irony’, within this quote, is completely absent.\(^{40}\)

Having examined the dialogues in which ‘irony’ and its instances do not directly or indirectly connect to Socrates or the concept of ‘Socratic irony’ per se, my research now focuses on the dialogues that do present the analogous relation, in an attempt to

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\(^{40}\) One could argue that, since Socrates was accused of and convicted for atheism and since he was famously described as ‘ironic man’, it is almost too naive not to connect the above reference to Socrates. However, this is only a speculation and it is highly doubtful that Plato would ever depict his teacher as a ‘dissembling atheist’. 
justify a refined transition from ‘irony’ to ‘Socratic irony’ initially through Plato’s words. It is crucial to define Plato’s attitude towards the term εἰρωνεία (irony), in order to categorically determine whether the negative charge this concept received in Aristophanes survived in Plato’s writing. Since this endeavour aims to justify ‘Socratic irony’ as an epistemic tool that can be constructively used in contemporary education, the concept’s refinement is pivotal. Of course, this understanding of ‘Socratic irony’ is not expected to have a catholic presence in every commentary and defended by every scholar who followed or studied Socrates. My research uses principally Plato’s and Aristotle’s references on ‘Socratic irony’ as key sources which prove that Socrates was not a reprehensible, sly εἰρων.

**Apology**

The *Apology* is not a typical Platonic dialogue. It is a defense speech delivered by Socrates, against the accusations he was facing for corrupting the youth and for not believing in the gods of Athens, introducing radical ‘religious innovations’ (κενά δαιμόνια). Socrates is defending his loyalty to philosophy and he argues that he never had any intention to offend the gods through his philosophical deliberation. Regarding the dialogues’ historical nature, it is highly doubtful that this is an authentic record of Socrates’ actual speech and not a composition of Plato’s work.

In *Apology* 37e4-38a1 we read:

> Now this is the most difficult point on which to convince some of you. If I say that it is impossible for me to keep quiet because that means disobeying the god, you will not believe me and will think I am being ironical (εἰρωνευομένῳ).

(*Ap. 37e4-38a1*)

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41 Grube & Cooper, 1981, p. 41 “τοιτί δὴ ἄτι πάντων γεγενημένων πεποίθω ταῖς ὦμοις ἔκπεκτῳ γέρῳ ὅτι τῷ θεῷ ἀπειθέω τοῦτ ἄτιν καὶ διὰ τοῦτ ἀδίκων ἁρπαχθεν ἄρεως, οὐ χαῖνετο μοι ὃς εἰρωνευομένῳ” (*Απολογία*, 37e4-38a1). Although I would have preferred a different translation from the term ‘ironic’, which would have given us a clearer feeling of what Grube considers this ‘irony’ to be (i.e. pretense, mockery, dissimulation, etc.), I intentionally kept the same translation as the one used so far for the Platonic quotes for purposes of consistency. I did also consult Loeb Classical Library, which has been a very useful tool overall in this thesis, and the find was slightly more fruitful. I include the translation here: “This is the most difficult thing of all to convince some of you of. You see, if I say that this is to disobey the god and because of this it’s impossible to lead a quiet life, you won’t be convinced, on the grounds that I’m pulling a fast
In the above quote, Socrates uses the word εἰρωνευόμενον in reference to himself. He suggests that, if he takes his students’ advice to keep quiet for the rest of his life, that would be in fact a disobedience towards the gods. He is obviously referring to the Delphic oracle, according to which Socrates was the wisest man, and, even though Socrates disclaimed the oracle trying to prove it wrong, he considered that accepting silence and compliance instead of finding out the truth—who is in fact the wisest man—would be an honest indication of pious disobedience. The understanding of the term ‘ironical’ here indicates two characteristics that are commonly related to irony. The first one is close to the trait of antiphrasis, which has been already discussed as a case of incompatibility, and most commonly opposition, between an utterance and its meaning. It is not definite whether the students would assume the exact opposite of Socrates’ words, but it is arguably apparent that they would consider Socrates to not mean what he says but something different. The second attribute is the trait of playful evasion. The notion εἰρωνευόμενον here indicates someone whose words are not trustworthy. However, the above reference does not imply any undertone of malicious deceit nor does it depict a sly philosopher, negatively portrayed as an Aristophanic εἴρων (ironic man). Apart from that, the importance of the above citation stems from the fact that Socrates actually denies this characterization for himself. The claim is that his students would not believe him, and they would think Socrates is εἰρωνευόμενον (being ironic), when, in fact, he is not. Socrates denies the characterisation of the εἴρων (ironic man) that others attribute to him.

Gorgias
Plato’s Gorgias is an intense dialogue both philosophically and intellectually. At first, Gorgias is urged by Socrates to comment on his ‘craft’ (τεχνή), the rhetoric, and argue on the importance of its nature, which is the power of words and persuasion. Gorgias


42 See previous footnote.

43 The sophists’ techē (rhetoric) is critically different from Socrates’ method and his irony, since the former is in the pursuit of persuasion and predominance in an argument, whereas Socrates’ method is
is tricked into admitting that the craft of rhetoric is not concerned with giving instructions on achieving a ‘virtuous’ life nor does it defend the overall good against the bad in a person’s living. The combat escalates quickly with Polus and Callicles jumping into the conversation to argue for the importance of the rhetoric when it comes to argumentation. Polus, being a rhetoric enthusiast, provides an extremist view according to which his technē gives everyone the power to do as they please, even if that means acting with injustice. For the remainder of the dialogue, Socrates contends with Callicles on the very nature of justice and injustice and the core differences between Callicles’ selfish lifestyle as opposed to a philosophical way of living that Socrates represents.

In Gorgias 489e1, we come across two references on ‘irony’, one of which is directed to Socrates and raises negative feelings of censure as far as his interlocutor, Callicles, is concerned. We read:

Cal. You are being ironic (εἰρωνεύῃ) Socrates.
Soc. No, I am not, Callicles – the character you were invoking by being ironic (εἰρωνεύου) with me just now! (Gorg. 489e1-3)\(^44\)

At first sight, both cases seem to include a sense of mockery in their ironic reference. Especially the second one (εἰρωνεύου), in which Socrates is accusing Callicles of being ironic first, when he mockingly compared and associated Socrates with Zethus’

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\(^{44}\) Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 833. “Καὶ. Εἰρωνεύῃ, ὥ Σῶκρατες. Μὴ τὸν Ζῆθον, ὥ Καλλικλέας, ὃς σὺ γρόμηνος πολλὰ νυνὴ εἰρωνεύων πρὸς μέν.” (Γοργ. 489ε1-3). The translation Vlastos uses for the first entry (εἰρωνεύῃ) is ‘mocking’ following Croiset & Bodin: “You are mocking me”. Croiset and Bodin, 1955 p. 25. – from Vlastos, 1991 p. 25. Vlastos, accepts the translation ‘mocking’ for both entries, whereas he rejects the translation ‘ironic’ for the second entry (εἰρωνεύου), arguing that Callicles’ mockery here was not ironic. I am not sure where he bases the justification for this argumentation. I reckon, that is stems from the fact that he wants to strictly determine for the concept of ‘irony’ the notion of ‘antiphrasis’ (saying something and meaning the opposite). Vlastos got very committed in justifying irony’s purification, including the refutation of any connection between mockery and irony. However, whether Vlastos accepts the translation or not, the actual classical text presents types of the term εἰρωνεία, which he translates as ‘mockery’, I do not see why eliminating the trait of mockery from ‘irony’ but not from εἰρωνεία, would suffice. Vlastos also rejects Irwin’s translation “sly” as part of irony’s purification process from any negative taint and ‘sly’ implies ‘cunning, wily and hypocritical’ in the tone or content Ibid. 26. I, too, agree with this latter clarification.
brother, the pathetic Amphion, who is portrayed as childish and juvenile. Callicles says in 485e-a:

Socrates, I do have a rather warm regard for you. I find myself feeling what Zethus, whose words I recalled just now, felt toward Amphion in Euripides’ play. In fact, the sorts of things he said to his brother come to my mind to say to you. You are neglecting the things you should devote yourself to, Socrates, and though your spirit’s nature is so noble, you show yourself to the world in the shape of a boy. You couldn’t put a speech together correctly before councils of justice or utter any plausible or persuasive sound. (Gorg. 485e2-483a1)\textsuperscript{45}

Socrates is referring to this very part of Callicles speech when he accuses him of being ‘ironic’. After reading the above quote, we realise that the type of ‘irony’ Socrates is referring to is tainted with mockery and a demeaning intention on Callicles’ side. Callicles compares Socrates to an inferior and frivolous character aiming to belittle him and, thus, degrade his method. The term εἰρωνεύω here, certainly preserves the unfavorable nature of the Aristophanic corpus and it does not seem to entail any understanding of antiphrasis (the opposite of what is being said). There is also no implication of pretense or any intention to deceive Socrates. Nevertheless, this thesis will arguably support that this sort of ‘irony’ is not the Socratic είρωνεία. And since this particular quotation does not concern Socrates’ ironic attitude or method as an ironic man, there shouldn’t be any doubt that this textual reference neither contributes to nor ruins the understanding of Socratic είρωνεία as self-depreciation towards the eiron (Socrates), contradictorily different from a demeaning intention towards the addressee in order to irritate and annoy them.\textsuperscript{46}

As far as Callicles accusation is concerned, let us revisit the dialogue to determine the ‘irony’ the sophist is referring to:

\textsuperscript{45} Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 830.

\textsuperscript{46} For more on this argumentation and the justification of Socratic irony as self-depreciation see Section 3. ‘Irony and Socratic είρωνεία’ and Chapter 2 ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron according to Aristotle: Perception, Distance, Motivation’.
Chapter 1: The Historical Overview of Irony’s Development

Soc. Tell me one more from the beginning, what do you mean by the better, seeing that it’s not the stronger? And, my wonderful man, go easier on me in your teaching, so that I won’t quit your school. (Gorg. 489d7-9)\textsuperscript{47}

Callicles is considering Socrates of being ironic (εἰρωνεύῃ) when the latter is casting himself as a student of the former. Callicles believes that Socrates is probably mocking him, as the latter is most likely to be the teacher when conversing in a dialogue. Although it cannot be decidedly argued that mockery is completely excluded from what Callicles understands Socrates’ instance of irony to be, it can be safely inferred that Socrates’ frequently expressed admiration towards an interlocutor is more complicated than that. When Socrates praises his interlocutor and even asks to be a student of theirs, a strong indication of ironic act and attitude, he has so much more in mind than to merely and plainly mock them. I will expand my argumentation in the following chapters. Apart from that, one could anticipate that this instance of ‘irony’ includes the notion of antiphrasis as well.\textsuperscript{48} I shall present my doubts on whether Socrates so obviously and plainly meant ‘the exact opposite’ when he asked to be someone’s student or when he encouraged the interlocutor to carry on in order to learn from them (most commonly protested as an ‘ironic’ proposition by the majority of scholars). What can be safely asserted though, is that the sensation of intended deceit is evidently absent. Callicles might even be slightly annoyed by Socrates’ ‘ironic’ attitude at this point – as he perceives it –, but it does not fall from the aforementioned that he was intentionally deceived or faced with sly evasion. And, most importantly, this type of ‘ironic’ (εἰρωνεύῃ) is essentially different from the type of ‘ironic’ attributed to Callicles (εἰρωνεύου), since Socrates does not follow Callicles’ path of diminishing the interlocutor to establish his superiority. He is doing the exact opposite. He is praising his interlocutor and encourages him to teach him patiently, so that Socrates can keep up. Socrates is an eiron (ironic man) who, so far, is underselling himself and his knowledge.

\textsuperscript{47} Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 833.

\textsuperscript{48} Vlastos claims that this is an instance of “– a transparent irony, since Callicles no doubt feels that, on the contrary, it is Socrates who has been playing the schoolmaster right along” (Vlastos, 1991 p. 26).
The Republic

Plato’s Republic, On Justice⁴⁹ is one of the most philosophically influential and intellectually demanding works. It amounts to 10 Books, which canvass the nature of justice, what it consists of and how the just man lives thereby a better, happier life than the unjust man. This monumental philosophical endeavor concerns not only philosophical matters but also, political theory and education, for the Books II, III and V discuss “the basic principles of just social and political organization and the education of young people that those principles demand.”⁵⁰ The Republic also unravels Plato’s metaphysical system since the discussion on knowledge introduces his theory of the Forms, consolidating the immortality of the human soul.

In Book I, Socrates delves into inquiry through the usual dialectic form along with the well-known sophist and teacher of oratory, Thrasymachus and, Plato’s brothers, Glaucon and Adeimantus. We read in the Republic, 337a Thrasymachus’ agitated accusation towards Socrates:

When he heard that, he gave a loud, sarcastic laugh. By Hercules, he said, that’s just Socrates usual irony (εἰωθεία εἰρωνεία). I knew and I said so to these people earlier, that you would be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned you, you’d be ironical (εἰρωνεύσοιο) and do anything rather than give an answer. (Rep. 337a2-7)⁵¹

The importance of the above quote is significant, for it is one of the references extensively discussed by Gregory Vlastos first and subsequently by Alexander Nehamas in an attempt to define the core characteristics of the type of irony Socrates employed. Therefore, this quote will be reexamined for the scholars’ contradicting approaches on the interpretation of the phenomenon ‘Socratic irony’.⁵² As this thesis

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⁴⁹ Πολιτεία, Περί Δικαίοσύνης.
⁵⁰ Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 971.
⁵¹ Ibid. 982. “Καὶ ὡς ἀκούσας ἀνεκάμψα τῇ μάλα σφάδινον καὶ εἶπεν· Ὅ Πράξις, ἔφη, αὕτη ἦ εἰωθεία εἰρωνεία Σωκράτους, καὶ ταῦτα ἐγὼ ζήσα ὅ τι καὶ τῶν προφετεύων, ὅτι σὺ ἀποκράτησαι μὲν ὡς ἐθλητής, εἰρωνεύσοιο δὲ καὶ πάντα μᾶλλον παισθεὶς ὥ ἀποκριθώ, εἰ τὶς τί σε έρωτῇ” (Πολ. 337a2-7). Another acceptable translation here would be the one by Desmond Lee: “Thrasymachus laughed sarcastically, and replied, ‘There you go with your old affection, Socrates. I knew it, and I told the others that you would never let yourself be questioned, but go on shaming ignorance and do anything rather than give a straight answer” (Rep. 337a2-7). Plato, Lee tr., 2003.
argues, Vlastos provides a rather robust and novel perspective regarding the nature of irony as a philosophical concept and the refined motive behind Socrates’ use. However, in this attempt, he gets too focused in fully discarding irony’s negative traits, presenting it as a transparent methodological phenomenon in Socrates’ hands and defending Socrates as a morally flawless ironic figure. Nehamas, on the other hand, accuses Socrates and his ironic attitude as being fundamentally connected to dissimulation, mock humility and a sense of superiority, since this is inevitably irony’s nature. I do not ally with either of these interpretations. My research defends a different understanding of ‘Socrates’ irony’ (eironeia), which both agrees and disagrees with the aforementioned positions in different cases and for different reasons. The interpretation of Thrasyamachus’ response to Socrates in the Republic is one of those cases and I shall argue why.

First of all, Vlastos presents a slightly different translation to illustrate Thrasyamachus’ reaction: “‘Hercules!’, he said. “This is Socrates’ habitual shamming (εἰρωνεία). I had predicted to those people that you would refuse to answer and would sham (εἰρωνεύσοιο) and would do anything but answer if the question were put to you.” (Rep. 337a3-7). Nehamas uses the same translation for he evaluates Vlastos’ approach through this reference. Vlastos claims that what Socrates is being accused of here by Thrasyamachus is lying. Socrates is lying when he claims that he doesn’t have the answers to the questions asked. And since Vlastos’ comprehension of irony is catholically delicate, he cannot accept the translation ‘irony’ for either of the above textual references, introducing the translation ‘shamming’ instead. I have already discussed that this justification presented by Vlastos does not identify with my interpretation of Socrates’ ‘irony’ nor does it suffice for irony’s refinement. As this chapter will gradually prove, Socratic eironeia shall not be confused with irony as a

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54 Ibid. 24.
55 ‘The translation ‘shamming’ or ‘pretense’ is the closest fit to Vlastos’ interpretation for Socrates’ complex irony. Since the ‘shaming’ is not intentional for purposes of deception, Socrates ‘pretends’ only to justify complex irony’s ‘opposite meaning’.
56 Even if Vlastos purifies ‘irony’, ‘εἰρωνεία’, the terminological attribution of irony in Plato’s texts, is still connected to mockery, since this is the translation Vlastos accepts. See my comments on the dialogue Gorgias.
conceptual generalization, for Socratic eironeia is only one facet of irony’s multifaceted nature.\textsuperscript{57}

Apart from that, it is not clear where Vlastos’ confidence that Thrasymachus considers Socrates to be lying stems from. All Thrasymachus mentions is that he was certain that Socrates would refuse to give a straightforward answer to his questions. He complains that this seems familiar and that Socrates’ behavior is typical, since this attitude is his ‘habitual irony’ (εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία). I argue that this quote gives as a clear account of Socrates ‘routine method’; he refuses to give explicit answers to the questions. All this quote does is underline the adamantly connection between Socrates’ irony (εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία) and his refusal to answer his interlocutor’s questions. Taking this a step forward, this also determines a strong relation between ‘Socrates’ irony’ and his disavowal of knowledge when asked for an explicit answer in an inquiry on moral truths.

Nehamas also argues that Thrasymachus’ complaint is not very accurately justified by Vlastos’ interpretation (i.e. Socrates is accused of lying), but he gives a more complicated explanation. He asserts that Thrasymachus is not lightly annoyed but rather he is infuriated by Socrates and his εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία, and this quote is actually an attack towards Socrates’ ‘habitual irony’: “The sophist has been silently fuming at Socrates’ discussion on the nature of justice for some time; unable to contain himself any longer, he has just exploded with a vicious attack”.\textsuperscript{58} What did Socrates say that got Thrasymachus to burst, according to Nehamas? In Republic 336e-337a, we read:

So don’t think that in searching for justice, a thing more valuable than even a large quantity of gold, we’d mindlessly give way to one another or be less than completely serious about finding it. You surely mustn’t think that, but rather – as I do – that we are incapable of finding it. Hence it’s surely far more appropriate for us to be pitied by you clever people than to be given rough treatment. (Rep. 336e7-337a1)\textsuperscript{59}

\textsuperscript{57} More on the justification of this claim in Section 3 ‘Irony and Socratic eironeia’.

\textsuperscript{58} Nehamas, 1998 p. 58.

\textsuperscript{59} Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997, p. 982.
It is true that Thrasymachus is triggered by Socrates’ words and his response entails irritation. Nehamas insists first that Thrasymachus’ reaction is more than mere irritation and, secondly, that Socrates’ ‘habitual irony’ (εἰσοδεή ἐς ἀποκείμενα) is his ‘mock humility’ when he praises Thrasymachus: “Thrasymachus does not accuse Socrates of lying; he blames him for not meaning what he says and, in addition, for not hiding his lack of insincerity. Socrates obviously doesn’t believe, Thrasymachus is saying, that the sophist is more clever than he.”

60 I have already acknowledged that Socrates often praised his interlocutor’s merits and this was the most common accusation from numerous scholars that he exerts mocking irony.61 However, I justify this trait of Socrates’ tactic as a part of his eironía (irony), without associating it to mock humility. In Chapter 2, I argue that Aristotle attributed mock humility to the Spartans and their supercilious ostentation and Socrates’s attitude is contraditorily different from that description. Nehamas is wrongfully estimating Socrates’ irony as plain taunting and mocking towards Thrasymachus and he goes on to comment that Socrates is “failing, intentionally, to hide his mockery”.62 This charge is arguably unfair. Nehamas, in an attempt to justify his understanding of Socratic’ irony’s superiority, which creates a distance between the speaker and the audience, attributes to Socrates the characteristics of a vain boaster. If we were to accept Nehamas' justification then, automatically, we endorse a Socratic figure that is cocky, arrogant, presumptuous and pompous, not much different from the sophists that he so openly renounced and not much different from the figure of an alazon (‘boaster’), which Aristotle proved that Socrates was not.63 Was the philosopher who chose loyalty to the ‘divine duty’ over his own life an arrogant mocker? I certainly doubt it.

Nehamas had every right to argue that “taunting and mocking are at best peripheral features of Aristophanic eironía” because they were, and that “they are essential to irony as we understand it today” because they are. Irony is a concept that survived

60 Nehamas, 1998 p. 58.
61 See previous commentary for the dialogue Gorgias and Socrates’ attitude towards Callicles.
62 Nehamas, 1998 p. 58
63 See the analysis of the triptych eiron (ἐίρων) – truthful man (ἀληθικός) – alazon (ἀλαζών) in Chapter 2 ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron according to Aristotle: Perception, Distance, Motivation’.
from antiquity until today; it evolved, it reformed, and it changed as it happens with almost every terminological concept. It is not peculiar for the concept itself to sometimes eternally carry the features that were attributed to it throughout the years. Therefore, ‘irony’ has so many different meanings and so many different features. ‘Socratic irony’ (erōneía) is only a ‘branch’, a feature of this versatile concept. The concept of irony is not exhausted in Socrates’ use. Therefore, ‘Socratic irony’ (erōneía), as my research suggests, should be examined methodically as a unique phenomenon.

**The Symposium**

The remaining two references of the term ‘εἰρωνεία’ are included in Plato’s dialogue *The Symposium*. A symposium is an elegant banquet, in which notable men were invited to feast and give friendly speeches. This particular symposium takes place in Agathon’s house, an Athenian tragedian, who invites his guests to deliver encomiums, speeches in praise of Love (Erōs), whether it concerns sexual instincts or intellectual attraction (as the one Socrates exerted on his entourage or interlocutors, like Alcibiades). Amongst the guests are Socrates, Alcibiades, general and political figure of the time, Aristophanes, and Phaedrus, an Athenian aristocrat associated with Socrates’ inner circle. Although it is considered a dialogue, the story of the symposium is actually narrated by Apollodorus to an anonymous friend of his, rendering it an essay-like speech.

As with several Platonic dialogues, *The Symposium* will be more extensively examined later on in the thesis, for its significant implications on teaching and the powerful influence the Socratic method appears to generate to his interlocutors. Regarding the two references of the term ‘εἰρωνεία’ they are both included in Alcibiades’ speech, who is admittedly drunk and is asked to deliver an *encomium* on the philosopher Socrates. The first quote is:
In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game – a game of irony
(εἰρωνεύομενος). ([Sym. 216e4])

Alcibiades first use of the term reminds us of Kierkegaard’s understanding of ‘Socratic irony’, which is defined as his entire life and not only one aspect of it: “His irony was not the instrument he used in the service of the idea; irony was his position – more he did not have.” The conclusions drawn from this quotation are not very sharp. Considering the context, the implications are not very illustrative as to what exactly this game of irony, which Socrates lived by, is. ‘Socratic irony’ is the main concern of this whole endeavor and simply describing it as ‘something that Socrates did his whole life’ is not particularly clarifying. Hence the contradictorily different interpretations of this terminological occasion: Guthrie translates it as “the way in which Socrates deceives everyone as to his real character”. Suzy Groden, on the other hands, writes: “He pretends to be ignorant and spends his whole life putting people on”, which is similar to W. Hamilton’s: “He spends his whole life pretending and playing with people”. Despite the many different translations, I do not see how we can assert a justified conclusion as to what Alcibiades precisely meant in this quote. And, nevertheless, it is Alcibiades’ understanding of what Socrates did in his ‘ironic’ life, a character who, in this dialogue is presented desperate, drunk, humiliated by Socrates’ rejection and shows evidently a bitter emotional outburst towards him, rendering his criticism on Socrates’ life highly subjective and emotionally charged.

The second quote is somewhat more enlightening. In 218d6 we read:

He heard me out, and then he said in that absolutely inimitable ironic manner
(μάλα εἰρωνεύομενος) of his [...] ([Sym. 218d6])

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64 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997, p. 498. “εἰρωνεύομενος δὲ καὶ παίζων πάντα τὸν βίον πρὸς τοὺς ἄνθρωπους διατελεῖ” ([Sym. 216e4]). The translators are Nehamas and Woodruff (see note 27 above).
65 Kierkegaard, Capel tr., 1966: the reference and translation here is from Nehamas, 1998 p. 70.
66 Guthrie, 1969, p. 446.
67 From Plato, Groden tr., 1970.
68 From Plato, Hamilton tr., 1951.
69 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 500. “Καὶ οὗτος ἰκνώσας μάλα εἰρωνεύομενος καὶ σφόδρα ἐκείνῳ τε καὶ εἰσθώτως ἔλεξεν” ([Sym. 218d6]).
First of all, I need to briefly comment on Cooper’s translation. The textual reference “μάλα εἰρωνεύωσ” is accurately translated as “absolutely ironic”. However, the attribution of “εἰρωθότως” as “inimitable” is not equally successful. We have already come across Socrates’ “εἰρωθεῖσα εἰρωνεία” (habitual irony) in the Republic and it has been discussed that the term “εἰρωθεῖσα” describes something familiar and typical, which Socrates’ ironic tactic was. “Εἰρωθότως”, coming from the same root as “εἰρωθεῖσα”, implies the same “casual” manner. Therefore, I alternatively suggest a different translation: “He heard me out. Then most εἰρωνεύως, in his extremely characteristic and habitual manner, he said, …”.

Having clarified the translation, it is interesting to see what Socrates’ ‘ironic’ response according to Alcibiades was, as well as what he is responding to. In 218d we read:

[…] you can have me, [Socrates], my belongings, anything my friends might have. Nothing is more important to me than becoming the best man I can be, and no one can help me more than you to reach that aim. (Sym. 218d1-3)

It is to this offer of Alcibiades that Socrates gives his ‘ironic’ response:

Dear Alcibiades, if you are right in what you say about me, you are already more accomplished than you think. If I really have in me the power to make you a better man, then you can see in me a beauty that is really beyond description and makes your own remarkable good looks pale in comparison. But, then, is this a fair exchange that you propose? You seem to me to want more than your proper share: you offer me the merest appearance of beauty, and in return you want the thing itself, ‘gold in exchange for bronze’. (Sym. 218d7-218e7)

The above quotes are exhaustively discussed by Vlastos, and consequently by Nehamas in an attempt to refute him, for the former considers it a perfect fit for ‘irony’s’ interpretation as a Quintilian continuation (‘something contrary to what is being said is to be understood’). Vlastos claims that when Alcibiades submits himself and his body to Socrates in exchange for Socrates’ moral wisdom, Socrates’ response “you are already more accomplished than you think” does not indicate a pretence or a deceit; it is pure opposition: “you are stupid!”.

70 Groden and Hamilton translate, respectively, “He answered in that extremely ironical way he always uses very characteristically.” “He made a thoroughly characteristic reply in his usual ironic style.”, in Vlastos, 1991 p. 34.
exchange (sex for his wisdom), saying it is a swindle. He starts off with a simple irony, saying to Alcibiades, ‘you are not stupid,’ when he clearly means: ‘you are stupid, very stupid: what could be more stupid than to think I would fall for a barter of gold for brass?’ I do not see where his conclusion comes from. Socrates is indeed rejecting Alcibiades’ offer, for his part of the trade is invaluable. However, the claim “you are more accomplished than you think” is rather clearly related to the fact that Alcibiades realises Socrates can help him be a better man and not to Alcibiades erotic offer. And as far as the offer is concerned, Socrates is not being ‘ironic’, not even if we were to consider the understanding of antiphrasis, since he says he is not going to sleep with Alcibiades and he doesn’t: “But in spite of all my efforts, this hopelessly arrogant, this unbelievably insolent man – he turned me down! He spurned my beauty […]” (

To sum up the analysis of the second reference of ‘irony’ in the Symposium, I argue that Socrates’ does not reveal a sense of pretense, he does not imply the phenomenon of antiphrasis nor does he disclose any deceitful motives. What I detect in this instance of ‘irony’ is a very lenient praise of the interlocutor in the words “you are already more accomplished than you think”. Whether this praise is honest or effective is to be discussed in the following chapters. Besides, as Vlastos very accurately mentions, not very further along in the dialogue Socrates makes a self-depreciating comment saying: “Still, my dear boy, you should think twice, because you could be wrong, and I may be of no use to you.” (Symp. 219a2). Socrates protests once again his possible incompetence, understating his own merits. Therefore, Nehamas’ argument on irony’s

71 Ibid. 36.
72 “You are not stupid” as Vlastos translates it, Ibid. 36. The Classical text writes: “οὐ φαίνεσθαι εἶναι” (Συμπόσιο, 218d8).
73 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 501. It is for the same reasons (refusing Alcibiades’ offer) that Nehamas associates the notion of ‘irony’ here with ‘pretense’: “But though Socrates might never have intended to deceive him when he refused his offer, his ironical manner need not at that time have been free of pretense. And in fact, it is not. It entailed the pretense involved when you detach yourself from the obvious interpretation of your words, when you hint that what you say may not be what you mean, when you suggest that you just might possibly be of two minds about what you are saying. And so you allow your audience to act on its interpretation of your meaning, whatever it takes it to be, rather than on its understanding of your words. An ironic refusal of someone’s offer to go to bed with you may suggest coyness rather than virtue.” (Nehamas, 1998 p. 60). My thesis remains the same; why consider Socrates to be pretending, when he did exactly as he said? He rejected Alcibiades’ offer verbally and literally.
catholic superiority, which accompanies its speaker as opposed to the audience, does not easily apply for ‘Socratic irony’. I counterargue that between Socrates and Alcibiades it is not clear whether it is Socrates’ intended superiority – due to his irony – that is advocated in this dialogue, or Alcibiades sense of inferiority. Alcibiades is angry at Socrates. I reckon this anger does not originate or evolve explicitly around his irony. He has been upset already from the beginning of his speech and distressed about Socrates being there, without even interacting with him. The negative emotions Alcibiades expresses are not exhausted in Socrates’ irony.

Irony in Plato: Concluding Remarks

Aristophanes’ negative attitude of εἰρωνεία did not survive in Plato’s scripts. Although it might seem that it is occasionally received so by some of Socrates’ interlocutors it is not intended as such. However, Aristophanes’ influence did not vanish after Socrates’ use of εἰρωνεία. The concept of irony still preserves the characteristics that the comic playwright attributed to it. Nevertheless, these traits do not apply to ‘Socratic irony’ behavior. I reckon this might the reason why numerous scholars jump effortlessly to an erroneous conclusion. As Vlastos notably indicates “because it is so commonly used to denote sly, intentionally deceptive speech or conduct throughout this period, must it be always so used of Socrates by Plato?”.

It has been evidently argued that the concept of irony is refined in Plato’s writings. And when I discuss irony in Plato I strictly hereby mean irony as used and employed by Socrates. Plato wrote what Aristotle saw in ‘Socratic irony’. A self-deprecation of its user (in this case of the eiron Socrates), who did not praise his merits and his knowledge. On the contrary; he disavowed knowledge, he showed less of himself and he embraced

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74 “The sense of superiority that always accompanies irony has its source in this intimacy between the speaker and the initiated part of the audience.” (Nehamas, 1998 p. 60).

75 Guthrie claims: “In Plato it retains its bad sense, in the mouth of a bitter opponent like Thrasymachus or of one pretending to be angry at the way in which Socrates deceives everyone as his real character (Alcibiades at Symp. 216e, 218d)” in Guthrie, 1969 p. 446. Burnet also admits: “The words εἰρὼν, εἰρωνεία, εἰρωνέωμαι (in Plato) are only used of Socrates by his opponents, and have always an unfavorable meaning.” – in his note on Plato, Ap. 38a1. Burnet, 1924.

76 Vlastos, 1991 p. 25.
and protested his ignorance. This was his typical tactic, his ‘habitual irony’ (εἰρωνεία εἰρωνεία) as Thrasymachus exposed it in the Republic. The motives behind this face of ‘irony’, as well as its applications, will be thoroughly discussed and justified herafter.

2.3 IRONY IN ARISTOTLE

In Plato, irony was used by the philosopher in his writings both as a term and as a concept. And though we have extensively discussed the ironic presence in the Platonic dialogues as a verbal appearance, the examination of the concept of irony exceeding the limits of speech is still pending. For Socrates’ attitude and method was arguably ironic in numerous occasions, whether Plato verbally described it as such or not.

Aristotle, on the other hand, provides us with a significantly valuable treatise discussing εἰρωνεία (irony) systematically as a phenomenon and Socrates as an εἰρων (ironic man). His corpus is a huge contributing to our comprehension of the ironic concept in its wholeness the way it was grasped and understood at the time, providing at the same time the most important study of Socrates and his ‘Socratic irony’. Therefore, a whole chapter scrutinizing the Aristotelian corpus and examining Socrates as an ‘ironic man’ through Aristotle’s eyes is essentially included in this thesis.77 Nevertheless, for the purposes of this subchapter I included the 22 terminological references in the Aristotelian corpus, without further assessing them here:

- **Eudemian Ethics**: εἰρων (E.E. 1121a25), εἰρωνος (E.E. 1233b39), εἰρων (E.E. 1234a1)
- **Nicomachean Ethics**: εἰρωνεία (E.N. 1108a22, E.N. 1124b30), εἰρωνείαν (E.N. 1124b30), εἰρων (E.N. 1108a22, E.N. 1127a22), εἰρωνείας (E.N. 1127a14), εἰρωνες (E.N. 1127b22), εἰρωνεία (E.N. 1127b30), εἰρωνεύόμενοι (E.N. 1127b31)

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77 See Chapter 2 ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron according to Aristotle: Perception, Distance, Motivation’.
In order to present a consistent discussion of irony’s evolution I summarise Aristotle’s interpretation as a brief side-note. For Aristotle, ‘irony’ the way Socrates used it was not mockery, or deceit, it was not a sly evasion, or a blameworthy and reprehensible ostentation. Aristotle understands ‘Socratic eironeia’ as self-depreciation and presents a purified ‘ironic’ Socrates (eiron), who understates his own merits, connecting adamantly the concept of ‘irony’ to admitted ignorance and Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge. Socrates is the exact opposite of a boaster, a character who praises his own qualities in order to brag and show off. I argue that it is because of Aristotle’s substantial contribution to the understanding of the concept of irony that contemporary lexicographical ascriptions associate ‘irony’ with litotes and meiosis. We read in A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory:

litotes (Gk from litós, ‘single, simple, meagre’) A figure of speech which contains an understatement for emphasis and is therefore the opposite of hyperbole (q.v.). Often used in everyday speech (frequently with a negative assertion) and usually with laconic or ironic intentions. A stock instance is ‘not bad’ meaning ‘very good’. See also irony; meiosis; paradiastole.

meiosis (Gk ‘lessening’) A figure of speech which contains an understatement for emphasis: often used ironically, and also for dramatic effect, in the attainment of simplicity. In everyday speech it is sometimes used in gentle irony, especially when describing something very spectacular or impressive as ‘rather good’, or words to that effect. Meiosis may even pervade the tone and manner of a work. A particularly good example is Auden’s The Unknown Citizen (1939). See also irony; litotes.

78 There is one more reference in Physiognomics, a treatise ascribed to Aristotle but widely accepted as a work of Aristotle’s ‘school’ and not something that the philosopher wrote himself. The reference is: eirōn (Physiognomics, 808a27).

Chapter 2 discusses how Aristotle’s attitude towards irony, andprimarily towards the irony Socrates used (eiromēta) and the ironic man Socrates was (eiron), determines the philosophical enhancement of the term and the motivational refinement of the eiron philosopher, Socrates represented. Aristotle evidently supports that the eiron as opposed to the alazon (braggart) does not show off and, therefore, he is constantly preferred. This claim is perfectly sustained by the two definitions provided for letotis and meiosis. The eiron Socrates represents does not praise his own merits but, on the contrary, he disclaims high qualities he does possess undermining himself.

2.4 THE GREEK EIPONELA CODIFIED: CICERO’S AND QUINTILIANUS’ IRONIA

So far, we witnessed an obvious change of irony’s attributes from Aristophanes’ negative perspective, to Plato’s more delicate sentiment and to Aristotle’s ennobled version of the eiron (ironic man). The remainder of this chapter briefly covers some milestones in irony’s development until the prevailing, contemporary appreciation of the phenomenon.

The first systematic discussion on irony is placed, as determined, in Aristotle’s corpus. However, the Roman rhetoricians Cicero and Quintilianus were the first to treat irony as a ‘rhetorical figure and a manner of discourse,’ giving the concept of irony a first terminological codification and an etymological definition. Cicero first, in De Oratore presents a definition in Latin, according to which something different from (alium, aliter) what is being said must be understood. Cicero seems to think of irony (ironia) in positive terms, leaving behind altogether Aristophanes’ (and Theophrastus’) unfavorable characterisations of cunning, vain and deceptive manner. Cicero ends up praising this form of dissimulation, describing it as “urbane” and “elegant”, and connecting it to Socrates: “Urbane is the dissimulation when what you say is quite

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80 This definition by DLJT has been already discussed in the beginning of this Chapter, Section 1. ‘Irony; a Multifaceted Phenomenon’.

other than what you understand … In this irony and dissimulation Socrates, in my opinion, far excelled all others in charm and humanity. Most elegant is this form and seasoned in seriousness.” (*De Oratore* 2.67. 269-271).82

Quintilianus expanded on Cicero’s definition of *ironia*. First of all, as a figure of speech, a simple trope (*tropos*) it is comprehended as “something contrary to what is said is to be understood”.83 Vlastos argues that this is the type that survived and continued intact in contemporary bibliography, and it is through this definition that εἰρωνεία metastasizes into irony. He cites *Webster’s Dictionary*, in which “Irony is the use of words to express something other than, and especially the opposite of, [their] literal meaning”.84 The same dictionary definition has been offered in the beginning of this chapter (see pp. 22-23). It is curious, though, how Vlastos misses to include other bibliography or the rest of *Webster’s* definition, which do not support solely the aforementioned. Saying the opposite of the literal meaning, is only one of the multiple characteristics the concept of irony holds (i.e. pretended ignorance, mockery, dissimulation, etc.). I do recognize that this double-edged feature of irony’s definition (i.e. meaning the opposite, or something different, of what is being said) is profoundly present in contemporary understanding and consciousness. However, this does not determine ‘Socratic irony’s’ behavior as such. Additionally, Vlastos overlooks Quintilianus’ expansion of the term, who treats it not only as a simple trope but also as a ‘figure’ (*schème* or *figura*).85 Quintilianus claims that “a whole life may be held to illustrate Irony, as was thought of Socrates” (*Instituto Oratorica*, 9.2.46). Therefore, although a ‘contradictory meaning to the words’ is a continuing feature of irony, it is not a feature that suffices or one that can be universally applied. I suggest that both Cicero’s and Quintilianus’ definitions of

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82 The translation is from Vlastos, 1991 p. 28. The quote will be further discussed, for it presents a misinterpretation on Vlastos’ side, giving an advantage to Nehamas in the debate on the nature of Socrates’ irony. Nehamas also denies Vlastos’ interpretation of the Latin “alia” as “quite other”, for he claims that the straightforward terms “other” and “different” are simpler and far more accurate *Ibid.*, 54. On this, I agree with Nehamas.

83 “contrarium ei quod dicitur intelligendum est”, *Instituto Oratorica*, 9.22.44 and similar definitions in 6.2.15 and in 8.6.54.


ironia fairly point towards ‘a different meaning of what is being said’ and not chiefly towards ‘the contrary of what is being said’.

**Side Note**

A parenthetical addition to the study of the concept of irony stems from Quintilianus’ definition. As the rhetorician claims that it is a simple trope in which the opposite of what is being said must be understood, he places the burden of the concept’s comprehension to the listener, the audience, the receiver of the irony. The role of the audience is of crucial importance, as we shall see in the following chapters. Therefore, it is particularly interesting to come across a definition that, whether intentionally or not, renders the eiron entirely innocent. The eiron can be ironic in many different ways but here, it is up to the receiver to detect, identify and decipher irony’s implications.

**SECTION 3. IRONY AND SOCRATIC EIRONEIA**

So far, I have loyally used the popularly accepted term ‘irony’ as the English translation of the Greek term εἰρωνεία. Nevertheless, εἰρωνεία came with a variety of translations. I mostly cite Cooper’s translation of the Platonic dialogues in my thesis but, in fact, very little consensus has been reached amongst scholars and translators as to the accurate transfer of the term and its meaning to another language. And, I too admit, ‘irony’ is a poor transfer of the concept’s attitude.

Determining the appropriate translation that encapsulates the characteristics of Socrates’ irony as I understand and define it has been a real challenge, only to eventually realise that there is actually none. My justification of Socrates’ ‘irony’ as an epistemic device with educational applications crucially differs from the interpretations of acknowledged scholars with whom it was essentially difficult to correlate.
I have sporadically discussed Vlastos’ approach in his book *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, which has been significantly dissimilar to my understanding of ‘Socratic irony’ as a phenomenon, although he does acknowledge the pedagogic aspect within the concept’s motives. First of all, I want to pay tribute to Vlastos’ work and the philosophical insights it provides so generously. His understanding of the etymological and philosophical refinement of *εἰρωνεία* from Aristophanes to Plato, to the Latin *ironia* and, eventually, to the contemporary term ‘irony’, and his novel interpretation of Socrates’ ethical character and the Socratic method has been a milestone, not only for my thesis and my maturation as a philosopher, but for the entire reading of Socrates’ philosophy. It is in many cases that my philosophical analysis of *eironeia* identifies with Vlastos’ argumentation, particularly on its positive attitude when used by Socrates and on the noble *eiron* he represented.

Vlastos’ justification behind irony’s refinement rests on Cicero’s and Quintilian’s definitional attribution of the concept, as he defines it. He argues that *ironia* – to use his terminology and typology – has, since the use of the word in Latin, discarded entirely the reprehensible Aristophanic connotations of deceitful mockery and devious dissimulation, preserving only the innocent connotation of *antiphrasis* (i.e. to say something but mean the opposite of it). Let us quote and criticize his reasoning:

When Cicero, who loves to make transliterated Greek enrich his mother tongue, produces in this fashion the new Latin word, *ironia*, the import has an altogether different tone. Laundered and deodorized, it now betokens the height of urbanity, elegance, and good taste […]86 And when Quintilian, two generations later, consolidating Cicero’s use of the term, […] we are no longer in doubt that *ironia* has shed completely its disreputable past, has already become what it will come to be in the languages and sensibility of modern Europe: speech used to express a meaning that runs contrary to what is said – the perfect medium for mockery innocent of deceit.87

It is true that contemporary definitions do not encourage the terms’ negative and deceitful meaning, nor do they imply that it is urged from mischievous motives. Aristophanes’ and Theophrastus’ understanding of irony did not survive in modern

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etymological sources. However, I reckon Vlastos’ interpretation to be fairly bold and somewhat hyperbolic. Although he accurately pinpoints that the intention of deceit is wrongfully connected to the concept of ‘irony’ and the ‘ironic man’, the utterly urban and elegant refinement he attributes, does not apply. Reconsidering the definitions that are submitted in the beginning of the chapter, ‘irony’ is treated cautiously at the very least. Vlastos, in his attempt to present a delicate and subtle portrayal of Socrates in general and of ‘ironic Socrates’ in particular, has argued so as to disinfect ‘irony’ from any specimen of negativism but neglected to do the same for the actual textual references of εἰρωνεία in the Platonic dialogues. He even suggests that the deceptive attitude was actually anticipated in the ancient Greek ‘ironic’ references. Vlastos considers that through a modern, positive appreciation of the concept of irony he will achieve a cultivate delineation of Socrates as an ironist and moral philosopher, serving a subsidiary assertion; substantiate Plato’s Socrates as the historic Socrates.

I support that ‘irony’ from Cicero and Quintilian until today, as well as εἰρωνεία in Plato and Aristotle, has arguably been ennobled and Socrates had everything to do with this refinement. I shall present a thorough argumentation to justify this claim in the following chapter. However, ‘irony’ has not survived as purely elegant and genuinely urbane, as Vlastos defended. And this is one of the reasons why, in the beginning of this chapter, when searching through dictionary etymological definitions of ‘irony’, ‘Socratic irony’ was often separately examined. Socrates refined ‘irony’ from the negative taint of its past and used it as a tool for epistemic and educational purposes, converting it into ‘Socratic irony’. However, it has been argued that this is only one facet of the concept. I suggest ‘irony’ in its contemporary use is cautiously treated

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88 So far, in numerous occasions we witnessed Vlastos avoiding any relation between ‘mockery’, ‘lying’, ‘sly evasion’ and ‘irony’. Even when the classical Greek text mentioned the terms εἰρωνεία, εἰρωνικός and the like, Vlastos would not associate the negative connotation to the current term ‘irony’, although he appears to accept the above unfavorable translations for the actual textual reference εἰρωνεία. See the analysis of Gorgias and The Republic in Section 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’. Vlastos’ Socrates never ‘cheats’ and, therefore, his irony is not the deceptive type. However, “both Irwin and Brickhouse and Smith argue that there is a conflict between Vlastos’ attribution of irony to Socrates and his contention that Socrates never cheats – both suggest that the attribution of irony is incorrect.” (Vasiliou, 1999 p. 464 n. 23).

89 “[…] the intention to deceive, so alien to our word of irony, is normal in its Greek ancestor εἰρινεία, εἰρικῦ, εἰρινευματι.” (Ibid. 23).

80 His endeavour is included in the aforementioned work and particularly in the chapter ‘Socrates contra Socrates in Plato’ (Ibid. 45-80).
precisely because it has preserved some of its past reprehensible reputation. ‘Socratic irony’ on the other hand, does not and should not be treated in a similar manner. For ‘Socratic irony’ is only a branch of the concept ‘irony’ and should be studied separately and treated differently. I argue for the refinement of the phenomenon ‘Socratic irony’ and not the concept ‘irony’ in its totality.

*CDP* presents a distinct entry for ‘Socratic irony’, giving an excitingly accurate and rather conclusive definition:

> A form of indirect communication frequently employed by Socrates in Plato’s early dialogues, chiefly to praise insincerely the abilities of his interlocutors while revealing their ignorance; or, to disparage his own abilities, e.g. by denying that he has knowledge. Interpreters disagree whether Socrates’ self-disparagement is insincere.\(^91\)

*DLTLT* does the same but the definition is not as meticulous:

> So called after Socrates whose favourite device was to simulate ignorance in discussion, especially by asking a series of apparently innocuous questions in order to trap his interlocutor into error.\(^92\)

It is for the aforementioned reasons that, for the rest of this thesis, I shall refer to ‘Socratic irony’ with the transliteration of the Greek word εἰρωνεία (*eironεία*). The contemporary English translation ‘irony’ barely captures the philosophical applications of the concept *ειρωνεία*, therefore notions like pretence, dissimulation, mockery, insincerity and the like, are preferred in numerous occasions.\(^93\) The translation which I have come to accept for Socrates’ *ειρωνεία* is ‘self-depreciation’, a term occasionally used by contemporary scholars but evidently justified in the Aristotelian corpus. Aristotle decoded Socratic *ειρωνεία* rather accurately, when he interpreted it as ‘self-disparagement’ towards the *eiron*’s own merits, particularly his knowledge. In Chapter 2 I prove that this is exactly the type of *eiron* Socrates was,

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\(^{91}\) Audi, 1999 p. 861. This definition shall be thoroughly studied hereafter.

\(^{92}\) Cuddon, 2012 p. 665.

\(^{93}\) Melissa Lane very accurately comments: “That Socrates is ironic is something that many people who know little else about Socrates believe” (Lane, 2011 p. 239).
embracing Aristotle’s self-deprecation but with the twist regarding the motive of the *eiron* and the applications of Socrates’ *eironikon* (ironic) method.

**SECTION 4. EARLY MODERN AND CONTEMPORARY IRONY; A BRIEF OVERVIEW**

According to *DLILT*, “It was not until 1502 that we find the first mention of irony in English: *‘yronye’ – ‘of grammarem by whiche a man sayth one & gyveth to understand the contraye’. This suggests a common usage.” And it is frankly a usage very similar to the Latin inheritance. And the historical overview continues: “By the late 17th and 18th c., irony, as a mode of thinking, feeling and expression, was beginning to attain a high degree of sophistication, as can be seen in the work of Dryden, Swift, Voltaire, Pope, Fielding and Johnson. At the turn of the 18th c. the concept of irony inspired some careful thinking in Germany, where A. W. and F. Schlegel, Tieck and Karl Solger all addressed themselves to the extremely difficult task of understanding these sublets of manifestations of the comic spirit.”

The contribution of the German philosopher and literary critic Friedrich Schlegel is momentous in the history of the concept of irony in recent bibliography. Schlegel is the ‘architect’ of Romantic Irony, in which the *eiron* is equalised to the victim, since everyone is doomed to the irony of the absolute, archetype *eiron* that is the God, metaphysically rendering the real world a *teatrum mundi*. The romantic ironist acts and reacts as an outsider, who is distant, detached and innocently ignorant of the ironic instance. ‘Schlegel is the originator of the Romantic theory of irony, a non-dialectical form of philosophising and literary writing that takes its inspiration from Socratic irony.

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95 Ibid. 372.
and combines it with Fichte’s thought process affirmation and negation, “self-creation” and “self-annihilation.” D. C. Muecke, who wrote extensively on irony, presents an informed analysis on the traits and impact of Romantic irony, including Hegel’s intolerance towards the cunningness of the romantic eiron.

Muecke’s work is a rather insightful source on irony as a concept, providing a thorough overview of irony’s types and forms in the history of philosophy, whether it is Romantic irony, Socratic irony, verbal irony, situational irony or tragic irony. He summarizes irony’s core characteristics in the following five: a) a blissful ignorance (either honest or pretended), b) a contradiction between the phenomena and reality, c) a comic element, d) the feature of detachment when the ironic agent is not aware of the irony, and e) an aesthetic element. J. Lear is also rather knowledgeable regarding the contemporary applications of irony and the way we currently use it. He describes it as a portal to self-knowledge, which interpretation was an eye-opener for my understanding of irony’s essential functions. Giving a fruitful review on verbal and situational irony, he argues that irony is a tool for practical deliberation, which shows us what we do not expect and, as a result, we end up knowing what we expected as well. And, certainly, a huge contribution to this field is S. Kierkegaard’s doctoral thesis The Concept of Irony, With Continual Reference to Socrates (1966), which is frequently mentioned in my research for his portrayal of Socrates and his description of irony as “infinite, absolute negativity.” He too discusses Hegel’s antipathetic posture towards irony, for Hegel took Socrates at his word when Socrates declared his ignorance, a perspective not much different from Nehamas’ as we shall comment on in the following Chapters. Although my approach is entirely different from Kierkegaard’s, his work

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96 Audi, 1999 p. 818.
97 See Muecke, 1982; Muecke, 1969. For Hegel’s appreciation of irony see Hegel, Bosanquet, and Bryant tr., 1886 Chap. Lectures on Aesthetics.
98 Muecke, 1969.
99 See Lear, 2011. The simplest form of verbal irony is what Quintilianus suggested centuries before, to say one thing and mean the opposite of it. However, as witnessed, it is never simple when it comes to irony.
100 “It is negativity because it only negates; it is infinite because it negates not this or that phenomenon; and it is absolute because it negates by virtue of a higher which is not. Irony establishes nothing, for that which is to be established lies behind it.” (Kierkegaard, Capel tr., 1966 p. 278).
benefitted my interpretation of Socratic *eironeia* and its philosophical significance. Kierkegaard presents a chronicle of irony with references to the German philosopher Jonathan Gottlieb Fichte, the romantics Friedrich von Schlegel and Johan Ludwick Tieck, and a philosophy enthusiast and student of Fichte, Karl Wilhelm Ferdinand Solger.101

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This Chapter has exhausted the phenomenon ‘irony’ as a linguistic approach and has scrutinised the verbal attitude of *eirôneia* in Aristophanes’, Plato’s and Aristotle’s corpuses. However, *eirôneia* is not solely restrained within its existence in speech. The broader stance of ‘Socratic irony’, which justifies it as an epistemic tool with strong philosophical applications, is Socrates’ admitted ignorance. *Eironêia*’s philosophical significance is affirmed when associated to Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and his keen desire to present himself inferior to others and, often, to his interlocutors. This form of *eirôneia* will be examined and analysed hereafter

First came the phenomenon, then came the term, then came the concept of ‘irony’. ‘Socratic *eirôneia*’ is only one version of this complex linguistic phenomenon and this multifaceted concept. My research will now focus on the philosophical applications of Socrates’ *eironêia* and will define the type of *eiron* Socrates was as a philosopher. The philosophical concept ‘Socratic *eirôneia*’ employs ignorance and self-deprecation for epistemic and educational purposes, building the interlocutor’s epistemic character and enhancing emotional intelligence in the pursuit of knowledge of the truth about

101 Undoubtedly, the bibliography one can consult is not exhausted in the references presented here. Numerous, prestigious scholars have contributed significant studies on the ironic conceptualization and philosophical employment, which I do not discuss for space constrain.
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the good. Socratic *eirôneia*, contains refined motives for the interlocutors’ intellectual enhancement and works as a ‘sting’ to further inquire and escape the state of *aporia* (bafflement) created by the elenchus. This thesis moves on to the justification of Socrates’ method as such.
Chapter 2

The Moral Status of the *Eiron* According to Aristotle: Perception, Distance, Motivation.

0. INTRODUCTION

This chapter is an extended version of my published paper *The Moral Status of the *Eiron* according to Aristotle: Perception, Distance, Motivation.* I presented this paper in the World Congress Aristotle 2400 Years (A.U.T.H.) in Thessaloniki (Greece) on the 25th of May 2016. I want to thank all the speakers and participants of this Conference for their constructive comments and valuable questions on my presentation.

This venture introduces a contemporary approach to understanding irony as a complex phenomenon beyond its’ mere linguistic use with a focus on Socratic *eironeia*, as introduced in Chapter 1. So far, irony’s study has shown a plethora of features, which are being attributed to its conceptualization throughout the years. Deceit,

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1 Lytra, 2019.
pretense, mockery, mock humility, antiphrasis, conveyed meaning, lie and humorous utterance are the most characteristic. My interpretation opposes the popular meaning of the concept, according to which irony is solely a semantic twist between words, actions meanings, with a hint of mockery, deceit, joke or humiliation. My research goes further and supports the theory that ‘Socratic irony’ (eironeía) in particular is none of the above.

In Section §1 I develop Aristotle’s appreciation of Socrates’ irony (eironeía) as a state of self-deprecation, exposing his ignorance and undermining his own merits against the interlocutor’s. Although self-deprecation has been recognized in contemporary bibliography as a plausible definitional approach, it is not a popular understanding of the term nor it is apparent why such a definition should be preferred for Socrates’ ironic method. Aristotle defends a resourceful approach, resulting in the moral refinement of self-deprecating eironeía through his theory on the ‘Golden mean’ and the triptych eiron (ἐιρών) – truthful man (ἀληθής) – alazon (ἀλαζόν). He argues that between the two vices, the deficient eiron and excessive alazon, the former (eiron) is evidently superior to the latter (alazon) and morally acceptable. The kind of eiron Aristotle introduces is one that does not speak for the sake of gain and does not have deceptive motives. I determine that the reason behind this preference is the alazon’s intention to lie, in order to show-off and boast when, on the other hand, the eiron hides the truth as an act of understatement or even humility, in order to stimulate epistemic engagement to inquiry. Aristotle’s quote on his understanding of Socrates’ method is pivotal and utterly changes the motivation behind the ironic utterance: “Self-depreciators, who underrate their own merits, seem of a more refined character, for we feel that the motive underlying this form of insincerity is not gain but dislike of ostentation. These also mostly disown qualities held in high esteem, as Socrates used to do” (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b23-26).

Section §2 moves on to support Aristotle’s understanding of the eiron’s preferred attitude through eironeía’s review as a unique speech act. The analysis of the following 3 aspects within the speech act is essential, in order to evidently accept Aristotle’s rehabilitation. The section proceeds as follows: I examine two aspects of the semantic features of the speech act (a) the perception or awareness of eironeía – representing the
authority of the audience (Section 2.1), (b) the distance (from the truth) of the semantic content and how the eiron uses it – representing the authority of the speaker (Section 2.2) and one aspect of the performative feature of the speech act (c) the motivation of the eiron (Section 2.3). These features correspond to the speech act’s locutionary, illocutionary and perlocutionary act. Eironeia, however, is not a typical speech act, for the performance of ironic behaviour. There is a divide between the semantic feature of eironeia in language and the performative phenomena that can be attained by using it. The motivation of the eiron, which ends up within the epistemic and educational spectrum, justifies Socrates as an ennobled ironic character.

Section §3 further examines Socrates’ motivation and, consequently, the speech act’s performative behavior. I argue that Socrates uses eironeia as an epistemic tool with an intention to motivate the addressee to desire knowledge and seek for answers. My stimulation for this quest initially arose from G. Vlastos’ work, Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher (1991) which roughly attributes to Socrates irony’s transition from the negative Aristophanic mockery and deceit to a beneficial elenctic method. Although my interpretation frequently opposes Vlastos’ understanding, his argumentation on the positive applications of the concept of irony through Socrates and on the educational character it entails, has been pivotal for my approach. Socratic eironeia allows for a reading of irony as an educational method and although this has been recognized in literature, it has been understood as a tool for moral education (i.e. Vlastos). I argue that by contrast it is an educational tool for developing the intellectual character of agents, that is, their cognitive virtues. This interpretation signifies Socrates as a unique type of ‘educator’ and introduces him as an ‘intellectual character builder’, for he cannot be accepted as a traditional teacher with the conventional sense of teaching.

Aristotle’s understanding of the phenomenon eironeia develops into a philosophically, epistemically and pedagogically promising ground for further research. Sadly, his subtle distinctions escaped philosophical discussion, a loss that can hopefully be remedied in contemporary thought.
Extended Preface: Aristotle’s Socrates

While writing this Chapter I realised the more I engaged to the philosophical configuration of Socrates’ method and his irony, the closer I kept coming to Aristotle’s philosophical views and ideas. I reckon that the reason behind this attraction was that amongst his contemporaries and his successors, Aristotle understood Socrates and his irony best. Naturally, this only concerns the ancients whose works have managed to survive throughout the years. It is a fact that Socrates has been the lead figure, the protagonist of the Platonic dialogues but perhaps Plato was too emotionally connected to be unbiased when attributing his teacher’s philosophy. Therefore, Aristotle, knowing the legacy, the views and the theories of them both (his teacher’s, Plato, and his teacher’s teacher, Socrates), might have been a more appropriate, a more objective observer and beneficial of two magnificently strong philosophical minds. And although, this seems more like a speculation here, the following Chapters will be strong proof that Socrates was indeed more accurately understood by Aristotle and that Aristotle was in his philosophy very ‘Socratic’, if I shall call him that.

As anticipated, this is not a unanimous claim amongst scholars. Al. Nehamas, for instance, argues for the opposite. He mentions, among other things, that: “There is little ground for supposing that Socrates’ contemporaries and ‘near contemporaries’ – the authors of the Socratic logoi which contained such incredibly different pictures of him – must have understood him better than we do”.2 His reasoning though seems quite abstract and with no valid ground. It eludes me why, the fact that we currently are in possession of different pictures of Socrates by his contemporaries justifies modern scholars as those who comprehend him more accurately. His students or contemporaries, like Plato and Xenophon, and his near contemporaries, like Aristotle, at least lived close to him, closer than all other following scholars, who merely studied or heard about Socrates’ work and life. The fact that the ancients have different and sometimes contradicting figures of him, solely shows a range of approaches that arises from dealing with such a controversial character and persona that Socrates was and from the fact that he never wrote anything in his own words and manner to inherit a

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transparent presentation of his views. It is well-established that he affected many philosophers of his epoch, who actively attempted to put together the pieces of the puzzle that his persona evidently was to them. But Socrates remained opaque. All the different approaches justify that, even if his contemporaries didn’t understand him to the fullest, at least they tried – and they tried hard – to figure out what Socrates’ true philosophy represented. And, frankly, subsequent scholars, who based their research on Socrates’ contemporaries and their theories, couldn’t have figured him out better than they did. Even if Nehamas here is trying to support that we all have the same difficulties comprehending Socrates, whether we are dealing with his philosophy today or whether we were ancient philosophers who may have interacted with him, this is still not a proof that his contemporaries failed to understand him because they present contradictory pictures of him. It is these different pictures which gradually compose this pluralistic mosaic that his persona was, and it is these different pictures of him that his contemporaries gathered on which all later research rests on. These pictures I am using today to construe a viable educational technique.

SECTION 1. FROM MOCKERY TO SELF-DEPRECIATION

It has been established that one of the most controversial philosophical terms has been the concept of irony; researchers have never reached consensus, and the struggle is still on. Even if there is an attempt to solely define irony, it is apparent that one would fail to give a fair definition for it is in irony’s linguistic and semantic nature to be vague and elusive.\(^3\) As determined in the previous chapter, the first historical data of the term

\(^3\) *DLTL* highlights: “By the end of the 19th c., then, we find that most of the major forms and modes of irony have been explored and, to some extent identified and classified. But it seems to be of the essential nature of irony […] that it eludes definition; and this elusiveness is one of the main reasons why it is a source of so many fascinated inquiry and speculation.” (Cuddon, 2012 p. 460).
The ancient Greek term εἰρωνεία in its originality and the concept it represented in Aristophanes’ plays, advocate a purely negative trait. It is only through the Platonic use that the term undergoes considerable change through Socrates’ method, signifying a hint of refinement. The Platonic dialogues in which instances of the term appear have been thoroughly discussed, and the concept’s rehabilitation when ‘Socratic irony’ is concerned has also been evidently defended. Whether it was the historical Socrates or Plato’s main character, the protagonist in his dialogues, the root cause of this transition is another rather controversial matter, which I am not discussing in this thesis for space and content constrain. For the sake of the current analysis though, I will presume that the historical Socrates is the Platonic one or, at least, coincides with Aristotle’s view of Plato’s Socrates and his ironic attitude in the Platonic dialogues.

‘Socratic irony’ in Plato is indubitably more complex and more sophisticated as a concept compared to Aristophanes’ use. The question arising is what this refinement is translated into. How can we justify a moral aspect in such a controversial concept, so closely related to reproach? I argue that the answer lies within the Aristotelian

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4 See Chapter 1, ‘The Historical Overview of Irony’s Development as a Term and a Philosophical Phenomenon’.
5 Ibid.
6 In the thesis’ Introduction I have manifested that the ‘Socratic problem’ or the historical/fictional figure of Socrates will not be a concern (see Introduction: ‘Methodology and Limitations’). Although this is not the place for a historical retrospection, it cannot go without notice that researches made contradicting but critically interesting claims about the ‘real’ Socrates. I shall briefly introduce only a few of them: S. Kierkegaard’s doctoral thesis claims Aristophanes’ portrayal of Socrates to be the most accurate representation of the man, especially regarding his ironic attitude (for more see Kierkegaard, Capel tr., 1966); A.E. Taylor, on the other hand, relies on Plato but in a moderate way: “Socrates in Plato, is neither [...] the historical Socrates nor [...] the historical Plato, but the hero of the Platonic drama. The hero’s character is largely modeled on that actual Socrates, his opinions are often those of the historical Plato, but he is still distinct from them both.” (Taylor, 1960 p. 32); and Olof Gigon, after an extensive research on the matter, concludes that historical Socrates is nowhere to be found, in any of the corpuses that have been written about him or because of him. The real Socrates, he believes, is not the Platonic one or Xenophon’s Socrates; in both cases, it is a character, which indicates some hints of historical elements but in both cases the writers created two different versions of him, using their writing skills and literary imagination (Gigon, 1995 pp. 13–75, especially the chapter entitled Η μορφή του Σωκράτη ως πρόβλημα).
corpus, namely Aristotle’s interpretation of Socrates as an *eiron* (ironic man) and I further support *eironeia*’s (Socratic irony) rehabilitation for the epistemic and educational background of this *eiron*’s motives. My research finds evidence for the transition of *eironeia* from Aristophanic mockery to a type of elenctic method in the Aristotelian view.

Before I introduce the relation between Aristotle and *eironeia*, I clarify that it is because of Aristotle that my translations of the concept – or other scholars’ translations which I provide – maintain the characterizations ‘self-deprecation’ and ‘self-deprecator’ instead of ‘irony’, ‘lie’, ‘pretense’, ‘deceptive irony’, ‘mock humility’ and the like. By the end of this chapter, the reasons for Socrates’ portrayal as a ‘self-deprecator’ will be arguably justified. My approach initiates from Aristotle’s *Eudemian Ethics*, when we come across the term *eironeia* (*εἰρωνεία*) as a part of the triptych *eironeia* (translated as *self-deprecation*) – *alitheia* (translated as *sincerity*) – *alazoneia* (translated as *boastfulness*). Thus, I intentionally chose to only use the term ‘self-deprecation’ hereafter as a translation for the Greek word *eipoveia*. As a matter of fact, in literature it is rather common and evidently preferred to come across the terms ‘self-deprecator’ and ‘self-deprecation’ as suitable translations for the Greek words *eipov* and *eipoveia* accordingly. To be more precise, T. Irwin and H. Rackham exclusively use these terms. Jonathan Barnes also regularly prefers them, although sometimes he translates *eipoveia* with the terms *mock modesty* and *eipov* with the terms *mock modest*. Even though I disagree with the latter translation, Barnes accepts the ancient Greek word *eipoveia* as a form of pretense, which, nevertheless, signifies understatement.

Aristotle wrote extensively on ethics and virtue ethical theory with two of his treatises thriving throughout the years (*Eudemian Ethics* and *Nicomachean Ethics*). They have been

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7 I hereafter use the terms *eiron*, *eironeia* (transliterate the Greek word *eipoveia*) when referring to Socrates and Socratic irony in particular, following Al. Nehamas’ example: “Since the proper understanding, even the exact translation, of the Greek term is in question, I will not use ‘irony’ and its cognates in discussing Greek texts until we are settled on their proper construal.” (Nehamas, 1998 pp. 201–2 n. 4).

8 Most translations for the Aristotelian corpus in this Chapter are by Rackham 2014 (*Rackham tr.*, 2014). Rackham’s translations are accessed through the UoE’s online portal Loeb Classical Library. Page numbers are in correspondence with this edition.


works of immeasurable philosophical influence and they are still popularly studied in contemporary Virtue Ethics.\textsuperscript{11} Although \(NE\) has been generously treated as a more prominent work, Rackham argues in his Introduction on \(EE\) that “in some places The Eudemian Ethics is fuller in expression or more discursive than the Nicomachean”.\textsuperscript{12} Both works study virtuous living (ἐνάρετος βίος) and argue on how one should be in order to achieve the ultimate good (ἀνώτερον ἀγαθόν): Eudaimonia (τήν Εὐδαιμονίαν).

Now let us reconsider the Aristotelian triptych eironeia (self-depreciation) – alitheia (sencrity) – alazoneia (boastfulness) and demonstrate, primarily, what it represents. Although Aristotle follows both his teacher Plato and his ancestor Socrates in claiming virtue to be a key factor for our well-being, he introduces an ethical system based on hexis (ἕξις) which contradicts both the Socratic and the Platonic methodology for achieving a virtuous life.\textsuperscript{13} Hexeis (dispositions) are states of character and as states of character, they can be defective or excessive. One’s purpose in order to achieve Eudaimonia (Εὐδαιμονία), and ultimate flourishing in life should be able to control the two and dominate over them aiming to reach the state of character which is mediating the aforementioned defective and excessive states. In other words, one should primarily focus on the acquisition of the ‘Golden mean’, also known as ‘Golden middle way’, which is the desirable middle state between the two extreme states, the excess (ὑπερβολή) and deficiency (ἔλλειψις).

In Eudemian Ethics (1120c-1121a) Aristotle gives a sketched list of these hexeis dividing them in aforementioned three categories: excess (ὑπερβολή) – deficiency (ἔλλειψις) – virtuous/golden mean (μεσότις):

Let each then be taken by way of illustration and studied with the help of the schedule:

\textsuperscript{11} On the revival of Virtue Ethics, see Chapter 3, 2.1.1 ‘The Revival of Virtue Ethics’.

\textsuperscript{12} Rackham tr., 2014 p. 191.

\textsuperscript{13} The translations ‘disposition’, ‘state’, ‘condition’ or ‘habitation’ are acceptable for a proper understanding of the transliterated term: “The dispositions are the formed states of character in virtue of which we are well or ill-disposed in respect of the emotions;” (Ε.Ν. II. 5. 1105b23-26; translation \textit{Ibid.} 86). “Ἕξεις δὲ καθ’ ἀκρίβεια τὰ πάθη ἐγγενῆ εἰ ἄκακος” (Ἡθικά Νικομήδεια, 1105b25-26).
The distinction between the two vices and the ‘Golden mean’ which Aristotle tries to achieve is quite obvious, with *eironeia* (self-depreciation) and *alazoneia* (boastfulness) being accordingly the deficiency (ἐλλείπειν) and the excess (ὑπερβαλλειν). The question still remains; since Aristotle constantly argues for moral goodness being concerned with certain means and the moral example always being a middle state between two extremes, how can states of deficiency like *eironeia* indicate potential subtleties of rehabilitation or refinement?

A detailed examination of Aristotle’s texts suggests that not everything that is not the ‘Golden mean’ is blameworthy; and, to be more accurate, not all vices, deficiencies

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<td>Shamelessness</td>
<td>Diffidence</td>
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<td>Prodigality</td>
<td>Meanness</td>
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<td>Boastfulness</td>
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<td>Rascality</td>
<td>Simplicity</td>
<td>Wisdom</td>
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14 *Ε.Ε. II. 3. 1220c36-1121a12 – my emphasis; translation from *Ibid.* 250). The right column indicates the dispositional states of the ‘Golden mean’, whereas the left and the middle columns represent the excess and the deficiency accordingly. It is not the most favorable listing, as the ‘Golden mean’ is commonly anticipated in the middle column. However, this is an exact translation of the Classical Greek text, in which Aristotle chooses to present the dispositional states as such. Also, I will mostly include all the original Greek texts except for cases like this list for space constrain.
and excesses, are equally blameworthy. The disproportional handling of the two characters (eiron, alazon) already appears in Eudemian Ethics:

He that pretends to have more possessions than he really has is a boaster, and he that pretends to have fewer is a self-depreciator. *(E.E. II. 3. 1221a24-27)*

And escalates in Nicomachean Ethics:

[... ] and similarly, the sincere man who stands between the two extremes is praised, and the insincere of both kinds are blamed, more especially the boaster. *(E.N. IV. 7. 1127a28-31 – my emphasis)*

The description of the eiron might not be praised, especially in *E.E.* in which the trait of dishonesty concerns both the eiron and the alazon, but it is arguably preferred. Now, an inherently interesting gradation occurs within the characters of the boaster (alazon) and the self-depreciator (eiron) throughout the exposition of *E.N.* (Book IV, 7) with Aristotle numerating the conditions under which someone is more or less acceptable and admissible. A fluctuation regarding who is more worthy of blame (the eiron or the alazon) occurs with the eiron constantly winning this debate. In Nicomachean Ethics we read:

The sincere man will diverge from the truth, if at all, in the direction of understatement rather than exaggeration; since this appears to be in better taste as all excess is offensive. *(E.N. IV. 7. 1127b7-10)*

And later on:

Self-depreciators, who undervalue their own merits, seem of a more refined character, for we feel that the motive underlying this form of insincerity is not to gain but dislike of ostentation. These also mostly disown qualities held in high esteem, as Socrates used to do. *(E.N. IV. 7. 1127b23-26 – my emphasis)*

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15 Rackham tr., 2014 the original ancient Greek text is: “ἀλαζών δὲ ὁ πλεῖον τῶν ὑπαρχόντων προσπουποθημένος, εἱρὼν δὲ ὁ ἐλάττων.” *(Ἠθικά Ευδήμια, 1221a24-27).*

16 Ibid. 243. “καθ’ αὐτὸ δὲ τὸ μὲν φεύγοντος ψεύδον καὶ φεύγοντος, τὸ δ’ ἄλογον καλὸν καὶ ἐπανετόν, οὔτω δὲ καὶ ὁ μὲν ἀλθητικὸς μέσος ὑπ’ ἐπανετόν, οὗ δὲ φεύγοντες ἀμφότεροι μὲν φεύγοι, μᾶλλον δ’ ὁ ἀλαζών.” *(Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια, 1127a28-31).*

17 Rackham, 2015, p. 243. “ἐπὶ τὸ ἐλάττων δὲ μᾶλλον τῶν ἄλογων ἄποικοι ἐμμελέττοντες γὰρ φαίνεται διὰ τὸ ἐπαρθεῖς τὰς ἑπερβολὰς εἰναι.” *(Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια, 1127b7-10).*

18 Rackham tr., 2014 p. 245. “μᾶλατα δὲ καὶ οὕτω τὰ ἑνδοξα ἀπαρνούνται, ὅπων καὶ Σωκράτης ἐποίει.” *(Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια, 1127b23).*
Chapter 2: The Moral Status of the Eiron According to Aristotle

The above texts allow for a reading of eironeia that summarises the characteristics my research supports. First of all, Aristotle doesn’t demand utter and absolute truth telling. Diverging from the truth is arguably acceptable when the eirones show ‘less’ of what they really are, present fewer of what they really have and understate their own merits. However, this trait of the eiron’s attitude alone does not automatically justify eironeia’s ‘dishonesty’ (i.e. showing less of the truth) as a positive and acceptable quality. The ironic man is not a noble character per se and can often be a boaster who understates himself in order to brag or show-off. Aristotle, though, says it clearly: “as Socrates used to do”. The way Socrates disowns his highly esteemed qualities is unique and peculiarly different. It contradicts the ironic attitude of others (i.e. the Spartans in E,N. IV. 7. 1127b25-29). Being a self-depreciator, a character who shows ‘less’ is only one feature of the type of eironeia I argue for. What makes Socrates’ eironeia unique and different than the rest self-depreciating ironies? I shall prove that this rare divergence lies within the motive of the philosopher. Socrates flaunts his ignorance, disavows knowledge and constantly argues he knows less than what he actually does, frequently admitting the interlocutors’ superior understanding of what they canvass. However, this type of eironeia is motivated by the philosopher’s intention to keep the interlocutor smitten and eager to proceed in the inquiry for attaining the truth (about the good). I shall evidently prove that Socrates’ motives are essentially intellectual and educational towards the audience; my first and rather strong evidence being Aristotle’s definite claim: “as Socrates used to do”.

The understanding of the eiron Socrates as an ennobled self-depreciator with beneficial educational motives, contradicts numerous scholars and their approaches. Focusing on Nehamas’ argumentation, it has been argued in Chapter 1 that he is in a pursuit of refuting Vlastos’ theory on irony’s operation as a tool of purely transparent antiphrasis (meaning the opposite of what is being said), and on Socrates’ moral depiction.

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19 We shall closely examine such an example within the ironic attitude of the Spartans (E,N. IV. 7. 1127b25-29). Nehamas actually uses this particular quote in order to defend his position on the iron’s integral superiority and, as a result, boastfulness. See Section 3. ‘Introducing Socrates’ epistemic and educational motivation as an eiron’.

20 In Chapter 1 there are several examples of this attitude (Section 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’). See, for instance, the dialogue between Socrates and Thrasymachus in The Republic (pp. 44-46) or between Socrates and Callicles in the Gorgias (pp. 40-42).
Although I have, too, argued against Vlastos’ justifications, Nehamas’ counterarguments indicate an ironic attitude covered in boastfulness, egotism and a sense of superiority towards the addressee: “The ironist knows something that someone else does not and, at least for the present, cannot know. In all irony, therefore, there is an element of boastfulness, which is part of the reason irony has always been met with such suspicion.”. Nehamas goes on to support this claim through Plato’s *Apology* and Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*. These traits, although they can be detected in the concept of irony, are arguably far from Socratic *eironeia*’s qualities. As Aristotle profoundly discusses, the *eiron* and the boaster are the exact opposite dispositional vices. And even if we were to accept irony’s ostentation as a diachronic attitude, Aristotle’s quote is rather straightforward that this is not the *eiron* Socrates represents. Additionally, my interpretation of *eironeia* infers from Socrates’ feigned disavowal of knowledge. Socrates is being a self-depreciating *eiron* when he espouses his ignorance and disclaims to have certain answers to the discussed topic in the dialogues. Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge creates intense philosophical controversy. Did Socrates genuinely disown the relevant knowledge to the questions asked or did he feign his ignorance? It is impossible to approach this epistemic concern superficially and merely provide an elementary response. In Chapter 3 I unfold my line of reasoning for Socrates’ feigned disavowal of knowledge and I provide a thorough justification according to which his *eironeia* is a peculiar pretense of ignorance and not the generally admitted one. My perception of Socrates’ motives is that they are, in fact, educational and this what makes his self-depreciation different from the rest ironic attitudes and his irony morally acceptable. However, Socrates has been widely accused for his non-profitable educational tactics. Socrates himself refuses the characterisation ‘teacher’ several times in the Platonic dialogues: “I have never been anyone’s teacher” (*Ap.*

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21 And he adds: “Ironists are vulnerable to their own tactics because their assumption that they are superior to their victims proves to be their fatal weakness.” (Nehamas, 1998 p. 49).

22 I have already discussed the referenced quote from the *Apology* (*Ap.* 37e4-38a1, in Chapter 1, p. 39) arguing that whichever qualities of irony one might detect, this is an ironic instance Socrates refuses for himself. As far as Aristotle’s quote (*E.N.* IV. 7. 1127b25-29), it will be examined here in reference to the *eiron*’s motives, again as a non-Socratic ironic moment (see Section 3. ‘Introducing Socrates’ epistemic and educational motivation as an *eiron*’ (p. X). For Nehamas’ whole argumentation see ‘Socratic Irony: Character and Interlocutors’ in Nehamas, 1998 and particularly pp. 49-53.
And since this is also an issue that asks for extensive argumentation, Chapter 4 of the thesis, supports the claim that Socrates, besides his peculiar pretense of ignorance, he also employed a peculiar teaching method; he is not a teacher, but rather an intellectual character builder.

For the moment, I shall refrain from arguing towards this direction and focus on Aristotle’s valuable understanding of the concept of eironeia. In the following Section (‘Socratic Eironeia As a Speech Act’) I substantiate eironeia’s function as a unique speech act. I determine its rare, principal features and argue towards the justification of eironeia’s enhanced epistemic and educational application. First, I shall introduce the aspect of ‘perception’ (of the audience/interlocutor/reader) since speech acts, eironeia included, presuppose a recipient. Secondly, the type of eiron Socrates represents shows ‘less’ of what he really is. I will name this aspect of eironeia ‘distance’ (from the truth), since, as already stated, the under-showing and over-showing entail a certain gradation. These two elements, ‘perception’ along with ‘distance’, signify eironeia’s semantic profile. Finally, the ‘motivation’ of the eiron, as detected in Aristotle’s texts, is the performatve feature of the phenomenon eironeia. I will embrace Aristotle’s attempt to elucidate the reasons why ironic self-deprecators are evidently purified as opposed to ostensible braggarts, and I will argue that all three aspects of this ironic speech act combined, render eironeia as an educational tool for developing the intellectual character of the agents. The motivation of the ‘self-depreciator’ is to diverge from the truth by deflation, in order to avoid ostentation and to motivate further inquiry. This aspect is finally and fairly attributed to Socrates, when he cast as an eiron who dislikes “mostly qualities held in high esteem” (EN. 1127b25). There is a pattern detected in Socrates’ eironeia for his disavowal of the ἔνδοξα (high qualities), which proves his motives. Why else would Socrates undermine his qualities, other than equalize himself with the interlocutors and downgrade his character in front of them so as to motivate them?

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23 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 30.
Aristotle’s lenient view towards the *eiron* and his justifications are used to support my thesis towards a three-dimensioned analysis of the speech act of *eironeia*. Let us now get deeper into the phenomenon to fully understand it.

SECTION 2. SOCRATIC EIRONELA AS A SPEECH ACT

To examine the phenomenon’s *perception, distance* and *motivation* we must first acknowledge it as an existing speech act. Speech acts have been introduced in Philosophy of Language as the performative products of utterances that serve a certain function in communication, such as promises, apologies, warnings, requests and the like. Broadly, speech acts indicate that our language can practically ‘do’ things. The speech act theory supports that to speak is to act and languages can be active and not merely verbal. J. L. Austin contributes rigorously to contemporary philosophy with his speech act theory and the idea that every use of speech carries a certain performative dimension. It is very important to comprehend this feature of the language for it gives insight to the utility of human communication. When, for instance, we make a promise to someone not only do we make a statement and a semantic, verbal, propositional utterance but we also ‘act’ accordingly; we simultaneously make a performative act of promising something.  

The very same characteristic can be detected in *eironeia*, which I will be scrutinizing for its idiosyncratic nature, since the semantic and the performative profile do not present absolute compatibility.

J. L. Austin was a British philosopher of Language and the father of the study of language as a speech act. His famous quote “to say something is to do something”

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24 On the theory of speech acts, see Austin, 1965 and Searle, 1975. The Wittgensteinian view similarly supports that the meaning of the language depends on its actual use. See Wittgenstein, 1953.

25 See Section 2.3: *Motivation (of the eiron)*.
encapsulates the essence of his theory. One can come across 3 key terms of Austin’s speech act theory: locution – illocution – perlocution.26 Locution or locutionary act is the ‘product’ of a propositional utterance, the use of the linguistic properties of our language, the descriptive function of speech.27 Although many interpret locution as a purely verbal, semantic feature of language, Austin actually claims that locution is also understood as an act.28 Illocution or illocutionary acts are the ‘products’ of utterances that come with the intention to interact while making the utterance (i.e. “I am so tired!”). And perlocution or perlocutionary acts are ‘products’ of utterances that come with the intention to interact and, at the same time, cause a certain reaction or affect a behavior (i.e. “Please, feed the dog while I am gone.”). Perlocutions include also the consequences of an utterance that affect the addressee. Again, following Austin, the three key terms are not very distinctive since all of them are performed in every utterance.29

Understanding the operations of language and comprehending the function of speech act is crucial for two reasons. First, irony is a speech act, a function of speech (locution) with illocutionary and perlocutionary effects. I shall exclusively argue for Socratic irony (*eironeia*) as a speech act, since the motivation (or intention) which justifies the action’s illocution and perlocution differs considerably between the ironic man and the Socratic eiron. Secondly, this thesis argues for a type of eironeia that can be fruitfully employed in contemporary educational systems. Novel philosophical interpretations argue that the theory of speech acts should be revisited and treated as an effective educational

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27 An alternative theory supports that prior to the locution come the utterances, which are strings of words with no specific meaning or recipient (e.g. “Aw!”).

28 “He suggests that a locution is also an act: what words you choose to use, what data to employ, is very performative” as argued in Gasparatou, 2018 p. 517.

29 “Austin’s original theory suggests that we perform all three acts in every utterance: everything we say in real life circumstances conveys some information (locutionary act or locution), implies certain meaning depending on our intentions and the overall conventions of the circumstance (illocutionary act or illocution), and has some effects in the audience (perlocutionary act or perlocution).” (Gasparatou, 2016 p. 324).
I will defend *eironeia*’s beneficial educational character thoroughly in Chapter 4, after establishing its performative profile as a speech act.

So far, it has been argued that speech acts are performed by our everyday utterances, thus serving a performative function in communication. It was also pointed out that the line between the semantic and the performative behavior of speech acts is ambiguous, for the simple reason that a mere utterance can, too, be very performative. For the purposes of this analysis, though, I will employ the distinction as follows: *eironeia*’s ‘perception’ and ‘distance’ signify its semantic behavior, whereas the ‘motivation’ its performative behavior. Through *eironeia* we come to realize that speech acts are way more perplexed than a mere correspondence between the semantic utterance and its ostensible meaning or its expected performative profile. The nature of *eironeia* that Socrates uses does not seem to serve semantic and performative compatibility within the concept. Similarly to making a joke and to a whole cluster of analogous acts (i.e. being sarcastic, mocking, etc.) we perform a different act than the one implied by the utterance when being *eiron*es (or, accordingly, when making a joke). For if we accept the most popular definitions of irony and apply the speech act theory, the *eiron* should make ironic semantic utterances and at the same time perform an ironic performative act of mockery or deceit. I reckon that the speech act of *eironeia*, as Socrates used it, serves the semantic utterance of ironic claims but it performs irony not by being derisively ironic but by being motivational to desiring knowledge. Hence, I shall argue that the performative aspect of *eironeia* as a speech act, which lies within the *eiron*’s motivational purposes, should not be identified with what is being said. Nevertheless, contemporary bibliography argues that the performative and the semantic utterance

30 So far, the speech act theory has had import in philosophy of language, ethics, political philosophy, philosophy of law, linguistics, artificial intelligence and feminist philosophy (Wolf, n.d.). For the re-examination of the theory of speech act as an educationally applicable theory I was inspired by Gasparatou, 2018.

31 I ought to clarify at this point that irony in general and not solely Socratic irony (*eironeia*) presents this discrepancy within the speech act’s profile. Irony as a concept entails a contradiction between semantic and performative behaviour.

32 The performative profile of *eironeia* will be extensively studied in “Section 2.3: Motivation (of the eiron)”. 
of speech acts should inherently be independent in numerous cases; the study of irony’s function proves that one could evidently argue for this distinction.

### 2.1 Perception

Starting with the aspect of *perception* within *eironeia*, it is more complex than one would expect and more complicated than many interpretations eventually captured. The *perception of eironeia* is versatile and can be understood through the following schematic, which depicts the complexity of *eironeia* already in its semantic structure.

First of all, since it is a function in communication the subjects must be more than one, for *eironeia* cannot be performed without a recipient and *eironeia’s perception* presupposes that someone uses it and someone, as a receiver, is being aware of its use. My schematic of the *perception* of the phenomenon *eironeia* presumes three subjects: i) the *εἰρων* (the ironic man, the agent who uses *eironeia*), ii) the *εἰρωνευθείς* (the agent upon which the *eironeia* is used, the ‘recipient’ of *eironeia*) and iii) the ‘audience’ (in the Platonic dialogues this can refer both to the ‘direct audience’ that was present at the time of the phenomenon’s occurrence and the ‘indirect audience’, which includes the sum of the readers of the Platonic dialogues):33

#### a.

| i) | The *εἰρων* says A | → | The *εἰρων* means A |
| ii) | The *εἰρων* says A | → | The *εἰρων* means mA34 |
| iii) | The *εἰρων* says mA | → | The *εἰρων* means mA |
| iv) | The *εἰρων* says mA | → | The *εἰρων* means A |

#### b.

| i) | The *εἰρων* says A | → | The *εἰρωνευθείς* understands A |
| ii) | The *εἰρων* says A | → | The *εἰρωνευθείς* understands mA |
| iii) | The *εἰρων* says mA | → | The *εἰρωνευθείς* understands mA |

33 To avoid potential objections, I have provided the Classical Greek term *εἰρωνεία* instead of the transliteration *eironeia* (‘Socratic irony’) or the English translation ‘irony’, because the original term involves both notions and all concepts of irony.

34 Where mA stands for “not A”, whether it is the opposite from A or something different from A.
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iv) The εἰρων says mA → The εἰρονευθείς understands A

c. i) The εἰρων says A → The audience understands A
 ii) The εἰρων says A → The audience understands mA
 iii) The εἰρων says mA → The audience understands mA
 iv) The εἰρων says mA → The audience understands A

(Schema 1)

The complexity of the semantic utterance of eironeia as a speech act is gradually demonstrated. The multiple connections that can be made between the three subjects signify a different layout of the phenomenon in each case. What is being said, what is meant to be said and what is being understood by the two of the three subjects (i.e. the ‘recipient’ and the ‘direct/indirect audience’) are combined in a rambling network, introducing systematically different levels of understanding. The receivers’ awareness of eironeia (receivers being both the ‘direct/indirect audience’ and the ‘recipient’) is compromised due to the nature of the semantic profile of the phenomenon itself.

Several times, while studying the Platonic dialogues, the important role of eironeia’s audience and recipient was constantly present. Even some of the definitions provided for the concept of irony depend their meaning on the receivers’ and not the speaker’s authority. To refresh our memory, Quintilian’s reference on irony is “something contrary to what is said is to be understood” (my emphasis). The burden of awareness seems to fall on the addressee rather than the eiron and his intentions. Besides, several scholars rely on irony’s awareness to justify their theories or create counterarguments. For instance, Nehamas’ accusation of irony’s boastfulness depends on the superiority of the eiron because the latter knows something that the audience doesn’t; and Vlastos’ contemporary examples on irony, presuppose that both the eiron and the audience are

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35 One could argue that only (a.) is the purely semantic profile whereas (b.) and (c.) are the pragmatic profile, since the recipience is included and that affects the perlocution of the speech act and the behaviour of the utterance. I do agree that a clear distinction is really hard. It is for this reason, however, that I chose the term ‘understands’ which entails the least possible behavioural effect.

36 The levels of understanding would have been even more perplexed had we considered for the analysis of the Platonic dialogues the distinction between Plato and Socrates (see Scott, 2000 pp. 2–3).
aware, otherwise the phenomenon of irony cannot even exist. Vlastos even argues that deception is so utterly contrary to the nature of irony mainly because only those who want to be deceived are eventually deceived. No responsibility lies on the intention of the eiron but only on the understanding of the recipient and the audience. Also, as discussed, Vlastos groundbreaking interprets ‘Socratic irony’ as complex irony, according to which what is said both is and isn’t what is meant. The understanding of the meaning relies on the addressee. And, similarly, Vasiliou’s theory on ‘conditional irony’ renders the audience as the facilitator of eironeia’s phenomenon, since the interlocutor (‘receiver’) believes the eironeia whereas the reader (‘indirect audience’) recognises it. All these claims, and many more with which contemporary bibliography is filled, justifies that the awareness of eironeia as a speech act is not only multilevel but also provokes diversified interpretations.

Apart from Plato’s dialogues and contemporary bibliography, the importance of the audience when it comes to eironeia, also appears in Aristotle. Take for example the following text:

He (= the great-souled man) must [...] care more for the truth than for what people will think; and speak and act openly, since as he despises other men he is outspoken and frank, except when speaking with ironical self-deprecation, as he does to common people. (E.N. IV. 3. 1124 b25-30 – my emphasis)

See Vlastos, 1991 pp. 57–58. For Nehamas see Chapter 1, 2.2 Irony in Plato, The Republic.

‘Conditional irony’ works as follows: Considering the case in Euthyphro’s dialogue, Vasiliou argues, if the antecedent were true then Socrates would believe the consequent, i.e. if Euthyphro had indeed knowledge of piety, then Socrates ‘shall never stop praising his wisdom’ (Euphr. 9b). However, the antecedent is not true and, therefore, neither is the consequent. The reader (indirect audience) understands that but Euthyphro (the recipient) doesn’t (Vasiliou, 1999). For the definition on ‘conditional irony’ see particularly (Ibid. 462).

Even though irony is not widely examined as a speech act, the importance of the audience is considered an unconditional fact. Jonathan Fine divides the audience in the Platonic dialogues into ‘inner frame’ (actual interlocutors) and ‘outer frame’ of narrative levels (all the readers of the dialogues). This way, however, J. Fine attributes all levels of irony to Plato, concluding that irony’s ultimate target in the Platonic dialogues are always the readers (see Fine, 2011). Melissa Lane talks about irony’s levels of understanding (Lane, 2011 p. 238). For the importance of the audience in Aristotle see also Broadie’s philosophical introduction (pp. 9-81) in Broadie and Rowe, 2002.

Rackham, 2015, pp. 223-225. “μεγάλων ζεί καὶ οφυμαστῶν […] καὶ μέλες τῆς ἀληθείας μᾶλλον ἢ τῆς δόξης, καὶ λέγειν καὶ πράττειν φανερῶς (παρομοιαστής γὰρ δὲ τὸ καταφρονητικὸν εἶναι, καὶ ἀληθετικὸς, πλὴν δὲα μὴ ἐν εἰρωνείᾳ· ἀρων δὲ πρὸς τοὺς πολλοὺς)” (Ηθικά Νικομήδεια, 1124b25-30).
Aristotle justifies *eironeia* as an acceptable means when the agent uses it in order to speak to “the common people” (“ἐίρων δὲ πρὸς τωὶς πολλοῖς”). Consequently, *perception* of the phenomenon and *awareness* of the truth seem to be crucial, with Aristotle attributing liability of their understanding to the ‘recipient’ and the ‘audience’. Since the common people, who in the Ancient Greek texts are frequently mentioned as *vulgar*, cannot always see the truth then nothing good can come out of telling them the truth. This realization has been critically pivotal for the understanding of the phenomenon. Since Socrates’ method will be decoded and analysed as a method which does not give answers or ‘the truth’ directly to the recipient (for he is not an ordinary teacher but an *intellectual character builder*), this quote is partly a justification to the reasons why he chooses to divert from a straightforward answer. As the 2 last Chapters shall prove, Socrates aims to keep the addressees cognitively alert, continue inquiry and further ‘train’ their desire to attain the truths themselves (helping them as a ‘coach’). Diverting from the truth as a self-depreciator was the most efficient way to lead them towards that direction. In this particular case, Aristotle comments that diverting from the truth is ethically acceptable when the recipients are the “common people”. Similarly, I will argue that in a classroom, using Socrates’ method, direct truth or direct knowledge towards the recipients (students) might not be as beneficial as the cognitive stimulation that a *distance* from the truth can induce; and this shall render Socrates’ method ethically acceptable in an epistemically educational system.

Concluding the study of the feature of *perception*, the significance of *eironeia*’s audience resides within the fact that irony is a speech act. *Eironeia* incarnates all three key terms of Austin’s speech act theory: locution (the ‘product’ of an ironic utterance) – *illocution* (the ‘product’ of an ironic utterance as expressed and intended by the *eiron*) – perlocution (the ‘product’ of an ironic utterance as expressed and intended by the *eiron* and the behavioral effect it causes). Therefore, the audience needs to grasp the illocution (the *eiron*’s intention) for the perlocution effect to successfully meet the *eiron*’s

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41 A Greek word for this term would be “ὄρος”.

42 See Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’.

43 My full argumentation in Chapters 3 & 4. Of course, I am not suggesting that students should be considered an equivalent to the ‘common people’. Only that different audiences can justify effective use of *distance* from the truth.
‘motive’; and this is not entirely under the *eiron*’s control.\footnote{See Gasparatou, 2018 p. 514.} This function of the speech act *eironeia* will be also further discussed in §2.3 ‘Motivation of the *eiron*’.

Now, while we remain on the study of *eironeia*’s semantic profile, there is one more essential feature to be examined. The connections made in all the aforementioned cases of ironic utterances (Schema 1) add a different value to the phenomenon, which will be properly understood through the aspect of *distance*.

**2.2 Distance (from the truth)**

The *distance* from the truth is the second aspect of *eironeia*’s semantic utterance and has the capacity to change the value of *perception*, in accordance to the receivers’ *awareness* of reality and of the truth. Reconsidering Aristotle’s text referring to the “common people” (see previous quote *E.N*. IV. 3. 1124 b25-30) both aspects of *eironeia*’s semantic profile (*perception* and *distance*) are demonstrated. The *distance* of the semantic content of the ironic utterance from the truth depends occasionally on the receivers’ *perception* and *awareness* of reality. Aristotle admits that it is ethically acceptable to diverge from the truth depending on the audience.

Apart from that, this chapter of *Nicomachean Ethics* (*E.N*. IV. 3) lists all the attributes that a great-souled man (*μεγαλόψυχον*)\footnote{Another translation for ‘*μεγαλόψυχον*’ is “the proud man” (Barnes, 1984 pp. 1773–76).} must have, distinguishing him from the unduly humble or small-souled man and the vain man.\footnote{“Such then being the Great-souled man, the corresponding character on the side of deficiency is the Small-souled man, and on that of excess the Vain man” (*E.N*. IV. 3. 1125a16-17); Rackham tr., 2014 p. 225. “Τοιοῦτος μὲν οὖν ὁ μεγαλόψυχος, ὁ δ’ ἐλείτους μικρόψυχος, ὁ δ’ ἐπιθρόνηλλος χαῦνος.” (*Ηθικά Νικομάχεια*, 1125a16-17).} And since the small-souled man is defined as the deficiency in Aristotle’s ‘Golden mean’ schematic and the vain man as the excess, we must regard that the great-souled man is the exemplar mean. Consequently, Aristotle surprisingly enough attributes *eironeia* to this type of man which he suggests as a virtuous example, the mean between the two extremes. *Eironeia* gets...
gradually more acceptable and refined, since it’s use is associated to the great-souled, exemplar man.

Besides the fact that the feature of *distance* has enhanced the argumentation towards *eironia*’s refinement, it also delineates how the *eirôn* and the *alazon* differ when distance of the truth is involved:

As generally understood then, the boaster is a man who pretends to creditable qualities that he does not possess, or possesses in a lesser degree than he makes out, while conversely the self-depreciator disclaims or disparages good qualities that he does possess; *(Е.Н. IV. 7. 1127a20-23)*

I have attributed the terminology *distance* (of irony’s semantic content from the truth) to what Aristotle attempted to describe here through the expressions ‘less’, ‘more’, ‘lesser degree’, etc. By naming it, the *eirôn*’s and the *alazon*’s use becomes clearer, creating the following schematic:

![Diagram showing the relationship between truth, distance, alazon, and eiron.](Image)

(Schema 2)

It is quite apparent that, if the truth and the truthful man lie in the middle with the *alazon* and the *eirôn* being the two extremes, the former would diverge from the truth and use the *distance* from it in order to show-off and brag, when, on the other hand, the

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*eiron* would also diverge from the truth but would use the *distance* not to ‘exaggerate’ but to ‘understate’ and show ‘less’. This way the *distance* changes when the *eiron* uses it and modulates his position on the scale that places him ‘over’ or ‘under’ the truth. To be more precise, the agent ‘plays’ with the *distance* from reality rightly when being an *eiron*. The use of the *distance* the *eiron* performs is constantly preferred in contrast to the *alazon’s*, because the former reduces the *distance* to undermine himself for educational purposes — as the following section shall prove —, whereas the latter swells it for the purpose of exaggeration.

### 2.3 Motivation (of the *Eiron*)

To this point, there has been an evaluation of the semantic features of the ironic attitude and the ways the speech act verbally occurs. The performative profile of the ironic utterance is finally identified within the third aspect of the phenomenon *eironeia*: the *motivation* of the *eiron* (the ironic agent). The *motivation* determines the character of the speech act that is performed when using *eironeia*. But before delving into the atypical distinction occurring within the speech act *eironeia*, distinguishing its performative from its semantic features, a brief examination of the motive attributed to the *eiron* by Aristotle is indicated.

First of all, the *motive* of the *eiron* Socrates represents differentiates him, not only from Aristotle’s *alazon* but also from all other types of ironic men. The *eironeia* Socrates uses as an utterance has an uncommon *motive* which is distinct amongst other types of ironies; self-deprecation to reinforce the desire for cognitive engagement towards further inquiry for the truth. Therefore, although so far the traits attributed to *eironeia* as a speech act could apply to the concept of irony in general, the performative profile (i.e. the *motivation*) of *eironeia* is the reason why irony and ‘Socratic irony’ are and should be treated and studied distinctively. As proved in Chapter 1, Socratic *eironeia* is only a branch of the concept of irony and the *motivation* of the *eiron* is the justification.

Additionally, Aristotle provided valuable reasoning as to why the *motive* of the *eiron* continually triumphs over the *motive* of the *alazon*. The latter appears to adopt all the features attributed to the ‘show-off’, and the ‘show-off’ can never have a refined *motive*
indifferent to gain. If anything, Aristotle’s alazon experiences a gradation within his motives that decreases from bad to worse:

The man who pretends to more merit than he possesses for no ulterior object seems, it is true, to be a person of inferior character, since otherwise he would not take pleasure in falsehood; but he appears to be more foolish than vicious. When, on the other hand, a man exaggerates his own merits to gain some object, if that object is glory or honor he is not very much to be blamed [as is the boaster], but if he boasts to get money or things that fetch money, this is more unseemly. (Boastfulness is not a matter of potential capacity but of deliberate purpose; a man is a boaster if he has a fixed disposition to boast - a boastful character). (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b10-16) ⁴⁸

The alazon is a person of inferior character in every case and his derogation is fierce. His motive is being criticised for the blind focus on gain, which h renders him as a foolish man. The motive remains blameworthy for it is the motive of a show-off and the show-off is always motivated by gain.

Conversely, the eiron as self-depreciator (using the distance from the truth to show ‘less’) is depicted as a more attractive character “for they are thought to speak not for gain but to avoid parade” (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b24). ⁴⁹ The eiron’s motive is not to show off and brag for qualities that he doesn’t possess but to avoid parade. Both the eiron and the alazon are distant from the truth, but the eiron’s motive lies with his dislike of ostentation, since he is a self-depreciator, showing always ‘less’ of his qualities and ‘less’ of what he actually is (in Socrates’ case, for epistemic and educational purposes).

Reconsidering Socrates’s attitude towards his interlocutors in Plato’s discussed dialogues (Chapter 1) evidently supports the aforementioned. Socrates constantly presents himself to be ‘less’ worthy and knowledgeable than what he really is and inferior to the interlocutor’s wit. We read in Gorg. 489d9, when Socrates is referring to Callicles: “And, my wonderful man, go easier on me in your teaching, so that I won’t

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⁴⁸ Ibid. 243. The above text is an additional proof that eiron’s motivation constantly remains more attractive than the alazon’s. “ο’ δὲ μείζων ὑπαρχόντων προσπυκόμενος μιθανός ἕνεκα φανόν μὲν ἑκατον ὡς γὰρ ἐν ἔχω τῷ φεῦτε, μάταιος δὲ βασάνηται μάλλον ἢ κακός, εἰ δ’ ἑνεκά τοιού, ἢ μὲν δόξης ἢ τιμής ὡς δὲ νέα στερος ὃς ὁ ἀλαιζων, ὃς ὁ ἀφερήσας ἢ ὡς εἰς ἀργάμοις, ἀργηνοποιήτειρος, (οὐκ ἐν τῇ δυνάμει δ’ ἐστιν ὁ ἀλαιζων, ἀλλ’ ἐν τῇ προαιρέσει κατά τὴν ἐξεν γὰρ καὶ τῷ τινῳδῇ εἶναι ἀλαιζων ἐστιν.)” (Ἡθικά Νικομάχεια, 1127b10-16).

quit your school”, 50 Or in Rep. 337a1, where Socrates refers to Thrasymachus: “Hence it’s surely far more appropriate for us to be pitied by you clever people than to be given rough treatment.” 51 In Plato’s dialogue Euthyphro, in which Socratic irony is apparent at its finest, Socrates utters: “Come on, try and demonstrate to me clearly that in this circumstances all the gods undoubtedly consider that this action is right. And if you do give me an adequate demonstration, I shall never cease singing your praises for your wisdom” (Euphr. 9b1-3). 52 What other commentators criticise as purely mocking ironic moment, since Euthyphro is clearly not a bright interlocutor, I value as a genuine Socratic paradigm of his eironeia, in which his motivation is exposed. The same applies for the dialogue Euthydemus, which is wrongfully recognised as a depiction of Socrates’ demeaning irony. For example: “So I said, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, do your absolute best to gratify these people and give a demonstration – and do it for my sake too” (Euthd. 274d3). 53 Aristotle never questions the eiron’s motive and this made him more attractive from the very beginning. I claim that Aristotle must have been influenced by Socrates’ renunciation of knowledge in order to redound to the conclusion that the eirones “mostly disown qualities held in high esteem” (“μάλιστα δὲ καὶ οὕτω τὰ ἐνδοξα ἀπαρνοῦνται”, E.N. IV. 7. 1127b25). The Socratic method, which tended to deny any explicit answer throughout the Platonic dialogues’ central questions, is reflected in the above approach of eironeia. This approach is entirely different from conventional definitions and justifies an interpretation of a motivation with epistemic and educational grounds. And this is a good enough reason to perceive eironeia as a less tainted hexis (disposition) than alazoneia. The performative profile of Socrates’ eironeia is atypical, since there is no absolute compatibility between the illocution and the perlocution of the speech act. The eiron’s

30 For the analysis of eironeia in Gorgias see Chapter 1, 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’.
31 For the analysis of eironeia in The Republic see Chapter 1, 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’.
32 Rackham tr., 2014 p. 50. “ἢ περὶ ταύτων πειρῶ τί μοι σαφὲς ἐνδείξωσθαι ὡς παντὸς μᾶλλον πάντες θεοί ἠγάπηται ὥσπερ ἦσαν ταύτην τὴν πράξιν· κἂν μοι ἰδικὸς ἐνδείχῃ, ἐγκωμιάζω σε ἐπὶ σοφίαν οὐδὲπότε παιδισμα.” (Ευθύφρων, 9b1-3).
intention, which pertains to the speech act’s illocution, is to interact with the recipient towards further inquiry while the eiron’s motivation, which pertains to the speech act’s perlocution, is to have epistemic and educational effects on the ‘recipient’ and ‘audiences’ (direct/indirect). The distinction between the terms ‘intention’ and ‘motivation’ here is similar to the differences entailed within the terms ‘illocution’ and ‘prelocution’. While the eiron’s intention serve the purposes of the interaction between the speaker and the recipient, the eiron’s motivation goes further to the affected behavior that the recipient presents. The intention of the eiron is to self-depreciate in order to interact with the recipient while the motivation of the eiron is to self-depreciate in order to interact and cause the recipient’s intellectual and educational enhancement.

Now, it has been pointed out, that in the case of eironeia the semantic and the performative profile of the speech act do not coincide. The speech act eironeia has within its features the ability to verbally use irony (in the conventional sense) without the expected act of being reprehensively ironic (in the conventional sense). In Socrates’ case, this distinction within eironeia’s features (semantic and performative) is dictated and incarnated when Socrates uses semantically the speech act of eironeia as understatement or self-depreciation and performs the act of cognitive motivation to his interlocutors (‘illocution’: intention to undermine my qualities – ‘perlocution’: intention to undermine my qualities to positively effect my interlocutor’s intellectual character). To further highlight this point, my analysis allows for a reading of Socrates’ method which permits us to perceive the performance of the ironic speech act as an act of motivation to seek for answers and not an act of ironic deception or ironic mockery or ironic bragging, serving the motivations of a conventional ironic man (i.e. comedy, laughter, humiliation, deception, arrogance, and the like). This reading of Socrates dictates the type of eiron that willingly demotes himself against the interlocutor, aiming to further stimulate their desire to pursue knowledge and to enhance their intellectual engagement. Thus, eironeia is a peculiar speech act, which, along with a cluster of similar acts, can support the theory of semantic and performative incompatibility within speech acts.
2.3.1 The Perlocution Expanded

One could anticipate the following objection. The Platonic dialogues hardly ever give answers and most of Socrates’ interlocutors end up being even more perplexed as opposed to feel motivated with excitement for the pursuit of knowledge. There is a plethora of examples in the Platonic dialogues, in which Socrates’ interlocutors are annoyed or remain blindly naive and they are most likely to quit inquiry rather than further engage in it (i.e. Euthyphro is nowhere benefited throughout his interaction with the philosopher and his contribution to the inquiry for the pious and impious is juvenile). But maybe we should consider that Euthyphro was a lost case. The success of the Socratic method does not demand or presuppose universality. This means that not every interlocutor will be equally or even successfully affected as anticipated. In Section §2, I argued that the *perception* and *awareness* of the phenomenon is rather complex and involves several relations between the subjects (*εἴρων, εἰρωνευθείς, audience*). Thus, even if Euthyphro was not motivated to further pursue knowledge, someone from the audience could have been affected and prompted with motivation; and if not someone from the ‘direct audience’ then I argue that the ‘indirect audience’ did (i.e. some of the characters that were merely observing but not participating in the dialogue, or all the readers of the Platonic dialogues that followed). Let’s examine the Platonic dialogue *Gorgias* closely to properly justify the reply to this criticism.

In the dialogue *Gorgias* one could claim that, same as with Euthyphro, Callicles is not benefitted by his interaction with Socrates.\(^{54}\) There is no sign in the dialogue that the sophist is in good terms with the philosopher nor does he change his mind about or even contemplate on injustice and how it can be promoted by the rhetoric *technē*. On the contrary, it appears that Callicles gets infuriated by Socrates’ attitude and method. We read in *Gorgias* 505b9 – 505d5:

> Soc. So to be disciplined is better for the soul than lack of discipline, which is what you yourself were thinking just now.
> Cal. I don’t know what in the world you mean, Socrates. Ask somebody else.
> Soc. This fellow won’t put up with being benefited and with his undergoing the very thing the discussion’s about, with being disciplined.

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\(^{54}\) I have discussed the dialogue’s theme in Chapter 1, 2.2 ‘Ironic in Plato’.
Cal. And I couldn’t care less about anything you say, either. I gave you these answers just for Gorgias’s sake.
Soc. Very well. What’ll we do now? Are we breaking off in the midst of the discussion?
Cal. That’s for you to decide.
Soc. […] Please answer the remaining questions, too, so that our discussion may get its head.
Cal. How unrelenting you are Socrates! If you’ll listen to me, you’ll drop this discussion or carry it through with someone else. […] Couldn’t you go through the discussion by yourself, either by speaking in your own person or by answering your own questions? (Gorg. 505b9-d5)  

The above reference is indicative of the frustration Socrates sometimes generates when committing to a conversation with his interlocutors. Callicles gets exasperated and the dialogue turns into a heated discussion from Callicles’ side. He is ready to give up the conversation, suggesting that Socrates should carry on by himself! What follows is a Socratic monologue, in which Socrates reiterates his position:

Soc. For the things I say I certainly don’t say with any knowledge at all; no, I’m searching together with you so that if my opponent clearly has a point, I will be the first to concede it. I’m saying this, however, in case you think the discussion ought to be carried through to the end. If you don’t want it to be, then let’s drop it now and leave.
Gorg. No, Socrates, I don’t think we should leave yet. You must finish the discussion. It seems to me that the others think so, too. I myself certainly want to hear you go through the rest of it by yourself. […]
[...] Cal. Speak on, my good friend, and finish it up by yourself. (Gorg. 506a2-c2)  

The way the dialogue progresses is unexpected. Callicles was so irritated and annoyed by Socrates’ attitude that abandoning the conversation, as he claimed he would do, seemed inevitable. However, in the very next paragraph we realise that he sticks on to the discussion, of course, with Gorgias’ encouragement. Socrates’ audience is smitten by him. Even if Callicles had given up on the conversation, the fact that Gorgias was not even considering it but, on the contrary, urges Socrates to finish the discussion,

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55 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 850. I shall not include this lengthy quote in its Classical Greek form for space constrain.
56 Ibid. 850
57 The emotions Socrates provokes (anger, adornment, etc.) will be discussed in Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Method in Contemporary Education’.
supports my argumentation on multiple, different levels of audience in the Socratic dialogues. Callicles eventually does not quit but, even if he had, the audience that was present in the conversation is a whole other story. The fact that Callicles was not benefitted by the discussion, if in fact he wasn’t, does not mean that Socrates’ method fails to promote awareness on justice and injustice and on the superiority of a life dedicated to philosophy as opposed to a selfish life supported by the tricks of the sophists – that being the dialogues main theme. The audience that was not benefitted was merely some interlocutors from the direct audience (i.e. Callicles and Polus). For we cannot overlook the fact that Socrates’ philosophy is still strongly influential and alive after 2400 years, stimulating us still to further philosophical inquiry and to pursuit for the truth, as we represent his philosophy’s ‘indirect audience’.

Besides, *eiron* is a speech act and, as a speech act, its locution, illocation and perlocution are predetermined as far as the speaker (eiron) is concerned. However, the perlocutionary effect is not. It has been established that the *perception* and *awareness* of the audience is essential for the successful function of the speech act. The perlocutionary act might be entailed within the *eiron’s motivation* (understate to motivate) but the perlocutionary effect that will be translated into the audience’s reaction to the speech act is not exclusively under the *eiron*’s control. The audience is partly responsible for grasping the illocation (the *eiron’s intention*). But even if it appears that the intention has been missed or misinterpreted, Socrates’ method is never futile, due to the multilevel audience of Plato’s dialogues.

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58 See Gasparatou, 2016. Gasparatou claims that frequently, grasping the illocation depends on emotions: “The illocation is indeed the key for fully understanding an utterance; and the emotions behind it are key to fully understanding the illocation” (*Ibid.*, 322). This is fairly accurate if we consider, for instance, Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (see Chapter 1, 2.2. ‘Irony in Plato*’). Alcibiades struggles greatly to grasp and accept Socrates’ illocation, since he joins the conversation being already infuriated by the philosopher. Gasparatou closely examines emotions as a crucial quality of speech acts, which was entirely omitted by Austin. I will agree with Gasparatou on the importance of emotions in education, justified through her understanding of the speech act theory (Chapter 4).
Motivation, as the performative aspect of the ironic utterance, justifies the attempt to signify eironia as a speech act with a behavioral act completely different from humorous or reprehensible irony. It also justifies the attempt to attribute to Socrates not the characterization of the teacher in the commonly held sense but that of the ‘guide’ or the ‘coach’ or the ‘builder’ who shows the way to develop an ‘intellectual character agent’. Socrates himself in most Platonic dialogues disclaims that he is a teacher or that he can teach anything at all and, primarily, virtue. However, in the Apology I cannot help but notice his own description of his method:

For I go around doing nothing but persuading both young and old among you not to care for your body or your wealth in preference to or as a strongly as for the best possible state for your soul [...] Now if by saying this I corrupt the young, this advice must be harmful, but if anyone says that I give different advice he is talking nonsense. (Ap. 30a6-b6)

It has been argued that whereas many scholars accept the interpretation of a refined attitude when it comes to Socrates’ eironia, the moral rehabilitation of the motivation of ‘Socratic irony’ is not widely accepted. G. Vlastos has been already thoroughly discussed for his inspirational contribution to the moral aspect of eironia and even though our interpretations eventually differ his claim “when Socrates is searching for the right way to live, [...] as obedience to divine command, his argument cannot involve willful untruth” stands out. However, numerous scholars argue for the opposite. Alexander Nehamas’ approach that eironia regardless who uses it (in this case Socrates) is always and inseparably related to boastfulness has been presented and can

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59 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 28. “οὐδὲν γὰρ ἀλλο πράττων ἔγω περιέργωσα ἡ πειθὼν ἐμῶν καὶ νεωτέρος καὶ προφθαρέως μὴ σωμάτων ἐπιμελείσθαι μὴ χρημάτων πρότερον μηδὲ οὐτῳ σφόδρα ὡς τῆς φερίς ὧπος ὡς άριστη ἔσται, [...] εἰ μὲν σῶν ταῦτα λέγων διαφθείρω τοὺς νέους, ταῦτα ἐὰν εἰς μιαρήν· εἰ δὲ τίς μὲ φημιν ἀλλὰ λέγειν ἡ ταῦτα, οὐδὲν λέγει.” (Apologia, 30a6-b6). For this particular quote Suzanne McIntire’s translation really inspired my interpretation: “[...] This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine, which corrupts the youth, my influence is ruinous indeed. But if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth.” (Ap. 30b4-6 – my emphasis; from McIntire, 2008 p. 23).

60 Vlastos, 1991 p. 34. Of course, I have argued that Socrates does diverge from the truth (distance from truth) but Socrates knows exactly how to use this distance and Vlastos’ interpretation entails a sense of deceptive untruth, which is nowhere evident in Socrates’ method.
be, finally, rebutted. For when a taint of arrogance is implied in the Aristotelian interpretation of the eiron’s model, the whole argument for a refined character, which uses distance rightly and has favorable, educational motives, is challenged. First of all, it is acknowledged that besides Nehamas various commentators share this opinion. For instance, P. Gooch provides his theory that the type of irony, which includes profit from others by deception, is a huge omission in Aristotle’s treatment of the term.61 Referencing these two scholars was intentional, for they both find proof of eiron’s arrogant motivation in the following text of Nicomachean Ethics:

Those who disclaim merely trifling or obvious distinctions are called affected humbugs, and are decidedly contemptible; and sometimes such mock humility seems to be really boastfulness, like the dress of the Spartans, for extreme negligence in dress, as well as excessive attention to it, has a touch of ostentation. But a moderate use of self-deprecation in matters not too commonplace and obvious has a not ungraceful air. (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b25-29)62

Aristotle argues in this text that both excess and extreme deficiency signify boastfulness. When an agent is being ironic and uses eironia to disclaim obvious qualities in a sense of mock humility then, Aristotle continues, this person is not morally refined or attractive anymore and is equalized to the opposite agent that stands in the state of excess, the braggart. Such eirones are the Spartans, who dress lightly and not with a heavy armor, indicating that they show ‘less’ of what they really are (i.e. skilled warriors). So far, this type of distance from the truth (showing ‘less’) has been justified as ennobled. In the Spartans case though, the distance is so desperately big that it ends up being used wrongly and is, therefore, similar to the boaster’s attitude. The distance is overused. To use Nehamas’ words: “[…] understatement itself can be overstated. The Spartans’ clothing, for example, was so exaggeratedly simple that it turned into its

61 “Why ignore and even deny [...] the truly reprehensive eiron who conceals the truth to advance his own purposes?”. Gooch, 1987 p. 97.

opposite and became form of bragging. [...] Irony does not only insinuate superiority: it can actually assert it.”. 63

However, this is not the type of eiron that Socrates represents and not the type of eironeia examined so far. For the text explicitly clarifies immediately after discussing Spartans’ ironic attitude: “But a moderate use of self-depreciation in matters not too commonplace and obvious has a not ungraceful air.” (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b29-31). 64 The association of this last sentence to Socrates gets even clearer if we reconsider the statement that comes right before this quote: “These also mostly disown qualities held in high esteem, as Socrates used to do.” (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b24-25). 65 The distance from the truth and, principally, the way Socrates uses this distance (moderate use of self-depreciation) distinguishes him from the arrogant irony of the Spartans. For Socrates’ motivation behind the eironeia’s use is refined, which renders the perlocution of the speech act significantly unique and categorically different from what the Spartans’ irony would achieve. The Spartans are motivated by ostentation whereas Socrates is motivated by his intention to stimulate the interlocutor find the truth and desire knowledge.

Understanding the function of the speech act and the relevant motivation its illocution/perlocution entails, not only purifies eironeia from its customarily negative overtone, but also shows how it can be potentially used as an epistemic tool which motivates students towards desiring knowledge and seeking for answers. The educational aspect of ‘Socratic irony’ although it has been recognized in literature it has been often misunderstood as a tool for moral education. 66 I am not arguing that

63 Nehamas, 1998 pp. 51–52. And, interestingly enough “Montaigne also notices the same point: to Aristotle, he wrote, ‘self-appreciation and self-depreciation often spring from the same kind of arrogance.’” (Ibid. 51–52).

64 I also really appreciated Barnes’ translation for he considers those who moderately understate attractive: “But those who use understatement with moderation and understate about matters that do not very much force themselves on our notice seem attractive.” (E.N. IV. 7. 1127b29-31; Barnes, 1984 p. 1779)

65 Rackham tr., 2014 p. 245.

66 Vlastos gives a very informed profile of Socrates’ moral teaching: “‘teaching’ – engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their own ignorance and enable them to discover for themselves the truth the teacher had held back – in that sense of “teaching” Socrates would want to say that he is a teacher, the only true teacher; his dialogue with his fellows is meant to have, and does
Socrates was not a moral philosopher. My point is that his tool *eironeia*, as part of his elenctic method, is firmly epistemic and is not translated into a tool for moral education but rather a tool to ‘train’ the intellect. His method is a method to create desire and motivation for knowledge, rendering it as a cognitive method. Whether his philosophy and the subject matter discussed (*aretē*) ends up giving answers regarding moral issues is a different argument. But his intellectualism is alive and strong in his methodology. Therefore, by contrast to the popular held belief, I will arguably prove that *eironeia* is an educational tool for developing the intellectual character of agents, that is, their cognitive virtues.

Although Nehamas’ accusation that irony has an integral trait of boastfulness has been averted, his study presents objections against Socrates as a teacher and he argues that *eironeia* does not qualify as an educational tactic: “Should we allow Socratic irony to transform itself so easily into an educational ploy?”67 And, most importantly, he declares that ‘Socratic irony’ has no depth because Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is eventually honest: “I am inclined to take Socrates’ profession of ignorance with regard to the ‘What is X?’ question quite seriously, at least when the subject in question is *aretē*”.68 Refuting these accusations has been the most challenging endeavor. In order to adequately support *eironeia’s* justification as an epistemic tool of Socrates’ elenctic method that can be conveyed in contemporary education, we must first and foremost determine that Socrates was not genuinely ignorant and that he did have knowledge of the questions examined in the inquiry. Therefore, the next two chapters argue on Socrates’ knowledge and Socrates’ teaching successively.

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67 Nehamas, 1998 p. 64.
68 Nehamas, 1999 p. 54 n. 37.
CONCLUDING REMARKS

Socrates’ motives are educational but not in the conventional way. He is not a teacher but rather an ‘intellectual character builder’, who uses eironeia as an epistemic tool and this theory will be further defended and explained. Socrates couldn’t have merely been an arrogant braggart who claimed honor and dominance over the occasional ignorance or incompetence of his interlocutors. For, if this were the case, then Plato’s protagonist in his dialogues would have been nothing but an Aristophanic caricature in humoristic comedies and not an emblematic philosophical figure.

Aristotle detected a pattern of feigned demotion within Socrates’ eironeia. In this chapter I decoded this pattern and justified the reasons why this type of eironeia is so differently distant from the Aristophanic use of mockery. This venture introduces an interpretation in which eironeia can be employed as an epistemic tool for developing the intellectual character of agents, namely their cognitive virtue.

As Aristotle argues on moral ethics, virtue cannot be taught propositionally but only through training and habituation. I claim that this thesis shows the way to ‘teach’ intellectual virtue in a similar methodology. The Socratic ‘habitual irony’ (eirōnēia) can be translated into a habitual motivation for learning. In the following chapters I support that this is precisely how eironeia can be fruitfully employed.
Chapter 3

Saving Socrates’ Appearances

And yet not once did he profess to be a teacher of virtue; still, being so obviously virtuous himself, he made those you spent time with him hope that by acting like him they too would become virtuous.

— Xenophon Memorabilia I. ii. 3

0. Introduction

In the thesis’ Introduction (‘Methodology and Limitations’) I argued that Xenophon’s Socrates is not the one in which we can find an accurate or helpful portrayal of ‘Socratic irony’. Xenophon’s Socrates is no eiron. In Memorabilia, Xenophon is more

1 The title is inspired by Nussbaum’s paper ‘Saving Aristotle’s Appearances’ (1982).
2 Translation from Nehamas, 1999 p. 27.
3 Vlastos argues that there are instances of ironic Socrates in Xenophon worth mentioning. In Memorabilia, while paying a visit to Theodote, Socrates gives her advice on how to get more customers and she invites him to be her partner in this scouting process for friends (φίλοι). “He demurs, pleading much business, both private and public, and adding: To Xenophon, Mem., 3. II. 16: ‘I have my own girlfriends (philai) who won’t leave me day or night, learning from the philters and enchantments.’. Since
interested in giving a strong defense of his teacher against the unfair accusations that he did not respect the gods of Athens, introducing new gods (καινά δαιμόνια), and that he was a bad influence who corrupted the youth. Therefore, Xenophon’s work presents a confident and earnest Socrates, who gives plenty of practical advice and does not really focus on depicting Socrates’ philosophy. However, the introductory quote from Memorabilia presented above gives an unexpectedly insightful summarisation of Socrates’ influence. My interpretation of his technique will justify Xenophon’s intuitiveness, when claiming that Socrates made others improve without being a teacher of virtue.

Although the attempts to justify Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge as a pretence are strong and alive in contemporary bibliography, approaches that argue for his ignorance to be honest and truthful are also vivid. I couldn’t help but wonder, what if Socrates actually knew nothing? What would that mean for his whole philosophy, for his method and, inevitably, for my philosophical interpretation of that method? For Socrates’ honest ignorance condemns him to Scepticism and automatically cancels his eironeia and its purpose.

In Section §1 I outline the criticism on Socrates’ renunciation of knowledge and his teaching. I first examine the arguments presenting Socratic disavowal of knowledge as a literal and honest assertion. My research moves on to present the extension of this charge: if Socrates doesn’t have knowledge as he demonstrates, then not only is he doubted as a moral educator, but as a teacher in general. I acknowledge the relevant literature, according to which, Socrates was never a teacher and his method should not be so easily transformed into an educational ploy, arguably because the philosopher claims numerous times in the Platonic dialogues that he is not.

In Section §2 I provide my counter-argumentation, the reasoning that supports it and I justify my interpretation on why Socrates chooses to camouflage his knowledge and

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she is meant to see, and does see, that these “girlfriends” are philosophers, depressingly male and middle-aged, there is no question of her being misled into thinking that her visitor has a stable of pretty girls to whom he teaches love-potions. So here at least we do get something of Cicero and Quintilian would recognize as irony, though hardly a gem on the genre: its humor is too arch and strained.” (Vlastos, 1991 p. 30). Although I consider this find interesting, it does not add much to the concept of irony my endeavor reveals. See also Nehamas, 1998 pp. 207–8 n. 47.
Chapter 3: Saving Socrates’ Appearances

put on the mask of ironic ignorance. I comment on the affiliation I detect between Socrates’ renunciation of knowledge of moral truths and the Aristotelian particularist approach of morality. My thesis defends that traces of the Aristotelian Particularism theory are implanted in Socrates’ methodology. Examining the revival of Virtue Ethics justifies Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge, secures his method’s validity and keeps the function of his eironeia intact. This argumentation concludes that Socrates’ attitude to not give explicit answers does not result from the fact that he lacks certain relevant knowledge but rather from the fact that aretē, and moral truths in total, have no exceptionless moral background that can be transferred as a solid, catholic and unchangeable piece of knowledge.

I establish that Socrates’ attitude resembles Aristotle’s particularist view of morality. However, supporting a moral theory that does not provide exceptionless moral rules but, on the contrary, focuses on each particular individual, raises concerns regarding the objectivity and the universality of Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics in general. Could this be an indication of Aristotle’s inability to give a realist account of morality that would be objectively true amongst particular individuals? And, as an extent, could a particularist interpretation of morality doom Socrates’ whole project of Intellectualism (knowledge is sufficient for virtue) to subjectivity and cancel, eventually, the ‘educational’ purposes of his methodology? In Section §3 I prove, using Aristotle’s Function argument and his theory on endoxa (common opinions of societies), that this is far from true.

SECTION 1. IS SOCRATES’ DISAVOWAL OF KNOWLEDGE PROBLEMATIC?

Throughout this work, my research and argumentation appeared to cross-examine numerous times Socrates’ irony and his insistent renunciation of knowledge. At first, I was flirting with the idea to solely acknowledge the contradicting opinions between the
two main hypotheses regarding Socrates’ disavowals of knowledge: Socrates’ ignorance as a fabricated pretense for various different reasons (e.g. educational purposes) and Socrates’ ignorance as a genuine disclaimer based on his honest lack of certain knowledge of the truth. I was fairly tempted to simply endorse the relevant bibliography as a small and trivial part of my research by giving a mere reconstruction of the relevant theories in a form of a literature review.

However, while my research on ‘Socratic irony’ advanced, the deep understanding of the aforementioned debate and its constructive evaluation seemed more and more crucial. It appeared that Socrates’ *eironeia* was intertwined with and inextricably related to his renunciation of knowledge.\(^4\) Since the definitional approach of ‘Socratic irony’ is widely accepted as a form of pretence and is constantly affiliated to Socrates’ ignorance and dissimulation of knowledge, examining what Socrates actually knew was, for the purposes of this endeavor, inevitable.

The fact that Socrates admitted his ignorance and disavowed knowledge so vocally has often categorized him to the realm of the Sceptics, who questioned any sort of putative knowledge, belief or dogma.\(^5\) Terminologically, Scepticism originates from the Greek word *skepsi* (σκέψις) meaning inquiry, examination, the process of thinking or deep consideration. As a philosophical movement, sceptics doubted our ability to gain certain knowledge of the world, although they considered themselves ‘investigators’ and not ‘nihilists’. Socratic Scepticism in particular evolves around his assertion that he has no knowledge of anything and the fact that he embraces his ignorance profoundly.\(^6\) When Socrates himself, in the Platonic dialogues admits his ignorance

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\(^4\) It is even defined so in dictionary entries. See, for example Chapter 1, p. 23: “a pretense of ignorance and of willingness to learn from another assumed in order to make the other’s false conceptions conspicuous by adroit questioning – called also *Socratic irony.*” (Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, 2011).

\(^5\) Although it is not the most prominent description of his philosophy, significant scholars did understand him as such, such as G. Grote (for more see Grote, 1865).

\(^6\) A rather interesting observation at his point is regarding Socrates’ worldwide famous quote from the *Apology*, “I know one thing, that I know nothing”, translating the Greek quote “*ἕν οἶδα, ἴτι οὐδὲν οἶδα*”. The truth is that this quote is not to be found solid in the Platonic dialogues. I had never reached this realisation until I read in David Neil Sedley’s, *Lucretius and the Transformation of Greek Wisdom*: “I know one thing that I know nothing’ is not attributed to Socrates by Plato, Xenophon or Aristotle. This non-reflexive skeptical dictum is first known to have been fathered on Socrates by Arcesilaus.” (2003 p. 86). To avoid any misunderstanding, Socrates means exactly that, that his purest knowledge is the fact that
Chapter 3: Saving Socrates’ Appearances

and takes a sceptic stance, it is already hard to prove that he does have knowledge as well as to justify the reasons why, even though he has it, he chooses to conceal it. This task becomes even more challenging when there are scholars accepting Socrates’ Scepticism, proving its accuracy and presenting strong evidence that his disavowal of knowledge is all the truth he has. The logic supporting such argumentation is so simple that, at first, it seems indefeasible: Socrates reaches no conclusion and provides no answer to the moral queries discussed in the dialogues. He also claims consistently that he does not possess the relevant knowledge of it. Therefore, he must have none.

In the following Sections I shall argue that Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge does not originate from a genuine sceptic stance for Socrates’ ignorance does not presuppose that Socrates was a sceptic philosopher, who tried to avoid definite answers for the sake of inquiry per se. His constant disclaimers of knowledge are rather an orchestrated methodology to develop our desire for knowledge. This endeavor is ambitious and complex, and it shall be gradually unfolded both in this Chapter and the last Chapter of my thesis ‘Socratic Challenge and Contemporary Education’. The current Chapter starts by presenting an overview of the criticism regarding Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and Socrates renunciation of his ability to teach – particularly aretē.

1.1 WHAT DID SOCRATES KNOW?

The strangeness (ἀτοπία) of Socrates, which is intertwined with his declaration of ignorance, has bothered many of his commentators for as long as they engaged to Socrates and the study of his philosophy. And plenty have argued that his strangeness

he knows he is ignorant. His sceptic stance still exists. However, the aforementioned quote, even though it is widely known, does not appear in the Apology, or anywhere in the Platonic corpus, as is. The closest we have to this admission comes from Apology (21d), where Socrates appears to say: “I am wiser than this man; it is likely that neither of us knows anything worthwhile, but he thinks he knows something, when he does not, whereas when I do not know, neither do I think I know; so I am likely to be wiser than he to this small extent that I do not think I know what I do not know.” (Ap. 21d3-7). So, evidently, he does admit that his awareness of his ignorance is what makes him wiser than the so-called ‘wise Athenians’.

Vlastos claims that the Greek word aretē is actually stronger than the English translation strangeness, for it encapsulates the ‘weirdness’, ‘outrageousness’ or even ‘absurdity’ in several occasions (Vlastos, 1991 p. 1).
should remain intact.\footnote{Irwin says: “When Socrates disclaims knowledge he should be taken at his word” (Irwin, 1979 p. 39).} It is, therefore, crucial to understand Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and put under close investigation his honesty or dishonesty when it comes to his ignorance. Besides, in case it is argued that Socrates’ ignorance is honest, his \textit{eironeia} is instantly philosophically superficial. So far, I have defended that the most essential feature of \textit{eironeia}'s function is Socrates’ self-depreciation and demotion of his merits as someone who does not know, does not understand, or is not wise enough. And the most straightforward renunciation of knowledge appears in Plato’s dialogues (e.g. “I am very conscious that I am not wise at all” – \textit{Ap.} 21b2). If the criticism that his ignorance is pure stands, then his ironic utterances are not \textit{eironeia}; they are plain declaration of the truth and honest acknowledgements of his incompetence to provide answers.

Nehamas puts forward a rather strong criticism taking the Socratic ignorant stance very seriously and literally. He claims: “But if knowledge of the nature of virtue is at least necessary as well as sufficient for the good life, and yet Socrates never acquired that knowledge, was his life a failure? And if Socrates was wrong, and knowledge of virtue must be supplemented by \textit{good upbringing} and by the \textit{independent training of the character} in order to secure virtue and happiness, was his teaching a mistake? In either case his moral intellectualism appears to condemn him: either a failed person, or a failed teacher, or perhaps both. Is this the Socrates we have to live with?”\footnote{Nehamas, 1999 p. 37.} (– my emphasis). In the face of these strong accusations my approach pivots towards defending not only Socrates’ \textit{eironeia} but also Socrates’ knowledge of moral truths, Socrates’ method and Socrates’ teaching as a lifestyle. I have highlighted within Nehamas’ accusation the notions ‘good upbringing’ and ‘independent training of the character’. By the end of this thesis it will be arguably defended that, although it does not appear so when first approaching Socrates’ thought, the philosopher actually
Nehamas’ argumentation becomes particularly intense when Socrates’ ignorance involves knowledge of virtue: “I am inclined to take Socrates’ profession of ignorance with regard to the “What is x?” question quite seriously, at least when the subject in question is areté”. Although he admits that when the relevant knowledge in question does not concern areté, Socrates occasionally appears to have knowledge. And precisely because he doesn’t have knowledge of areté and of moral truths he cannot be a moral teacher.

My interpretation, on the other hand, of Socrates’ profession of ignorance is very much aligned to Gulley’s understanding of Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge in his work The Philosophy of Socrates. Gulley supports that Socrates does not mean it when he says he has no knowledge and his avowal of ignorance is actually a unique, peculiar technique, “an expedient to encourage his interlocutor to seek the truth, to make him think that he is joining with Socrates in a voyage of discovery”. And although our justifications differ, the approach Gulley suggests agrees with the perspective this thesis supports for Socrates’ method.

In Section 2 & 3, I shall demonstrate whether Socrates means it when he says he has no relevant knowledge when dialecting with his audience, rejecting the accusations on his ignorance being all the truth he ever had. For now, I shall present a rather succinct justification of Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge as indicated in CDP:

Since Socrates can defend his beliefs and has subjected them to intellectual scrutiny, why does he present himself as someone who has no knowledge –

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10 In this Chapter I argue for the implied relation between the Socratic ‘teaching’ and Aristotle’s theory on endoxa (the resected opinions of a community that is passed on from a generation to another) and in Chapter 4 I introduce Socrates as an Intellectual Character Builder – the very first one.

11 Ibid. 55. “Socrates sometimes suggests that he does in fact have answers for his “What is x?” question when areté is not the subject: La. 192a1-b4, Eo. 765-d5, M. 72a6-c5, 75b8-76a7”. The citations are as indicated by Nehamas.

12 Ibid. 69.


14 Ibid. 69.
excepting the knowledge of his own ignorance? The answer lies in his assumption that it is only a fully accomplished expert in any field who can claim knowledge or wisdom of that field; someone has knowledge of navigational matters, e.g., only if he has mastered the art of sailing, can answer all inquiries about this subject, and can train others to do the same. Judged by this high epistemic standard, *Socrates can hardly claim to be a moral expert, for he lacks answers to the questions he raises, and cannot teach others to be virtuous.* Though he has examined his moral beliefs and can offer reasons for them—an accomplishment that gives him an overbearing sense of superiority to his contemporaries—he takes himself to be quite distant from the ideal of moral perfection, which would involve a thorough understanding of all moral matters. (—my emphasis)

I shall defend that the Aristotelian approach of Virtue Ethics and the particularistic nature of morality render Socrates’ knowledge on the subject-matter he taught, inadequate for his students’ moral self-improvement. As indicated above, Socrates “lacks answers to the questions he raises, and cannot teach others to be virtuous”, because being virtuous is not something that can be propositionally taught. Amongst all the maxims Socrates declared “Know Thyself” (γνῶθι σεαυτόν) perfectly fits this interpretation of his philosophy. The truth behind this claim is momentous, since he believed that one has to find their own truth of moral knowledge first to attain knowledge of the good in general. Knowledge of the truth lies within each of us. My thesis argues that moral refinement is an individual, independent deliberation, under the guidance of the proper ‘educator’.

**1.2 What Did Socrates Teach?**

I shall start this argumentation by admitting that even though I do not support the characterization ‘teacher’ for Socrates either, I also do not accept the charges that he was a complete failure in this domain. I will argue and prove by the end of this Chapter that Socrates was not a teacher in the common sense. He repeatedly disclaims this title

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15 Audi, 1999 p. 860.

16 See Section 2 ‘The Defence Argument’; and Section 3 ‘Particularism vs Relativism; The non-Subjective Nature of Virtue Ethics’.

17 *Alc.* 124a, 129a, 130c, 132c–132d; *Charm.* 164d; *Hipp.* 228c; *Lach.* 11.923a; *Phdr.* 230a; *Phil.* 48c; *Prot.* 343b.
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for himself throughout the dialogues: “I have never been anyone’s teacher” (Ap. 33a6). He was, however, most certainly a unique type of ‘educator’. I will be using hereafter the term ‘educator’ until I reach the point where I introduce and support the exact type of educator, I consider him to be.

The arguments used against Socrates’ characterisation as a teacher can vary. In an attempt to keep this overview succinct, I will focus on the most common ones. First of all, as already pointed out, Socrates himself avows his ignorance and disavows the quality of the teacher. Socrates’ articulate renunciation of the title of the teacher is by several scholars considered an adequate disclaimer. Secondly, as Socrates is admittedly described to be a moral educator, he failed to achieve moral improvement for his interlocutors: “Socrates failed as a teacher since he is not shown to have made anyone else good”. Socrates seems to refuse responsibility towards students, something that a real educator would never do. There are several examples of Socrates’ interlocutors in the Platonic dialogues, who gain nothing from their interaction with Socrates. Nehamas comments on Euthyphro’s case: “we finish the dialogue convinced that whether Euthyphro knows it or not, he has lost a day.”. And the last accusation I shall bring into discussion is the philosopher’s repeated disavowal of knowledge, which is correlated to his qualification as a pedagogue. If Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is honest and pure then, in all seriousness, he has nothing to teach. And the complete absence of transmitting deductive, propositional knowledge or giving any sort of definite, certain answer in any dialogue strengthens this charge.

In an attempt to highlight the important issues of the above criticisms for the case of Socratic irony, I shall argue that the major questions which arise are the following two: first, does Socrates in fact have knowledge of those matters in relation to which he disavows knowledge; and, second, if he does, and so his disavowal is in some respect false, does he expect his audience to believe that he indeed lacks the relevant

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18 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 30.
19 As I explain in Chapter 4, he is an Intellectual Character Builder.
20 Nehamas, 1999 p. 48. Nehamas’ criticism that Socrates was ‘a complete failure as a teacher’ can be found in Nehamas, 1992.
knowledge? First of all, the objectives of this thesis fall necessarily under the argumentation that Socrates does arguably have knowledge of the issues he discusses with his interlocutors. The disavowal of certain truths is a common technique he employs to intensify the agent’s desire to get to the truth on their own.\(^{22}\) He possesses the relevant knowledge of the questions the raises and, at the same time, he knows that spoon-feeding his answers and his truths to the interlocutors will not benefit them in any way.\(^ {23}\) Therefore, his persistent renunciation of knowledge, although false to some respect, is, however, necessary and essential.

As for the second issue and the awareness of Socrates’ audience, although the answer might seem more complicated, this does not affect the essence of the Socratic method and I shall argue why. First of all, the importance of this clarification (‘does Socrates expect his audience to believe him, in order for irony to work?’) lies in the importance of the audience per se and audience’s understanding when it comes to irony.\(^ {24}\) In this respect, it might have seemed important -at least when superficially approaching the issue- that the audience would believe Socrates when he claimed he lacked relevant knowledge for the success of the Socratic method. However, I argue that ultimately it is not a matter of believing him. Socrates’ method remains intact regardless of the audience’s first impression, awareness or belief. Some interlocutors might indeed believe him and accept Socrates as ignorant (e.g. Euthyrpho) and some might not (e.g. Thrasydryph).\(^ {25}\) However, whether they believe him or not, the seed of doubt is well planted in them and, as I shall prove in Chapter 4, this alone is sufficient to create a personal challenge for the interlocutors and to intensify their desire to find out truths on their own. The success of his method does not rely on his interlocutors’ ‘good faith’

\(^{22}\) My full argumentation in Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’.

\(^{23}\) My full argumentation in Section 2 ‘The Defense Argument’, in which I explain the particularist nature of morality and how it prevents Socrates from turning his teaching into a propositional exchange of moral truths and knowledge.

\(^{24}\) I have thoroughly discussed the importance of the audience in Chapter 2 ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron According to Aristotle; Perception, Distance, Motivation’, and how some interlocutors even support the claim that, if irony is not detected, then the phenomenon of irony cannot even exist (see particularly, Section 2, 2.1 Perception).

\(^{25}\) In the Republic we read: “I knew and I said so to these people earlier, that you would be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned you, you’d be ironical (ἐἰρωνεύομαι) and do anything rather than give an answer.” (Rep. 337a2-7). See Chapter 1, p. 44.
in Socrates’ sayings or in Socrates’ disclaimers. It relies on the self-depreciation of the authority (and in particular the authority of the educator) and the fact that this authority is challenged. This renunciation of knowledge, whether real or fake, increases the audience’s desire to find out the truth about the good and challenges them to outdo the authority (and in particular the authority of the educator in a teacher-student relationship). Thus, I shall argue and prove that the success of the Socratic method does not presuppose neither that the Socratic irony is detected nor that it is decoded by the interlocutors/students.

The remainder of this Chapter as well as Chapter 4, will focus on defending Socrates’ knowledge and Socrates as a certain, unique type of educator, despite his constant disclaimers.

In Section 2 ‘The Defense Argument’, I examine morality under Aristotle’s particularist theory on Virtue Ethics. I shall support and evidently prove that when Socrates claims he doesn’t have the relevant knowledge he is partly being honest because of the nature of the knowledge he is asked to transfer. His knowledge, which he does possess, if shared, will not benefit his interlocutors. It is the nature of morality itself that prevents him from teaching knowledge of the good and virtue propositionally. In Chapter 4, I make the same defense but this time on the grounds that Socrates is not teaching moral truths in the conventional sense of propositional teaching because of Particularism and the very nature of aretê. Besides, Socratic Intellectualism supports the conclusion that everyone desires the good, so engaging to a ‘conventional’ moral training (i.e. the kind that Aristotle envisaged) is not feasible in the Socratic reality. However, we constantly witness that he keeps interacting with people, in the quest to find the good and he employs all his epistemic tools (eironeia included) habitually, with no exceptions. He has a method, a technique that targets our character and ‘trains’ us into inquiry. Therefore, he should be considered a unique educator.

26 My full argumentation in Chapter 4 (particularly Section 2.4 ‘The Gadfly Effect’, 2.4.1 ‘The “Ideal” Audience’ and Section 3 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’).
1.2.1. A Premature Rebuttal

My initial reaction to the first question, which I would like to briefly introduce before I focus on an analytic defense, was based on a psychological argument that came to me almost instinctively. If that were the case indeed, if Socrates didn’t know anything, if the justification for not being a teacher of aretē is that he lacked that particular kind of knowledge, how did he manage to live the most virtuous life? Was it a coincidence and pure luck? And also, why would he go around interacting with people in the pursuit of aretē and moral truths in general? Why would he devote himself and his whole lifestyle into countless conversations with numerous interlocutors, trying so hard to intrigue them into inquiry? Why would he crave to sting his interlocutors with ‘irony’ to keep them motivated in their quest for the truth? Because no one can deny that this was all he did:

I do nothing but go about persuading you, young and old, to have your first and greatest concern […] for your soul, that it should be as excellent as possible. (Ap. 30a-b)

If we accept Nehamas’ charges that Socrates honestly has no knowledge of aretē when he claims he doesn’t, then this whole quest with all his interlocutors is a waste of time and Socrates’ life is plain futile. In the same psychological manner Grube admits: “How can such a serenely self-confident personality have no knowledge?” and later on “His ‘mission,’ which he explains in the Apology, was to expose the ignorance of those who thought themselves wise and to try to convince his fellow citizens that every man is responsible for his own moral attitudes.” There must be a reason behind his ‘preaching’, behind his interaction with his fellow citizens or his whole lifestyle is entirely bizarre, worthless and vain.

27 “For here we have someone, who, precisely in disavowing ethical knowledge and the ability to supply it to others, succeeded in living as moral as anyone ever did.” (Nehamas, 1992 p. 296).
28 I emphatically used Nehamas’ translation of the Apology here, as presented in Nehamas, 1999, to further strengthen my argumentation. And as Nehamas puts it in his own words this is Socrates’ “own understanding of his mission in life” (Ibid. 84).
In addition, as acknowledged, one of the most profound arguments which support the thesis that Socrates was not a teacher is the fact that he disclaims this quality for himself continuously and there is no obvious reason why we should doubt his sayings. However, we should keep in mind that in Socrates’ years the systematic education held the sophists as the most famous Athenian teachers of the 5th century B.C. It is possible that Socrates might have refused the label of a ‘teacher’ in an attempt to avoid to be confused with the sophists and their teaching.30 It makes sense that Socrates would want to be distinctly separated from them, for their approaches were so desperately different; Socrates was after truth whereas the sophists were after persuasion and welcomed conversational tricks that would help them win the argument (similar to modern lawyers’ tactics). Besides, Socrates is, as stated above, a certain type of educator, but certainly not the teacher that would agree to transfer knowledge in exchange for money, as the sophists did. Furthermore, let us consider the different kinds of ‘wise men’ that Socrates visits after the oracle’s response pointing him as the wisest man. He refers to them as “those reputed wise” (Ap. 21c) including profound poets, craftsmen, orators, politicians, etc. Socrates considered them wise enough to prove the oracle wrong, at least before he met with them and realised their ignorance and their arrogant unawareness of their ignorance. So, even though Socrates concluded that they could not be considered wiser than himself, the fact that Plato provides these groups of fine people in the dialogue for Socrates to visit, indicates that they were the commonly believed ‘educators’ in historical Athens, the ‘reputed wise’ according to the Athenians. This could be a strong indication that the characterization ‘teacher’ was very closely related to the sophists and the sophists alone and not to all types of ‘educators’ that would exist in Athens at the time.31

As a last brief response to the charges, prior to the analytic justification of my premise, I shall revisit the accusation that Socrates’ teaching did not make others improve and

30 See for instance: “And if you have heard from anyone that I undertake to teach people and charge a fee for it, that is not true either. Yet I think it a fine thing to be able to teach people as Gorgias of Leontini does, and Prodicus of Ceos, and Hippias of Elis.” Apology, 19d4-e2; Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 20.

31 Avi I. Mintz argues on Socrates’ implications that the Athenians failed to recognise the various types of educators the Athenian system of the 5th century provided. See Mintz, 2014.
did not benefit his interlocutors. First of all, I have already pointed out in Chapter 2 the levels of the audiences affected in a Platonic dialogue and I have discussed that the catholic success of Socrates’ method is not a presupposition for his method to exist and work. His philosophy influenced so many, that it would be simply wrong, oblivious and naive not to acknowledge the fact that, even those who disliked or rejected him, were improved in a certain way. Socrates made them think, he made them wonder, he made them form a philosophy, an opinion, whether they embraced or abandoned Socrates’ views. If we could phrase it this way, Socrates made the audience want to read him, understand him, in order to – often – reject him. He ‘stings’ them with his radical, controversial method, with his eironeia and, this was exactly the first step of his success: the fact that he can draw his interlocutors’ attention for various reasons and drag them into the inquiry with him towards moral truths. The moral improvement is the ultimate goal, it is not achieved by everyone and not any inquiry is justified as morally beneficial. However, it is undeniable that any inquiry is preferred than a completely pathetic attitude, for “the unexamined life is not worth living” (*Ap. 38a5-6 – “ὁ δὲ ἄνεξέταστος βίος αὐτῷ ἀνθρώπῳ”
).

I shall wrap this argumentation with the following observation. When Nehamas claims that Euthyphro’s interaction with Socrates was actually a waste of time he references Diogenes Laertius. He says: “Diogenes Laertius claims that Socrates actually diverted Euthyphro from his course of action as a result of their conversation on piety;” And, indeed, this is exactly what Diogenes Laertius mentions. However, it is really interesting to see how he proceeds: “[...] but when Euthyphro indicated his father for manslaughter, Socrates, after some conversation with him upon piety diverted him from his purpose”. It appears that Euthyphro is, in fact, affected by Socrates. But even if we still assume he wasn’t, other interlocutors arguably were. This is where Diogenes Laertius’ commentary gets particularly interesting: “Lysis, again, he turned by

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32 See Chapter 2, Section 2.1 ‘Perception’.

33 For instance, it is common knowledge that Nietzsche fiercely rejected Socrates’ philosophy accusing him that he taught a ‘slave morality’ that kept our instincts for life captive. This indictment though followed Nietzsche’s thought vividly throughout his work, giving the impression that he was actually obsessed with Socrates and his philosophy. The impact is immense! For more on Nietzsche’s views see Nietzsche, Kaufmann tr., 1982.

34 Nehamas, 1992 p. 298.
exhortation, into a most virtuous character” concluding that: “He (Socrates) showed equal ability in both directions, in persuading and dissuading men; thus, after conversing with Theaetetus, about knowledge he sent him away, as Plato says, fired with a divine impulse” (—my emphasis).\(^{35}\) Characters are affected ‘by exhortation’, which is the ‘sting’, the encouragement I shall argue for; and they are ‘fired with a divine impulse’, namely their desire for knowledge, their desire to know the truth about the good.

SECTION 2. THE DEFENSE ARGUMENT

The riddles on Socrates’ admitted ignorance and his qualities as a teacher are inextricably related to my interpretation of ‘Socratic irony’ when it comes to disavowing knowledge and I will gradually show how. By the end of this section it will be evident that the way I ultimately come to explain Socrates’ eironeia leans towards an Aristotelian particularistic justification of morality that Socrates could not have possibly introduced because, as a theory, particularism was not even discovered yet. However, I argue that Socrates actually employed techniques and philosophical theories prior to their terminological and conceptual identification. I determine that Socrates set the milestone for some of the most outstanding Aristotelian – as well as Platonic – theses and that, if we take a closer look, we can identify traces of the Aristotelian philosophy within Socrates’ philosophical attitude. Particularism as well as Moral Realism are such examples.\(^{36}\)

\(^{35}\) Laertius, 1972 p. II.5.29.

\(^{36}\) The same applies for Chapter 4 and the conceptions ‘moral and intellectual character’.
2.1 TRACES OF ARISTOTELIAN MORAL PARTICULARISM WITHIN SOCRATES’ METHOD

The connection between Socrates’ method and Aristotle’s philosophy primarily on Particularism is the following. Aristotle provides an adequate particularist conception of morality which can be systematic and non-relativistic without being universal. Similarly, Socrates searches for moral truths, which, by nature, are not universal. We have witnessed Socrates numerous times in the Platonic dialogues discarding established views and disdaining catholic answers to the inquiries. In Protagoras we read:

Soc: Do the cowardly go forward to things which inspire confidence, and the courageous toward things to be feared? – P: So it is said by most people. – Soc: Right, but I am not asking that. Rather, what do you say the courageous go boldly toward: toward things to be feared, believing them to be fearsome, or toward things not to be feared? (Prot. 359c5-d1)

The above quote signifies that Socrates cares about the individual, particular interpretation of the courageous act. As it is already apparent, Socrates evidently refrains from asking for a catholic answer, allowing for a particularist reading of the courageous act and, eventually, of the nature of aretē. I will argue that the approaching method used to his interlocutors supports the above claim.

Now, the particularist nature of virtue constitutes moral truths non-transferable from one agent to another, simply because there is no deductive knowledge of morality to be transferred through moderate teaching. Hence Socrates’ attitude to not give explicit answers does not result from the fact that he lacks certain relevant knowledge, i.e. no knowledge of aretē, as Nehamas claims. It merely results from the fact that aretē, and moral truths in total, have no exceptionless moral background that can be transferred as a solid, catholic and unchangeable piece of knowledge. It can only be achieved and attained individually, as it can differ amongst individuals, amongst particular agents and considering specific situations. As a result, we can firmly claim that Socrates tactic

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37 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 788. The above emphasis (‘you’) is copied as indicated in the translation. Regardless, the classical Greek text is already emphatic and I completely agree with this approach: “Λέγεται δή, οἱ Σόφοι αὐτῶν ὑπὸ τῶν ἀνθρώπων. — Ἀλήθε, ἐφεξ ἡμῶν, λέγεις — ἀλλ’ αἱ τοῦτο ἵσταται, ἄλλοι σὲ ἐπὶ τοῦ φθινοπώρου ἐν αὐτῷ τῷ ἀνθρώπω.” (Πρωτ. 359c5-d1). I will be revisiting this quote in Section 3.2 ‘Aristotle’s endoxa (Second Criterion of Objectivity)’.
was spot on; ‘train’ the intellect to achieve aretē on our own for his knowledge of aretē could not be catholically accepted or universalized, let alone transferred and taught untouched.

I will, therefore, present an argumentation that relies crucially on Aristotle’s interpretation of morality, i.e. Virtue Ethics and Particularism. Many have argued that giving non-explicit moral guidance is not an issue for Aristotle.38 I will assert that, similarly, giving non-explicit answers is not an issue for Socrates and the accusation that he actually has no relevant knowledge of moral truths, simply does not stand.

2.1.1 The revival of Virtue Ethics

For centuries Virtue Ethics had suffered great neglect and had been manifestly marginalized, making room for Kantian Deontology and Utilitarianism to conquer the Ethics World. The core difference is that the latter advocate a formation of catholic features of morality for all actions to share and for all agents to have in common. These features work as moral rules that need to be followed for an action to fulfill the criterion of rightness.39 In general, providing universal and catholic moral codes that could be applied on particular cases, in order to achieve moral stability and ethical realism, felt only reasonable, making Deontology and Utilitarianism highly influential.

Nevertheless, even though the attempts to identify catholic and exceptionless systems of morality, which provide explicit moral guidance, have been plenty throughout the history of philosophy, their formation has been proven rather hard and often unsuccessful.40 Therefore, normativity had to be reexamined. It was in 1958, that

38 See for example Zagaebski, 1996; or Nussbaum, 1995.

39 For example, Utilitarianism supports the principle that ‘an act is morally right if it maximises utility’ and it all falls under the Consequentialist approach that supports the goodness of the outcome of an action over the rightness of the action itself.

40 Again, examining Utilitarianism, there are plenty of obvious morally right actions that do not maximise utility (i.e. refuse to kill X, even though killing X would save the life of nine other people) or actions that do maximise utility but are morally wrong (i.e. in the same way, kill an innocent person in order to save the lives of nine other people). This is actually a rather popular thought experiment, the so-called Trolley Problem (dilemma).
Elizabeth’s Anscombe’s article Modern Moral Philosophy was published, calling for a reevaluation of Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics. She claimed that the concept of moral obligation was flawed and after her attack against the traditions of Utilitarianism, many were inspired to re-approach virtue from a different angle. The revival of Virtue Ethics was marked, and scholars were now taking under consideration certain aspects involved in a moral situation (i.e. character, community, education, etc.) disparaging the universality of exceptionless moral principles. To name a few, Philippa Foot supports the revival of Virtue Ethics enthusiastically in her work Virtues and Vices (1978) as does McIntyre in After Virtue: A Study of Moral Theory (1982) and Richard Taylor in Ethics, Faith and Reason (1985).41 The latter two are currently promoting a modernization of Virtue Ethics towards the 20th century

2.2 PARTICULARISM; THE ‘NON-TRANSFERRABLE’ MORAL TRUTHS

Even though the revival of Virtue Ethics marked a new age in contemporary philosophy, it has not been unanimously embraced. Supporting moral theories that do not provide commonly shared or explicit guidelines, is proven highly disputable. To focus primarily on Particularism as a philosophical movement, it has suffered great neglect from a wide range of scholars.42 It has been surrounded with plenty of debate and, although it has received quite some attention over the past years, scholars struggled to reach consensus as to what Particularism customarily represents.43 Nevertheless, despite the great dispute, Particularism stands as the theory that best

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42 Sidgwick, for instance, concludes that Particularism is nothing more than a form of intuition (Sidgwick, 2019 pp. 99–100).
43 I will refrain from giving a thorough historical overview of the debate per se or the contradicting approaches, in an attempt to avoid a lengthy analysis of such a controversial philosophical topic. To keep my argumentation succinct and consistent I will principally focus on the scholars that interpret Aristotelian Particularism the way I understand and accept it, in order to provide a knowledgeable justification for my thesis. I introduce here a list of scholars and essays that examined the theory of Particularism in depth: Dancy 1983; 1993; 2004; McNaughton, 1988; Hooker and Little, 2000; Little, 2001; Holton, 2002; Lance and Little, 2006; McKeever and Ridge, 2006; Strahovnik, Potre, and Lance, 2008; and Leibowitz, 2009; Leibowitz, 2011.
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explains the Aristotelian comprehension of morality and normativity. I will, therefore, show that Aristotle’s Particularistic conception of moral truths is a plausible normative theory that also justifies Socrates as an ‘educator’ who possessed moral truths; truths which could not be traditionally transferred to his students because of the actual nature of the moral truths themselves.

In general, Moral Particularism argues that “the moral status of the action is not in any way determined by moral principles; rather it depends on the configuration of the morally relevant features of the action in a particular context” and also represents that there is no such thing as a “morally perfect person to be conceived as the person of principle”. Moral Particularism is the exact opposite of Moral Generalism, according to which “in order to explain moral phenomena we must find and formulate exceptionless moral principles – and not with any individual moral theory”.

The Neo-Aristotelian approach of Virtue Ethics supports the view that the absence of specific set of moral rules does not condemn the agent’s attempts to gain moral truths and achieve happiness, *aretē* and *Eudaimonia*. On the contrary, it is currently widely defended that even with the absence of catholic moral codes – or better yet because of their absence –, the moral agent can successfully be led towards the moral goods. As McDowell claims “It is sometimes complained that Aristotle does not attempt to outline a decision procedure for questions about how to behave. But we have good reason to be suspicious of the assumption that there must be something to be found along the routes he does not follow”. And it is accurate to support that the absence of explicit moral guidance is not an issue for Aristotle’s philosophy. Broadie also

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44 The theory that Aristotle’s *NE* provide a particularist interpretation of morality is also not widely accepted. T. Irwin (2000) for instance, argues that Aristotle was not a particularist. For Irwin’s argumentation and his formulation of the particularism-generalism debate see *Ibid.* And for a particularist justification of Aristotle’s *NE* check Lebowitz, 2013; McDowell, 1979; Dancy, 1983; Dancy, 1993; Dancy, 2004 who writes extensively on particularism, and Scalsas, 1996. Here I am presenting the most relevant arguments that, to the best of my knowledge, effectively support Aristotelian Particularism as a moral theory.


recognizes that Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics evidently lack a criterion of moral rightness and she claims that “no kind of natural response neutrally described is either right or wrong in itself. This always depends on the particulars.” (my emphasis). Her approach differs from other modern moral theorists in the following sense. While most scholars try to develop a systematic ground-level normative ethics, Broadie argues that Aristotle did not provide one because he simply didn’t need to. She writes: “That Aristotle provides no ground-level normative ethics, and is apparently quite untroubled by any lack of a system here, gives us food for thought. He so blatantly fails to produce the kind of position that it is a modern tradition to expect as a main deliverance of philosophical ethics – and he is not wringing his hands!” And although Broadie’s interpretation would be sufficient for the purposes of this thesis, including Leibowitz’s understanding of Aristotle’s ethics explicitly as a particularist theory is essential. Leibowitz provides a comprehensive particularist reading of Aristotle’s NE, concluding that, even without exceptionless moral principles we can still talk about a systematic ground-level normative ethics. I will proceed with a brief analysis of the most crucial aspects of Particularism in Aristotle as a systematic ground-level normative ethics, as indicated in Leibowitz (2013), mainly because his account on Aristotle’s method presents significant similarities with my interpretation of the Socratic method.

According to Leibowitz, Aristotle is very straightforward when he makes the following statements. Firstly:

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50 Broadie, 2006 p. 353.


52 Various scholars have explained Aristotle’s normative ethics without providing particularistic connotations. See, e.g., Taylor (1988) according to whom Aristotle was eventually not interested in the rightness of the action because he focused on concepts like happiness, virtue and the good character “[Aristotle] did not think of ethics as having to do moral right or wrong” Ibid. 54. Others addressed a virtue-based criterion of moral rightness, such as Zagzebski: “An act of intellectual virtue A is an act that arises from the motivational component of A, is something a person with virtue A would (probably) do in the circumstances” (Zagzebski, 1996 p. 270). See also, Hursthouse, 1999; Oakley, 1996; Swanton, 2001.
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[...] for the purpose of this examination is not to know what virtue is, but to become good, since otherwise the inquiry would be of no benefit to us. (E.N. II. 2. 1103b29-30)\(^{53}\)

What Aristotle is providing in \(NE\) is not moral truths (i.e. what virtue is) in answer-forms. Aristotle is giving an *explanatory schema* that we can use and through which we will be able to pave the way towards becoming virtuous, *eudaimones*, etc., otherwise the inquiry for *aretē* and *Eudaimonia* would not be beneficial to anyone. Aristotle is not after a single moral theory, but rather he is gifting us with a *research programme*, in order to explain the moral phenomena including the rightness and wrongness of particular actions, through which we will become good human beings (ἐνάρετος). Secondly:

For we should certainly begin from things known, but things are known in two ways, for some are known to us, some known without qualification. Presumably, then, we ought to begin from the things known to us [...]. (E.N. I. 4. 1095b1-4)\(^{54}\)

The above quote is a crucial Aristotelian inquiry towards first principles (*endoxa*). I will extensively present the *endoxa* – namely the respected opinions of society – and critically assess their importance in the Aristotelian philosophy, and consequently in the Socratic methodology, in the following Section 3.2 ‘Aristotle’s *endoxa* (Second Criterion of Objectivity)’.\(^{55}\) For now, this text from \(NE\) strengthens my claim on a particularist account of virtue. It proves that when it comes to moral theorising, it is again the consideration of particular actions that needs to be promoted. As Burnyeat observes: “the ancient commentators are agreed that Aristotle has in mind knowledge about actions in accordance with virtues; these virtues are the things familiar to us from which we must start, and what we know about them is that they are noble or just”(1980, 71-2).\(^{56}\) What is known to us concerns our understanding of (moral) actions and situations, our particular judgement of the world. This also enhances Leibowitz’s characterization of Aristotle’s particularism as a *explanatory schema* since the existence of *endoxa*

\(^{53}\) Irwin tr., 2000 p. 19.

\(^{54}\) Ibid. 3–4.

\(^{55}\) For the purposes of consistency, I will present a thorough examination in my following argumentation that justifies moral truths in Virtue Ethics as non-relativistic.

presupposes that we have a certain conception of the world, and consequently of moral matters, that are ‘bequeathed’ to us. We might, therefore, be able to recognise that a certain situation is e.g. virtuous and what we need is a research programme to figure out the reasons why the aforementioned situation is, indeed, virtuous. Additionally:

 [...] the account of particular cases is still more inexact. For these fall under no craft or profession; the agents themselves must consider on each case what the opportune action is, as doctors and navigators do. The account we offer then in our present inquiry is of this inexact sort; still, we must offer help. (E.N. II. 2. 1104a5-11)\(^57\)

Aristotle’s philosophy on the doctrine of the ‘golden mean’ is essentially included here.\(^58\) Many scholars argued that acting in accordance with the mean, although it assists us into building a moral character it does not help get explicit moral rules and action guidance or be provided with an adequate, systematic interpretation of normative theories. Broadie, for instance, observes: “[Aristotle] could be deceived into thinking the doctrine of the mean useful in ways in which in fact it is not. This may be what happens in NE II.2, where he bewails the impossibility of giving exact rules for correct particular responses (1104a5-9);”\(^59\) But Leibowitz understands Aristotle’s intentions more accurately, arguing that Aristotle did not attempt, through his conception and commentary on the mean, to give any responses: “[…] in VI.1 Aristotle explicitly tells us that he does not think that his remarks on the mean can help us to identify what we ought to do”\(^60\). And he goes on arguing that the doctrine of the mean was never supposed to give systematic responses or serve the purpose of explicit guidance. It was, however, meant to help us explain why the situations that we can

\(^{57}\) Irwin tr., 2000 p. 20.

\(^{58}\) See my analysis of the ‘Golden mean’ in Chapter 2 ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron According to Aristotle; Perception, Distance, Motivation’.


\(^{60}\) Leibowitz, 2013 p. 130. Referencing Aristotle’s quote: “We stated earlier that we must choose the median, and not excess or deficiency, and that the median is what right reason dictates ... but this statement, true though it is, lacks clarity. In all other fields of endeavor in which scientific knowledge is possible, it is indeed true to say that we must exert ourselves or relax neither too much nor too little, but to an intermediate extent and as right reason demands. But if this is the only thing a person knows, he will be none the wiser: he will, for example, not know what kind of medicines to apply to his body, if he is merely told to apply whatever medical science prescribes and in a manner in which a medical expert applies them.” (E.N. VI. 1. 1136b19-35 – Ross tr., n.d., as indicated by Leibowitz)
identify as virtuous – because of the endoxa – are indeed virtuous. “If we can tell – as we must be able to do in order to obtain starting points for our ethical enquiry – that a particular act is courageous, for instance, we now know that this action lies in the mean”.\(^{61}\) And later on, he writes: “Although the doctrine of the mean doesn’t identify for us the features that make right actions right, it does tell us what a proper explanation of the rightness of a particular action should look like. [...] And the proper explanation of the rightness of each individual action depends on the specific features of the particular act in question.”.\(^{62}\) In a nutshell, Aristotle’s explanatory schema or research programme presents unbreakable links between the following terms: endoxa – doctrine of the mean – particulars. Our moral perception is inevitably formed through the endoxa. Our whole journey to reach the first principles – and maybe reexamine and reformulate the endoxa – is through our own ability to recognise the mean between the two excesses; and the mean always differs depending on the particular circumstances.

In Aristotle’s NE. III.1 we read:

> What sort of things are to be chosen and in return for what, it is not easy to state; for there are many differences in the particular cases. (E.N. III. 1. 1110b7-9)\(^{63}\)

The above quote remarkably shows that every agent individually is the standard measure for each particular moral situation. In Book III, where Aristotle makes an extensive discussion on the virtue of courage (ἀνδρεία) examining what courage essentially is and what constitutes a courageous act, the outcome is exactly that: all different specific possibilities and various context must be taken under consideration.

He writes:

> The man, then, who faces and who fears the right things and with the right aim, in the right way and at the right time, and who feels confidence under the corresponding conditions, is brave; for the brave man feels and acts

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\(^{61}\) Leibowitz, 2013.

\(^{62}\) Ibid. 132–33.

\(^{63}\) Ross tr., n.d.
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according to the merits of the case and in whatever way reason directs. (E.N. III. 7. 1115b18-20)

While the mean courage (ἀνδρεία) lies between the excess boldness (θράσος) and the deficiency fear (φόβος), the rational agent is required to assess the specifics that indicate the right way, the right motive, the right time etc. of a particular action. Considering an everyday-life example, for a single mother, who struggles to raise her children, working hard in an underpaid job would be considered a courageous thing to do. The agent is overcoming the state of deficiency (fear) and avoids the state of excess (boldness). However, the same choice (i.e. keeping an underpaid job) for a qualified young adult that is fairly wealthy and does not have life-bonding commitments (i.e. support a family), this specific act would possibly lean towards the state of deficiency (fear), indicating lack of self-confidence.

Conclusively, there is no algorithm to be applied on morality and generate explicit and sufficient ethical codes. Normativity does not come with a manual for moral acting or a handbook with specific guidelines towards moral truths. Every explanation given for a certain action is formed and characterised by the specifics of each particular situation. As the argumentation unfolds it only makes sense that morality cannot be transferred or taught through explicit rules. Due to Particularism, moral truths are not governed by unbreakable rules or untouchable codes that Aristotle or Socrates could teach to their students following the traditional forms of teaching. Their teaching techniques definitely differ, but the reason is mutual.

Therefore, the criticism that Socrates’ profession of ignorance is honest and truthful, because he did not possess certain, deductive knowledge of aretē, seems superficial. Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge entails a peculiar characteristic. He means it when he says that he doesn’t have the relevant knowledge and the answers the interlocutor is seeking because, indeed, he doesn’t. However, he himself does have knowledge of aretē and is the only one who can help the interlocutors in their inquiry towards aretē.

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64 Ibid.
The moral truths can be achieved individually through independent inquiry and not through propositional lecturing from someone who possesses them. And besides, Socrates’ knowledge of areté and the moral truths he carries are of no use to the interlocutor for they are not catholic and, thus, they do not coincide. Therefore, so far Socrates’ knowledge is secure as is his eironeia.

SECTION 3. PARTICULARISM VS RELATIVISM; THE NON-SUBJECTIVE NATURE OF VIRTUE ETHICS

Before I resume my analysis of the Socratic method and summarise the connection of the Aristotelian interpretation of Morality with Socrates’ fair disavowal of knowledge and his eironeia, I am urged to address and answer another crucial objection that could provisionally hurt this approach. Does the understanding of moral truths which focuses on the particulars of every action, condemn this project to eternal subjectivity? Are Virtue Ethics a hymn to Relativism? Does this interpretation suggest that eventually what is good for an agent is merely what seems to be good for an agent? And, as an extent, could a particularist interpretation of morality doom Socrates’ whole project of Intellectualism (=knowing the truth about the good) to subjectivity and cancel, eventually, the ‘educational’ purposes of his methodology? Because if this is the case, then the accusation that Socrates is not a teacher is restored and his ignorance could potentially be an honest utterance of oblivion. I will prove that this is far from true.

In an attempt to anticipate potential objection, I shall briefly examine the aspect of objectivity and relativism in Virtue Ethics and, primarily, in a particularist approach of morality. I shall evidently conclude that Socrates’ method, even though it leans

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65 I will elaborate on Socrates’ role as educator (‘epistemic coach’) in Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’.
towards particularism, does not imply for a relativistic conception of normativity. Our knowledge on moral truths can be a subject to Particularism, while sustaining their objective account. My line of argumentation will assess two fundamentals in Aristotle’s philosophy; the Function Argument and his theory on the endoxa. I will argue that both theories allow for a realist interpretation of moral truths and secure the objective account of knowledge, which the Socratic method assists us to achieve. I will defend the thesis that the objectivity of the knowledge of the good (or the truth about the good), very much attached to Socrates’ account of Intellectualism, can be confirmed, if we consider Aristotle’s Function Argument and endoxa theory and prove the non-subjective account they provide for the moral truths.

My support will be two-fold. First, I will present a novel argumentation that the Function Argument argues for an internal balance within us, as human beings, that targets each one of us as distinct entities. Nevertheless, the function (ergon) of preserving this balance successfully, is still common amongst all human beings. Secondly, I will support that the objectivity of the truth about the good, again as presented by Aristotle, is an inherited presupposition, since we are all organisms which live, think and evolve in this world. Because of the truths that we inherited, namely the “respected opinions of society” or, using the Aristotelian terminology, the endoxa, our conceptual scheme about the world and the truths it holds cannot be rampant. Therefore, even though the revival of virtue ethics comes with strong disagreement regarding their realistic application, we can still talk about objective moral truths that maintain and successfully withhold their universal nature even without providing exceptionless moral rules. And, more importantly, this justification shall also determine that Socrates had every right to point us to a direction towards the knowledge of the good and the truth about the good and he did it the best way possible; using his eironeia excellently.

3.1 The Function Argument

First of all, this Subsection presents a justified interpretation of the ergon (function) of the human beings and supports the objective account of Eudaimonia (happiness). It includes a summarised outline of the Function Argument and introduces the most
crucial scholarly argumentation that sustains my interpretation of Socrates’ non-subjective perception of the nature of the knowledge of the good, hence the objectivity of the truth (about the good).

When Aristotle talked about the greatest good (ἀγαθόν), he admitted that we could easily come to a verbal agreement as to what it could be; happiness (eudaimonia). However, it is fairly obvious that particular individuals could easily provide different accounts as to what happiness (eudaimonia) represents and what being happy (eudaimon) is for each one of us. Namely, Eudaimonia is an uncontroversial, yet uninformative account that needs to be made clearer (ἐναργέστερον). So, how can one know the truth about the good, if there is very little – if any – agreement as to what the good is? How can we support that Socrates showed the way to intellectually achieving the truth about the good, if there is no certainty about the identity of the good itself? The ambiguity seems hopeless.

“Aristotle tells us that the [Function] argument will not determine precisely what the nature of Eudaimonia is but will delimit its range and, narrow it down to a domain that is common to all agents” (my emphasis). As Aristotle puts it in NE: “This, then, is a sketch of the good; for, presumably, we must draw the outline first and fill it in later.” (NE. I. 7. 1098a20-22 – my emphasis). And this is, literally, all we need. An outline, a sketch common to all that could, however, be adjustable to particular circumstances and still guarantee objective moral principles. No one could have phrased it better than Aristotle himself. Martha Nussbaum also praises Aristotle’s formation of objectivity in Virtue Ethics and chooses this particular quote to conclude her argumentation in Non-Relative Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach. She writes: “The best conclusion to this sketch of

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66 See Aristotle’s textual reference: “Let us, then, begin again. Since every sort of knowledge and decision pursues some good, what is the good that we say political science seeks? What, [in other words], is the highest of all the goods achievable in action? As far as its name goes, most people virtually agree; for both the many and the cultivated call it happiness, and they suppose that living well and doing well are the same as being happy. But they disagree about what happiness is, and the many do not give the same answer as the wise.” (NE. I. 4. 1095a14-22; Irwin tr., 2000 p. 3).

67 Scaltsas, 1996 p. 293.

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an Aristotelian program for virtue ethics was written by Aristotle himself, at the end of his discussion of human nature in *Nicomachean Ethics*.\textsuperscript{69}

Let us reconstruct the Function Argument step by step to determine what is precisely the *ergon* of a human being and affirm that an aforementioned outline, which we all share, exists:\textsuperscript{70}

1. For everything that has a function the good resides within the function
2. If human beings have a function the good will reside within the function
3. Human beings must have a function, for if the carpenter, tanner, etc. have one, it seems implausible to claim that human beings don’t have one
4. The function of the human beings must be something, which is not *koinon* (shared) but *idion* (essential/ distinct/ peculiar)
5. Therefore, living is excluded (for we share it with plants)
6. Nutrition and growth are excluded (for we share it with non-rational animals)
7. The function that is *idion* to human beings is Reason:
   2 parts of the soul: i) Obeying Reason (capacity) & ii) Possessing and exercising Reason (activity)
8. The human function is the activity of the soul which follows (or implies) Reason
9. Lyre player function – to play lyre
   Good lyre player function – to play lyre well, that means from virtue, excellence
10. Men function – the activity of the soul which follows Reason

\textsuperscript{69} Nussbaum, 1988 p. 51. I shall include here the whole quote as presented in Nussbaum’s paper, since it is a perfect illustration both of the ‘common outline’ the Function Argument implies and of the non-relativist nature of virtue ethics: “So much for our outline sketch for the good. For it looks as if we have to draw an outline first, and fill it in later. It would seem to be open to anyone to take things further and to articulate the good parts of the sketch. And time is a good discoverer or ally in such things. That's how the sciences have progressed as well: it is open to anyone to supply what is lacking.” (*NE*. I. 7. 1098a20-26).

\textsuperscript{70} I present here the steps of Aristotle’s argument as I summarised them for an Ancient Philosophy Postgraduate Seminar on the Function Argument, supervised by Prof. Scaltsas. The presentation took place at the University of Edinburgh on 02/02/2017. Aristotle refers to the Fuction Argument on *NE*. I. 7. 1097a-1098b.
Good men function – the activity of the soul which follows Reason well, that means from virtue, excellence.

→ The Human Good is the activity of the soul that exhibits virtue

Now, although I reconstructed the Function Argument in bullet points in an attempt to make Aristotle’s text more transparent, a sound interpretation of the conclusion of the argument, is still essential for the account of *Eudaimonia*. We need to precisely determine the steps of the argument and prove its objective nature in order to secure Socrates’ method towards an achievable knowledge of the truth about the good.

I want to comment here – as a parenthetical note – that the Function Argument, as it commonly occurs in philosophy, has suffered great controversy over the years, especially after the contemporary revival of virtue ethics. It is only reasonable that the *ergon* argument has been widely examined, discussed and interpreted, raising reasonable philosophical dispute and even jeopardizing the success of the argument itself. For example, McIntyre writes “It is the telos, of man as a species which determines what human qualities are virtues” attributing to Aristotle’s determination of the human good a metaphysical biological teleology, placing it outside and not within the organism and suggesting a Naturalistic Fallacy (i.e. what is, is what ought to be). However, this is not the case, since what is good for me is incorporated simply in my partaking to a certain species of natural kinds, i.e. being a human being. This is something non-instrumental and categorical, contrary to what McIntyre implied. Or, it is commonly highlighted that Aristotle’s conclusion of the rational activity being uniquely distinctive or peculiar to the human nature seems quite abstract and groundless (i.e. isn’t our ability to create fire equally distinctive?). Broadie writes “One might have expected Aristotle to attempt to cover this sort of gap in his argument […]

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71 Even though the majority of English translation use the terms ‘in accordance with (virtue)’ or ‘in conformity with (virtue)’ I do not support the misinterpretation it raises that one could be acting ‘in accordance’ with virtue out of pretence or unwillingly or ostensibly, etc. and not because or from of virtue: “τὸ ἀνθρώπου ἀγαθὸν φύσις ἐνέργεια γίνεται κατ᾽ ἀρετήν, ἐὰν δὲ πλείον ἀρεταί, κατὰ τὴν ἀρετὴν καὶ τελειοτάτην.” (Ἠθικά Νικομάχεια, 1098a16-17). Therefore, I conclude with the translation ‘that exhibits virtue’ hoping to refrain from any confusion on the matter.

72 MacIntyre, 1983 p. 172.
Aristotle makes no effort to strengthen his starting point.\textsuperscript{73} The dispute can go on and on. I will loyally uphold my initial statement and for the sake of inclusiveness I will not present or evidently argue against the objections that the argument raises. I will, however, clarify that both aforementioned matters – and more – are successfully answered and refuted in \textit{Good, Reason and Objectivity in Aristotle} (Scaltsas, 1996) and in \textit{Aristotle’s Function Argument: A Defense} (J. Whiting 1988).\textsuperscript{74} Both papers guarantee the success of the \textit{ergon} argument, supporting that Aristotle arguably concludes that our peculiar characteristic of the human nature is the activity of the soul which follows Reason well, hence the activity of the soul that exhibits virtue.

\section*{3.1.1 First Criterion of Objectivity}

Scaltsas and Whiting give a defensible interpretation of the \textit{ergon} Argument, guaranteeing its success. Aristotle provides within the Function Argument an objectivist view all the way down, that what is good for men falls \textit{simply} from their function – common to all human beings but not shared outside their species (οὐ κοινόν) and yet peculiar and distinctive (ἴδιον) for each one of them. However, it should be clarified at this point that the objectivity account is more accurately established by Scaltsas, for he introduces the aspect of internal cohesion within the activities and pursuits of the human soul.\textsuperscript{75} Whiting writes: “Now the things which are objectively good for a person, \textit{whatever his actual beliefs or desires}, are the categorical goods which Aristotle thinks will benefit him simply in so far as he is \textit{essentially} human.”(my emphasis).\textsuperscript{76} However, this is not a sufficient justification of the objective account of the argument, and as Scaltsas claims, essentiality shouldn’t be a determining factor.

\footnote{73} Broadie and Rowe, 2002 p. 13.

\footnote{74} It is really interesting when both Whiting and Scaltsas mention Aristotle’s four causes and conclude that in the \textit{Metaphysics} the final cause is actually the same with the formal cause: “What is the material cause of man? The menstrual fluid. What is the moving cause? The semen. The formal cause? His essence. The final cause? His end. But perhaps the later two are the same.” (\textit{Met.} VIII. 4. 1044a34-b1, translation as indicated in Scaltsas, 1996 p. 295). Hence, human beings are ends in themselves and their \textit{ergon} lies within them and not outside of them, as McIntyre suggested.

\footnote{75} See Scaltsas, 1996.

\footnote{76} Whiting, 1988 p. 45.
First of all, if we consider Whiting’s explanation to be accurate, it follows that all human beings should essentially share the exact same categorical goods, which is further from true as I have established and shall further explain. Nevertheless, particularism shows that every moral action should be assessed considering the specifics of each case. Therefore, beliefs and desires are not to be suppressed or marginalized. They need to be cohered to reason, directed towards the real good, allowing for our rational desires to thrive.\(^7\) The 1\(^{st}\) Criterion of Objectivity lies within this balance, between the phenomenally desired and the rationally desired, securing internal coherence. Because the coherence, as we shall see, characterizes only the real good and not the phenomenally good, achieving harmony. The phenomenally good, which would suggest subjectivity is not in balance but in conflict with the real good. We need to tone down and eliminate this conflict to achieve Eudaimonia. This coherence is crucially entailed in Aristotle’s conclusion that the human ergon is the activity of the soul that exhibits virtue. I will attempt to further illustrate this 1\(^{st}\) Criterion of Objectivity in the following argument, using an empirical example:

As we are living organisms with different personal abilities, desires, dispositions, needs, goals, beliefs, etc. it all lies within the coherence amongst all the above – let’s refer to them as natural desires – and what I should refer to here as rational desires. Very roughly speaking, rational desires are the desires of our cognition, the dispositions to pursue and obtain rational goods. I will attempt to make my statement clearer with a personal example that was namely my very own realization of what natural desires and rational desires are and what achieving a balance between the two represents. As a coffee lover, I have been raised to drink my coffee with sugar for a very simple reason: this is how my grandma used to drink her coffee and that’s how she served it when we first shared a cup. Also, desiring something sweet rather than bitter that is the coffee taste, was something that came naturally to me, especially at a teenage age that I was at the time. For many years I was drinking sweetened coffee, which I very much desired and craved on a daily basis. When I grew older, I adopted a healthier lifestyle. I was more informed regarding healthy living and one of the things I wanted to pursue was eliminate daily

\(^7\) Rational desires, as well as the distinction between phenomenal and the real good is extensively discussed in Chapter 4 ‘The Socratic Challenge and Contemporary Education’.
sugar consumption effectively. When I first tried black coffee, the bitterness appalled me. It tasted nothing like the pleasant beverage I grew up into loving and I definitely did not have any desire to drink that beverage. However, the desire for a healthier everyday nutrition was still alive and strong within me. This is when I realized my desires were in conflict. On the one hand, I naturally desired a hot, sweet beverage and, on the other hand, I rationally desired to be healthier. My two desires were contradicting each other, and I had to figure what was my honest, “real” desire, since desiring them both was an oxymoron at the very least. Eventually, I started drinking coffee with less and less sugar every day, until I reached a certain point where I did not desire sugar in my coffee anymore. My desire for the real good (wanting to be healthy) triumphed over my desire for the phenomenally good (I want to have a sweet coffee everyday) and I was able to ‘train’ my habit (drinking coffee with sugar) towards the directions, which I actually preferred (adopting a healthy lifestyle in general). I deliberately ‘trained’ my hexis (ἕξις) and turned it into a habit that would identify with my rational desire. I willfully constructed my disposition in a certain way so as to desire black coffee and, to be honest, I don’t even like sugar in my coffee anymore.

This real-life experience helped me with one more philosophical realisation. Aristotle’s theory on the coherence of our desires does not imply or suggest that we suppress or hide or deny our desires for the phenomenally good. We need to ‘train’ our desire towards the real good. When the two are in conflict (natural desires vs rational desires) compromising them is the only way towards achieving Eudaimonia. And as a rational agent I deliberately ‘trained’ my disposition, I constructed myself to go after the real goods, since their beneficial outcome was the object of my rational desire.

The internal cohesion which the real good upholds, guarantees the objective account of our desire for the good. As Scaltsas suggests, attaining internal coherence is the first criterion of objectivity in Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics. And the reason is simple. Attaining coherence and harmony is an exclusive characteristic of the real good. “[…] phenomenal desires are not mutually compatible; they do not harmonise with one another but

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78 See Scaltsas, 1996.
rather they conflict with one another”. The phenomenal desires fight and compete one another and, therefore, balance cannot be attained. “On the contrary, real pleasures are not in conflict with one another but rather are compatible and mutually harmonious”. Therefore, objectivity is secured: “Internal coherence is the criterion of objectivity in the domain of pleasures, since it characterises only real pleasures”. When the conflict of desires towards the real and the phenomenal good occurs, the inevitable result is to discard the phenomenally desired (phenomenal good) and preserve the really desired (real good). What we need to do there is balance the (natural) desires to the rational desires, using reason, which is also guaranteed through the Function Argument.

Furthermore, it is inferred when interpreting Aristotle’s approach as we did, that we can and should ‘train’, ‘construct’ and ‘form’ ourselves – and more accurately our character – to pursue rational desires naturally. In Aristotle’s words:

[11] Now the things that please most people conflict, because they are not pleasant by nature (τοῖς μὲν ὀλὲν πολλὰ τὰ ἡδία μᾶχεται ἡδὰ τὸ μὴ φύσις τοιαῦτ’ εἶναι), whereas the things that please lovers of the fine are things pleasant by nature. Actions in accordance with virtue are pleasant by nature, so that they both please lovers of the fine and are pleasant in their own right. (E.N. I. 8. 1099a12-16)

So, Aristotle had every right to believe that we can train our dispositions, our hexeis (ἕξεις) and turn it into habituation. What is important is to find harmony, the coherence between our phenomenal desires and rational desires. Only when harmonia is achieved through coherence from the desire for the real good and the constant internal conflict from the desire for the phenomenal good is eliminated, can a human being achieve moral truths, experience the real good and attain Eudaimonia.

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79 Ibid. 300–301.
80 Scaltsas also includes the notion of ‘pleasures’, which, he considers, are described as movement towards a certain destination (the good), and he draws a further distinction between phenomenal and real pleasures, which I will not further examine here (in Ibid. 300).
81 Ibid. 301.
82 Irwin tr., 2000 p. 11.
Thus, summarizing the Function argument, the human function, when performed well, secures that the agent pursues real goods which cohere with each other and result in a harmonious soul rather than phenomenal goods which are at conflict with the real goods and lead the agent’s soul into a constant state of strife. We can train our desires, using reason, and direct them towards the harmonious balance that the real goods guarantee. The Function Argument supports an Objective account of Eudaimonia, of what is the real good for the human being. The absence of catholic, exceptionless moral rules would have destroyed this whole argument, since we do not share the same rational desires. But we do share the same ergon which we need to perform it well, namely succeed in conforming the activity of the soul to reason. This would secure that only the real goods are pursuit by the soul. Our desire for the real good using reason, preserves the internal cohesion, the internal balance.83 A subjectivist interpretation would have implied that what is good for me is what seems to be good for me. But as I have already proven that is an erroneous understanding of aretē’s nature.

3.2 ARISTOTLE’S ENDOXA (SECOND CRITERION OF OBJECTIVITY)

For it is impossible to discuss them* at all from the principles proper to the particular science in hand, seeing that the principles are the prius of everything else: it is through the opinions generally held on the particular points that these have to be discussed (Top. I. 1. 101a38-40 – my emphasis)84

[* the term ‘them’ refers to ‘the ultimate bases of the principles used in the several sciences’]

83 Aristotle’s Human Function excises relativism: “The connection is the following. The introduction of reason into the activities of the soul secures the internal cohesion in the activities and pursuits of the human soul. [...] The coherence between the goods pursued by the soul, is what secures that the phenomenal goods have been excised and the remaining ones are the real goods. The good performance of the human function, namely the conformity of the activity of the soul to reason, will secure that only real goods are pursued by the soul in its choices of human actions and objects of pursuit.” (Scaltsas, 1996 p. 304 - in the text Scaltsas once more refers to ‘pleasures’, which I did not include here). And the real goods are characteristically objective.

84 Translation Pickard tr., n.d. (Internet Classics Archive, accessed on 20/19/2019)
The second reflection of objectivity concerns not the human being as individual entity but the human species as a wholeness. Achieving a balance between us and the *endoxa*, the inherited truths of our conceptual reality, is what guarantees a realist account of moral truths and our knowledge of them. For this justification I shall briefly refer to the much-examined theory of Moral Realism and the contribution of Putnam, Davidson, Nagel, Nussbaum and Scaltsas on the relevant research. However, since this is a rather complicated epistemological and metaphysical matter in contemporary philosophy, I shall present a knowledgeable understanding of the criterion and the scholars’ approaches without delving into a deep analysis of Moral Realism in general. I shall start my argumentation by giving a thorough definition of Aristotle’s *endoxa* and what the *endoxa* stand for in his philosophy.\(^85\) I shall then include the connection of the *endoxa* to the conceptual scheme in which we are born, live, think and evolve. Additionally, I shall introduce the philosophical conception of Internal Realism, proving the objective identity of morality and our knowledge of moral truths.

The ancient Greek word ἔνδοξα is related to the verb δοκέω-ῶ (the most common textual reference of the verb is in the third person δοκεῖ), which means to expect, to think, to suppose, to imagine, to seem, to have or form an opinion.\(^86\) Thus, when Aristotle cites the ἔνδοξα in his corpus of work, he is referring to the things that ‘seem’ to us, the things that we have an opinion for. Without any intention to show disrespect to the translations, I will continue using the transliteration of the term, since I reckon the translating attempts do not pay justice to the precise terminological conception Aristotle had in mind.

As stated earlier we start our moral theorizing from our judgements about particular actions. These judgements are predetermined by the *endoxa*, namely “the respected opinions of society”,\(^87\) and although our judgements are inevitably predetermined by


\(^86\) For an accurate translation of the term I consulted Liddell & Scott Greek-English Lexicon (Liddell, Scott, and Berry, 1927).

\(^87\) Scaltsas, 1996 p. 292.
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the endoxa, the aim of this moral theorising will lead us to the First Principles. Aristotle’s first words in the Topics (Book I) are:

Our treatise proposes to find a line of inquiry whereby we shall be able to reason from opinions that are generally accepted (ἐξ ἐνδόξων) about every problem propounded to us. (Top. I. 1. 100a18).  

As it commonly occurs, many have challenged Aristotle’s account of the endoxa and the fact that he relies on them to reach First Principles provoked significant scholarly disagreement. Endoxa are the ‘proverbial opinions of the wise and/or the many’, the credible opinions of the society in which we are born and raised. And they are an inevitability of inquiry in Aristotle’s schema, since we cannot start our moral theorizing being impartial and completely detached from the endoxa. Consequently, despite the mistrust that the less reliable knowledge (endoxa – what seems) can adequately provide substantial insight for the more reliable knowledge (First Principles), the core conception of Aristotle’s aforementioned approach remains untouched; we are in need of a starting point for our moral theorizing and since we live, evolve and progress in this particular moment in time we are not impartial but rather inevitably intellectually formed by the credible beliefs.

In Aristotle’s Topics we read:

Those things are true and primary which get their trustworthiness through themselves rather than through other things; for when it comes to scientific starting-points, one should not search further for the reason why, but instead each of the starting-points owes to be trustworthy in and of itself. Those are acceptable (ἐνδοξὰ), on the other hand which seems so to everyone or to most people or to the wise – to all of them, or to most, or to the most famous and esteemed. (Top. I. 1. 100b18-23)

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88 Translation Pickard tr., n.d. (Internet Classics Archive, accessed on 20/12/19).

89 To give an example, Robin Smith suggests that a reconsideration of Aristotle’s approach on the matter is crucially required at the very least. See Smith, 1993 pp. 335–58.

90 See also Gasparatou, 2018 p. 515: “Intellectual habits, character traits, ideals and ambitions are nurtured. Within every speech act, all the above are put in motion. The information is being passed on.”.

91 The translation here on Aristotle’s Topics is from Smith, 1997.
We also come across a similar approach in C. Shields’ book *Aristotle* when he claims that “Aristotle collects *endoxa* at the start of a dialectical inquiry, running through them both to bring a problem into focus and consider what progress may have already been made with respect to the issue under consideration. […] When Aristotle records the *endoxa*, he is recounting how things have seemed, without taking a stance on whether what seems to be the case is or is not the case.”.

In the previous Subsection on Aristotle’s Function Argument I presented a justification of the objectivity of moral truths through the internal coherence that characteristically describes the *real good* and the balance between the *real* and the *phenomenal good* that can be successfully attained. Now, the introduction of the *endoxa* as an effort to present the 2nd Criterion of objectivity, relies on the grounds that the *endoxa* determine the aforementioned balance to be inherited by us from previous generations. In other words, each generation that bequeaths and transmits the *endoxa* to their successors, transmits alongside the coherence and balance of the *real good*, guaranteeing the objectivity of the knowledge of the moral truths.

As Aristotle would argue, we are first and foremost, social animals by nature. It is, therefore, impossible to escape the *conceptual scheme* in which we grow up. This claim takes us back to McIntyre’s interpretation on the Function Argument. Besides the unfortunate exegesis, due to which our function does not reside within us but outside of us – namely our partaking in a social status quo as human beings –, McIntyre had every right to address Aristotle’s identity as a Communitarian. Because indubitably the social aspect is an integral part of the human activity. The only difference is that “in Aristotle’s scheme, the social form of life is for the sake of the human being, rather than vice versa”, since human beings are ends in themselves.

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92 I briefly discuss the applications of the dialectic in Chapter 4, 2.2 ‘The Dialectic’.


95 Nussbaum’s approach on the matter is fairly similar: “Much though at certain times we may long to be told from outside what to do and what to be, it is only from ourselves that we can find the answers to these questions” (1995 – my emphasis).
The aspect of our social nature on which I am focusing on is that we are born in a previously shaped conceptual scheme from which we cannot instantly escape. When we start our moral theorizing and we generate our cognitive operation, we are no ‘tabula rasa’, but rather we are thinking things functioning in an established conceptual scheme of the current intellectual world. Inherently we share a wide range of moral truths, from which the conceptual scheme is formed, we grow up from them and we also pass them on to our children. Aristotle’s theory on endoxa addresses that the starting point for moral theorizing is already shaped. An objective criterion of the truth pre-exists our moral theorizing and is formed by the credible opinions of the community regarding the good. The endoxa constitute Aristotle’s theory of truth, which is common to the human species, therefore we inherit the objectivity of the truth. Namely, a realist criterion of the truth from which we start our moral theorizing already exists and we build our character – moral and intellectual – from that objective starting point growing our moral and intellectual understanding. This argumentation, however, does not signify that the endoxa are timeless, eternal or everlasting. We do inherit specific moral truths and we do inherit the internal balance from the previous generations. However, after the moral theorizing begins, we can doubt, change, address, accept or reject the inherited endoxa. Aristotle admits that the endoxa are – and should be – subjects to change, whenever science or philosophy demands. The inevitability is that when we form our conceptualization and shape our moral and intellectual character, the results of this moral theorizing will introduce again the (reformed) endoxa that we then will pass on to the next generation, keeping the objectivity criterion alive and strong. We will be the ones to pass on the balance to our children and supply them with a system of moral

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96 Donald Davidson claims that it is paradoxical to talk about alternative conceptual schemes, since we function in this particular – moral and intellectual – world. As I understand his assertion, we can, for example, hypothesize that a Martian, who does not share with us Earthlings the same concepts, the same truths, the same comprehension of the world, could claim an alternative conceptual scheme. We, on the other hand can only share one conceptual scheme since we share a significant amount of truths, growing up into the endoxa of our ancestors. And while it is only reasonable to expect different approaches, different understandings, different traditions amongst the human species, the conceptual scheme is common and shared. For more on the conceptual schemes see Davidson, 1974 pp. 5–20.

97 A brief historical observation regarding political correctness, human rights, etc. can adequately prove this claim (i.e. rights of women, rights of gay people, rights of black people; the examples of the on-going change and transformation of the endoxa could be endless).

98 See for example: Met. 1073b36, Met. 1074b6; P.A. 644b5; E.N. 1145b2–30.
truths, forming a catholic conceptual scheme, only for them to find their own balance with their interaction with the world.

One could argue, that although the aforementioned argumentation might be true for Aristotle’s moral philosophy, it is doubtful that such an interpretation could also apply in Socrates’ understanding of aretē, since he took under consideration only his and his interlocutors’ beliefs, placing no credence on general consensus and the opinion of the many.99 However, Scaltsas writes in his work Socratic Moral Realism that there are textual references, in which “the general opinion seems to carry weight in the argument, very much in the way that the endoxa in Aristotle make a strong claim to truth”.100 He argues commenting on the Philebus: “[…] repeatedly in this short exchange something is accepted as true on the basis of the fact that it would be accepted by everybody (my emphasis): ‘Anybody, I imagine, will prefer this mixed life to either of those others. Indeed, I shall go further – everybody will’ (22 A 5-6).”101

My principle rationalisation for occurring inconsistencies between the Socratic approach and the Aristotelian philosophical justification, such as the above, can be adequately portrayed at this point. The reasoning is the following: Socrates as a philosopher, as a thinker, as an educator and as an Athenian of the 5th century BC, precedes Aristotle and his philosophy. It is impossible for Socrates to have been aware of the endoxa as a philosophical term or as a conclusive conception the way it was introduced and extensively described by Aristotle. It is impossible for Socrates to have reached all – or even some – Aristotelian (and, in the same sense, all – or even some – Platonic) conceptualization of morality, of virtue, of knowledge, etc. Nevertheless, Aristotle has been characterized as a ‘very Socratic’ philosopher. Therefore, it is only safe to assume that traces of the Aristotelian philosophical understanding can be detected in the Socratic methodology and his applied techniques. Socrates introduces

99 We read in Crito: “We should not then think so much of what the majority will say about us, but what he will say who understands justice and injustice, the one, that is, and the truth itself. So that, in the first place, you were wrong to believe that we should care for the opinion of the many about what is just, beautiful, good, and their opposites.” (Cr. 48a3-5; Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 42).
100 Scaltsas, 1989 p. 149.
101 Scaltsas, 1989. Philebus’ translation here is as indicated in Scaltsas’ paper.
philosophical theses, which are afterwards shaped, formed, endorsed and identified in the Aristotelian corpus (and, in the same sense, in the Platonic as well).  

The current research on Aristotle’s interpretation of ethics and knowledge justifies a realist interpretation of morality and our knowledge of the moral truths. Internal Realism allows for a reading of Aristotle’s moral scheme according to which knowledge and moral truths can be objective and commonly shared in the human species, while preserving an individually esoteric balance when attaining the real good. The Unity of Virtue necessitates that an internal coherence in the virtues is a presupposition for developing our (moral & epistemic) character. Therefore, the truth of the good and the knowledge of the truth (of the good) remain objective. The internal coherence in the virtues is the key notion for Internal Realism, which is fully developed in M. Nussbaum (1982), in Th. Scalsas (1989) and a several of H. Putnam’s works (1987, 1992).  

3.2.1 The Objectivity Criterion Enhanced  

Before I conclude my argumentation for the non-relativist nature of aretē and thus of the knowledge of the good, I want to enhance the Second Criterion of Objectivity with the following data.  

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102 This is one of the many occasions, where I cite traces of the Aristotelian thought in Socrates’ methodology. I will signpost these traces throughout the thesis.  

103 I shall focus on the development of our intellectual character in Chapter 4, Section 1 ‘Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder’. For now, I shall add that the Unity of Virtue is entailed in the Socratic as well as the Platonic and the Aristotelian philosophy. The core argument is that the good is internal and can provide no inconsistencies. Specifically, for Socrates the Unity of Virtue requires the Unity of Knowledge, since virtue is knowledge (e.g. In case I am aware that I lend money to a criminal in order to harm, I cannot solely know that I lend money. I am also aware that he will use the money maliciously).  

104 Hillary Putnam was a rather well-known realist. Indicatively for Putnam see: The Many Faces of Realism (1987) and Realism with a Human Face (1992). And although Putman eventually abandoned his Internal Realism, the reasons for his renouncement focused on ontology and the functions of the human mind in relation to the external world and does not affect my analysis of Aristotle’s conceptualisation of morality and the internal coherence of the good. Besides, he always remained a realist supporting that truth and knowledge are objective.
First of all, Aristotle’s communitarianism suggests, in general, that human beings share an objective range of moral truths. This eventually infers that there is a common knowledge about the truth of the good. Th. Nagel in his work *The Limits of Objectivity*, introduces an objectivity criterion of morality according to which the more universal a value is, the more objective and truer it is. For instance, pain is universally bad because it is found in all species. Oxygen is a vital necessity for the majority of the species and, therefore, the oxygen’s need becomes a widely true value. Community values follow the same principle, from objective to conventional. For instance, the truth of an exhibition being enchanting is less catholic than the truth of child abuse being reprehensible and universally bad. It occurs to me that it is because of a similar understanding of objectivity that Aristotle never in his works does he examine or even mention glaring reprehensible actions. Leibowitz writes: “And while it is common in modern moral ethical works to ask questions like ‘Why is torturing babies for fun wrong?’, we do not find these kinds of questions in Aristotle.”

The main reason for including the above criterion of objectivity stems from the paralogism that often results from the inference that Virtue Ethics casually imply moral truths to be subjective and, therefore, what is good for me is what it seems to be good for me. In modern philosophical debates this argument is frequently stressed out by the accusers suggesting that this understanding of morality allows for a killer’s or an abuser’s truth about the good to be of equal value and to be treated with respect by their community. Nagel’s criterion of objectivity shows the incompatibility of such an understanding of moral truths, especially when applied in Aristotle’s treatise. Aristotle’s ethical scheme manifests that the *ergon* of human beings is ‘the activity of the soul that exhibits virtue’. And those actions are far from virtuousness with brutal or fatal impact.

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105 Nagel, 1979. The Lecture was delivered at Brasenose College, Oxford University, on May 4, 11, and 18, 1979.

106 Leibowitz, 2013 p. 137. And continuous: “The closest Aristotle comes to discussing cases like ‘torturing babies for fun’ is in VII.5, where he mentions ‘the female who, they say, rips open pregnant women and devours the infants,’ (1148b20-23) and ‘the man who sacrificed and ate his mother, or with the slave who ate the liver of his fellow’ (1148b25-6, Ross translations). All that Aristotle has to say about these cases is that these acts are brutish, and that brutishness is beyond the limits of vice.”
on third parties. Aristotle’s Virtue Ethics evolve around reason and rational agents, providing limits for extreme subjectivist views and anarchy.

This brings me to my following argumentation regarding the presuppositions that Aristotle sets in his moral theory. Numerous times in the Aristotelian corpus the notion ‘brought up well’ or ‘brought up in fine habits’ is introduced, referring to children’s or student’s upbringing. Aristotle strongly believes that in order for a human being to be virtuous and succeed into achieving a moral character is through certain upbringing and certain education. And although I will revisit this theory, I suggest here that the presuppositions Aristotle submits in this moral scheme demonstrates the ‘normal conditions’ under which the good is determined (i.e. agents that are ‘brought up well’, rational agents, etc.). The ‘normal observer’ is for Aristotle a criterion of truth. The ‘normal observer’ determines the good without necessarily being catholically good. They are merely normal, and, therefore, the criterion of truth. The same applies for the ‘normal circumstances’. In case the circumstances change, our conception of the truth will also change. For example, one will not rely on a sick person with the flu about the taste or the flavour the food has. A ‘normal observer’, under ‘normal circumstances’ fulfil the criterion of truth and this applies to moral truths as well.

3.3 Did Socrates Teach Virtue Afterall?

Answering the question on virtue being knowledge and, in fact, a teachable type of knowledge is more complicated than a simple affirmative or negative response (even though Socrates demonstrated that whatever is knowledge is teachable). And there is a reason for that.

107 “That is why we need to have been brought up in fine habits if we are to be adequate students of fine and just things.” (E.N. I. 4. 1095b5 – Irwin tr., 2000 p. 4).

108 We have witnessed Socrates admitting the difficulty of giving a straightforward answer to this inquiry in the Protagoras: “It seems to me that our discussion has turned on us, and if it had a voice of its own, it would say, mocking, ‘Socrates and Protagoras, how ridiculous you are, both of you. Socrates, you said earlier that virtue cannot be taught, but now you are arguing the very opposite and have attempted to show that everything is knowledge – justice, temperance, courage – in which case, virtue would appear to be eminently teachable (ὡ τρόπῳ μάλιστ’ ἂν διδακτικὴν φασίς ἢ ἀρετή). On the other hand, if virtue is
As I discussed in the beginning of this chapter, one could argue that Socrates did not practice what he preached. For as a teacher—and in particular a teacher of morality—he should have taught moral truths to his students, as anticipated. However, we see that Socrates does not do so. We see him struggle with his interlocutors in endless inquiries, which traditionally do not provide any concluding, deductive, certain answer, without ever revealing the knowledge he possesses. Socrates was an Intellectualist. He believed that virtue is knowledge. A knowledge he did possess. His admitted Intellectualism, ensuring knowledge as virtue’s only presupposition, would actually justify him teaching moral truths in the moderate way, through transferring the knowledge he possesses to his interlocutors-students. Why doesn’t he provide, then, this knowledge? There seems to be a lacuna in Socrates’ method.

In an attempt to offer an explanation for this lacuna I submit the following theory. Socrates was at the verge of discovering what Aristotle introduced later on in his philosophy; the fact that morality is particularist. Socrates’ understanding of the nature of virtue was incorporated in this methodology and later on ‘decoded’ and interpreted by Aristotle’s moral theory on Virtue Ethics and Particularism. Particularism constitutes virtue a non-transferable piece of knowledge—especially not through the traditional ways of teaching (i.e. lecturing, the sophists’ method, etc.). Socrates anticipated that his students would not benefit from his knowledge; he had to figure out a technique that would effectively lead to their moral—or intellectual as I shall argue in the next Chapter—self-improvement. Thus, he chooses to camouflage his knowledge and put on the mask of ironic ignorance. His eironia remains intact and is further supported as an epistemic tool in Socrates’ method. When Socrates being a self-depreciating eiron admits that he doesn’t have the answers, or is not wise enough, he means what he says; he doesn’t have the answers that would improve or benefit his

anything other than knowledge, as Protagoras has been trying to say, then it would clearly be unteachable. But, if it turns out to be wholly knowledge, as you now urge, Socrates, it would be very surprising indeed if virtue could not be taught. Now, Protagoras maintained at first that it could be taught, but now he thinks the opposite, urging that hardly any of the virtues turn out to be knowledge. On that view, virtue could hardly be taught at all.” (Prot. 361a3-c1; translation Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 790).

Of course, I am not suggesting here that this was Aristotle’s purpose. Aristotle developed his theories enriched by Plato’s and Socrates’ philosophical heritage, but he did not reach his conclusions in a quest to find answers to the Socratic puzzles.
interlocutor. However, he is not ignorant. He possesses knowledge of virtue and he has a method to ‘teach’ us how to get to that knowledge ourselves. Socratic *eironeia* is not honest ignorance with no depth. It is as deep and epistemically significant as the rest of the ‘tools’ Socrates used (i.e. dialectic, elenchus, etc.). In the next Chapter I shall conclusively prove *eironeia*’s essentiality as an educational tool.

The particularist nature of morality is the reason why Socrates has to aim towards the individual character of his students. The only type of educator he can be towards his students is the one that ‘architects’ their character adequately for their own, individual, independent quest towards moral truths, *aretē* and happiness. They need to find their own answers, but they are not accomplished enough to do it on their own from the beginning. They need a ‘coach’, a peculiar educator, that will be able to value the results of their inquiry. Therefore, Socrates aids his students through shaping their character to discover moral truths on their own.

Now, Socrates being an Intellectualist is not simply the reduction from virtue to knowledge. His Intellectualism entails that everyone desires the good. Therefore, the only things standing between us and attaining the good is knowing what the good is, finding out the truth about the good. There is no moral character to build within us though (for we already desire the good). The only thing remaining for Socrates to do as an educator is build our cognitive character into finding the real good on our own. This is a novel interpretation and an ambitious approach that I will thoroughly discuss and support in the following Chapter.

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110 Vlastos understanding of Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is similar: “In ‘complex’ irony what is said both is and isn’t what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another. […] (therefore), when he (Socrates) profess to have no knowledge he both does and does not mean what he says. He wants it to assure his hearers that in the moral domain there is not a single proposition he claims to know with certainty” (Vlastos, 1991 p. 31 – my emphasis). Vlastos admits that the moral domain is a crucial factor in the sufficient comprehension of Socrates’ method (when it comes to ironically disavowing knowledge). However, our justifications essentially differ. Vlastos would argue that Socrates lacks (and is aware of that) the sort of knowledge which is deductive and certain. He draws a conceptual differentiation between knowledge and certainty employing the theory on ‘true beliefs’. For more on his argumentation see Vlastos, 1985.
In conclusion, virtue cannot be taught in the conventional sense of teaching; because virtue is not a solid, transferable piece of knowledge. And Socrates is not a teacher; because he is an *Intellectual Character Builder*.

**CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This Chapter commenced with Xenophon’s testimony that Socrates made others improve *without being a ‘teacher’ of virtue*. I have methodically shown that this statement is fairly accurate once we understand all the features of Socrates’ method.

In this study I have refuted the charges that Socrates is not a teacher of *aretē* because he doesn’t have the relevant knowledge, on the grounds that the particularist nature of morality makes the transfer of knowledge from a teacher to a student in a form of lecture impractical and futile. If Socrates wanted to share his answers he could have done so, advertising his own cognitive achievements and his own knowledge. Not teaching the knowledge he possessed does not concern his teaching skills or his ingenuity. It stems from the Particularist nature of morality. He knew that giving straightforward answers in the inquiries would have not benefitted his interlocutors. And a real ‘educator’ would prioritise his student’s improvement, as Socrates did.

I shall move on to the next Chapter attempting to extend my criticism on the above accusation (i.e. that Socrates was not a teacher of virtue), but this time on the grounds that he was a peculiar, unique type of educator. He was an *Intellectual Character Builder* and not a moral educator, as it was widely believed. Virtue could not be taught because, as he professed, everyone desires the good. So, there is actually no moral virtue to teach, no moral character to ‘train’. He can only ‘train’ our intellect to desire knowledge for the *real good*. 
All of us are pregnant, Socrates, both in body and in soul, and, as soon as we come to certain age, we naturally desire to give birth. Now no one can possibly give birth in anything ugly; only in something beautiful. […] Some people are pregnant in body, […] while others are pregnant in soul—because there surely are those who are even more pregnant in their souls than in their bodies, and these are pregnant with what is fitting for a soul to bear and bring to birth. And what is fitting? Wisdom and the rest of virtue.

— from Diotima’s speech in the Symposium 206c-209e

0. INTRODUCTION

This last Chapter concentrates on a rigorous interpretation of the Socratic method as epistemically significant and educationally applicable. Socratic *eironeia* is evidently depicted as a tool with crucial epistemic application when it comes to educating an agent-student exercising our dispositions. Therefore, this Chapter reinvents the
educational function of the Socratic method, introduces the term *Socratic Challenge* and promotes its contemporary pedagogic significance.

Section §1 includes a forthcoming publication, co-authored with my supervisor Prof. Theodore Scalsas, my peer Dr. Alkis Kotsonis and Prof. Duncan Pritchard. The paper *Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder*, introduces the term *Intellectual Character Builder* for Socrates, examining the philosopher’s focus and main concern for the interlocutor’s intellectual character, prior to Aristotle’s theory on the moral character of the agents. In this Section I discuss Socratic Intellectualism and how the premise ‘knowledge= virtue’ can include the formation of the agents’ character, affecting their dispositions for intellectual virtue. The distinction of the *phenomenal* vs. the *real* good plays a crucial role in decoding Socrates’ method and, along with Socratic elenchus and *aporia* (bafflement), Socratic *eironeia*’s epistemic function is revealed.

In Section §2 I expand the justification as to why Socrates should be considered an *Intellectual Character Builder*, which is not a teacher in the ordinary sense but is indubitably a persona that ‘taught’ his audiences in his own, very unique way, training their disposition towards rational desires (i.e. to know the truth about the real good). Therefore, Section §2 examines separately the key features of Socrates’ method: Intellectualism, Dialectic, Elenchus, *Eironeia*.

In Section 3 I develop my analysis of the *Socratic Challenge* (renaming Socratic *eironeia* along with the functions of the aforementioned key features) as a method of ‘training the intellect’, which can and should be transferred and successfully employed in today’s systematic education. Contemporary education targets the students’ character and is not concerned with propositional teaching. The *Socratic Challenge* is introduced as a method that our epistemic character exercises our emotional intelligence. *Eironeia*’s nature as speech act refines the *eiron*’s motive (i.e. to stimulate inquiry) and can be, therefore, admissible in formal education as a method that promotes our cognitive dispositions for knowledge.
SECTION 1. Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder

In this Section I introduce for Socrates the characterisation of an Intellectual Character Builder as defended in the forthcoming publication Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder, co-authored with my supervisor Prof. Theodore Scalsas, my peer Dr. Alkis Kotsonis and Prof. Duncan Pritchard. Our paper introduces a new approach to Socrates’ method as employed towards his interlocutors.

Preface

I would like to thank my co-authors for giving me the opportunity to work on this article introducing a radical interpretation of Socrates’ philosophy and technique. First and foremost, I would like to particularly thank Prof. Scalsas, who brainstormed this interpretation in one of our meetings in his office three years ago, which changed, afterwards, the purpose of my entire thesis. I would also like to thank my peer Dr. Alkis Kotsonis for constantly completing and enhancing this tender approach with his knowledge and insights, as well as Prof. Pritchard for his valuable input in this venture.

At this point, I want to disclaim any future suspicion for the authenticity of my work. As this paper is also included in Dr. Kotsonis’ thesis, which has already been submitted at the University of Edinburgh, and is a paper that is soon to be published, tentative plagiarism is inevitable. Prof. Scalsas, Prof. Pritchard and Dr. Kotsonis are aware that I am using this article in my thesis as a co-author.

I have included the article Socrates as Intellectual Character Builder intact, as submitted for publication. Thus, the narrative may revisit some already discussed concepts. After I introduce the article’s argumentation I shall pinpoint and further-examine key notions that are discussed.

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1 Kotsonis, Lytra, Pritchard, Scalsas (forthcoming). This version of the paper is the first, unrevised draft accepted for publication by Ancient Philosophy Today: Dialogoi. Therefore, by the time the paper is published, some corrections or alterations may appear.

2 The thesis is Kotsonis, 2018.
Abstract

The paper’s primary purpose is to propose and evidently defend a thesis according to which Socrates is not a moral philosopher as commonly believed but rather the very first – and perhaps the only – intellectual character builder. The paper addresses the reasons why Socrates cannot be considered neither a teacher in the conventional sense nor a ‘moral character builder’. Due to ‘Socratic Intellectualism’, everyone innately desires the good and, thus, desiring the good cannot be taught. However, discerning the real from the phenomenal good, which accordingly represent the actual and the intended objects of our desires, is the true burden between us and the virtuous life. Therefore, there is only one virtue to be ‘taught’ or – better yet – ‘built’ in the agent: the cognitive virtue for the desire of truth and of knowledge of the good.

Socrates needs a method that will make the interlocutors realise their ignorance of what is truly good and ‘train’ them to desire and go after the real good instead of the phenomenal good. The well-known Socratic Method is reinvented with a novel understanding of its steps: (a) Elenchus, as a discerning device, weeds out the interlocutors’ false beliefs, (b) Through the elenctic method the interlocutors realise their ignorance for they discover inconsistencies within their belief system, (c) Along comes the realisation that they actually do not know the truth about the real good, (d) Since they innately still desire the good they necessarily want to find out the truth about the good, (e) The interlocutors are now in a state of bafflement, (f) Socratic eironeia is used by Socrates as a epistemic tool of self-depreciation in order to stimulate the desire to continue inquiry and pursue the truth about the real good on their own. The Socratic Method overall uses epistemic tools to develop the interlocutors’ cognitive virtue: the intellectual disposition of agents to desire the truth.

1.1 Introductory Remarks

The Socratic methodology of teaching the young has been in the epicenter of numerous philosophical analyses. Scholars have engaged in controversy about the
purpose served by this method, but there is no general agreement in the literature. However, most scholars, if not all, agree on Socrates being a moral philosopher, searching for moral truths and answers. Even amongst scholars who object to this thesis, arguing that very few elements in Socrates’ philosophy can be described as moral, no one has ever suggested that Socrates aims to the development of the epistemic character of the young through this method. We will here argue that Socrates, contrary to the commonly held belief, is not a moral philosopher or even a ‘moral character builder’, but rather an intellectual character builder. This paper will introduce an interpretation of Socrates’ methodology according to which, what we can call the ‘Socratic method’ is a tool for developing the intellectual character of agents, namely, their cognitive virtues. We will argue that the Socratic elenchus was the very first attempt in developing a method for the training of the agents’ epistemic dispositions for truth, as opposed to a method for moral inquiry or the development of moral character.

After establishing the critical difference our interpretation makes in identifying Socrates’ methodology, we will address the question ‘how does Socrates build the intellectual character of his interlocutors?’ We will assume Socratic Intellectualism as background and focus on the nature of the virtue Socrates is trying to develop in the young. The Socratic position is that there is only one virtue to be ‘taught’ or built in an agent; cognitive virtue. We will then discuss his method in detail and explain how Socrates’ methodology aims at developing cognitive dispositions within his interlocutors.

3 Gregory Vlastos’ book, Socrates; An Ironist and Moral Philosopher, is a rather lenient defense of Socrates’ moral character and moral teaching (Vlastos, 1991).

4 According to Sosa a cognitive virtue is “a quality bound to help maximize one’s surplus of truth over error” (Sosa, 1991 p. 225) while Greco, defines it as “…innate faculties or acquired habits that enable a person to arrive at truth and avoid error in some relevant field” such as “perception, reliable memory and various kinds of good reasoning” (Greco, 2002 p. 287).
Aristotle was the first philosopher to clearly distinguish and individuate moral from intellectual virtues. However, even though Aristotle did introduce in philosophy the terminology for moral character and moral exemplar, he, surprisingly, did not do the same for intellectual character and intellectual exemplar. We shall argue that a detailed examination and understanding of the Socratic Method introduces us to the latter concepts.

We first address the following diachronic debate: Was Socrates a teacher and, if he was, what was the object of his teaching? Scholars have never reached consensus on the matter. Indicatively, G. Vlastos claimed that Socrates was indeed a teacher of moral philosophy, attributing to Socrates what he called ‘complex-irony’, a groundbreaking reading of Socratic irony, according to which Socrates means and at the same time does not mean what he says. Therefore, Vlastos argues, Socrates’ constant disavowal of knowledge and eventually teaching, is only true under certain circumstances and only when accepting the conventional sense of ‘teaching’. But if we apply the rules of ‘complex irony’ to this claim, justifying him as a teacher not in the common sense but rather as someone who assists you towards moral self-improvement, then Socrates can only be considered a teacher and nothing else. Alexander Nehamas, on the other hand, objects to this understanding of irony, arguing that it turns Socrates into a pedagogical technocrat and transforms irony into ‘an educational ploy’, since this interpretation opens the way to turn all Socrates’ disavowals of (ethical) knowledge

5 “Now virtue also is differentiated in correspondence with this division of the soul. Some forms of virtue are called intellectual virtues, others moral virtues” (EN: I. 13. 1103a4-5); translation Rackham tr., 2014 p. 67. “διορίζεται δὲ καὶ ἡ ἄρετὴ κατὰ τὴν διαφορὰν ταύτην· λέγομεν γὰρ αὐτῶν τὰς μὲν διανοητικὰς τὰς δὲ ἐθικὰς” (Ηθικά Νικομάχεια, 1103a4-5).

6 Vlastos, 1991 p. 32.

7 “In ‘complex’ irony what is said both is and isn’t what is meant; its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another. [...] So too, I would argue, Socrates’ parallel disavowal of teaching should be understood as complex irony. In the conventional sense, where to “teach” is simply to transfer knowledge from a teacher’s to a learner’s mind, Socrates means what he says: that sort of teaching he does not do. But in the sense which he would give to “teaching” — engaging would-be learners in elenctic argument to make them aware of their ignorance and enable them to discover themselves the truth the teacher had held back — in that sense of “teaching” Socrates would want to say that he is a teacher, the only true teacher; his dialogue with his fellows is meant to have, and does have, the effect of evoking and assisting their own effort at moral self-improvement.” (Ibid. 31–32).
into ‘complex ironies’. This reading, Nehamas claims, introduces a dogmatist we do not recognise, who knows the truth and “he knows that he knows (the truth)”, eliminating his strangelness (ἄτοπία). We take issue with both interpretations.

The main concern in this paper is to provide evidence for our disagreement with the thesis that (1) Socrates is a teacher, and in particular, (2) a teacher of morality. The latter claim, that Socrates is not a teacher of morality and is not particularly interested in developing the moral character of his interlocutors, is really challenging and will gradually unfold in the analysis. In order to support the claim that Socrates was interested in developing the intellectual character of the agent as opposed to the moral, we will primarily focus on what Socrates actually was, if not a teacher, and what his technique did, if not teaching in the conventional sense. So, as far as the first part of the thesis is concerned, we argue that Socrates cannot be considered a teacher without further justification of this claim, because he says numerous times in the Platonic dialogues that he is not a ‘teacher’. For example, in the Apology, Socrates states in an explicit manner:

I have never been anyone’s teacher [...] I offer myself to both rich and poor alike for questioning, and if anyone wishes to hear what I say, he may answer me. And whether any of them becomes an upright man or not, I would not justly be held responsible, since I have never promised or taught any instruction to any of them. If someone says that he has ever learned from me or heard privately anything that everyone else did not, know well that he does not speak the truth. (Ap. 33a6-b9 – our emphasis)

8 Nehamas, 1999 p. 102

9 “But the most important and the most controversial element in Vlastos’ interpretation of Socrates is his governing assumption that there are truths that Socrates knows and he knows that he knows. This Socrates is, in the ancient sense of that term, a dogmatist: he knows the truth. His ironic denial that he possesses knowledge and that he teaches it, once interpreted as Vlastos proposes, disappear into protreptic devices designed to get others to see that truth for themselves. Should we then allow irony to transform itself so quickly into an educational ploy?” (Ibid. 101–2).

10 Translation from West, 1979. “ἐγὼ δὲ διδάσκαλος μὲν αὐθεντικὸς πώποτε ἐγνώμην [...] ἀλλ’ ἄριστος καὶ πλεονήμων καὶ πέντε παράγημα ἔμαθον ἐξαπλών, καὶ ἔνα τε μείζονα ἀπαραδόνος ἀκούειν ὅν τὰ λέγω, καὶ τούτων ἐγὼ ἔτε τις ὁρωμένος μένεται ὑπερηφάνη, ὥσεστε ὑπερηφάνη, μηδὲν πώποτε μάθημα μήτε ἴδεθ' ἐν δὲ τὰς φήμα παρ' ἐμοὶ πώποτε τι μαθητήν ἢ ἀκούειν ὅδε ὅτι μή καὶ ὧν ἄλλοι πάντες, εὐ ὅτε ὅτι αὐξ ἐλεύθη λέμε.” (Ἀπολογία, 33a6-b9).
And it is not only the characterization ‘teacher’ that he denies, he disavows knowledge several times (ἀπορία) and he refuses that he is in any way wise at all. For example, in the *Theaetetus*, Socrates notes:

I am, then, not at all a wise person myself, nor have I any wise invention, the offspring born of my own soul; but those who associate with me, although at first some of them seem ignorant, yet, as our acquaintance advances, all of them to whom the god is gracious make wonderful progress, not only in their own opinion, but in that of others as well. (*Th.* 150d1-7).

We understand that Socrates, as declared in the *Apology*, has not passed on any piece of knowledge to the young by instruction (μάθημα), namely, he has not passed on to them propositional ‘knowledge’, which can be encapsulated in declarative sentences by delivering a lesson. Thus, he cannot be considered a ‘teacher’ in the conventional sense. Socrates is not lecturing his interlocutors. Nevertheless, he admits he does have a certain ‘teaching’ technique:

For I do nothing but go about persuading you all, old and young alike, not to take thought for your persons and your properties, but first and chiefly to care about the greatest improvement of the soul. [...] This is my teaching, and if this is the doctrine, which corrupts the youth, my influence is ruinous indeed. But if anyone says that this is not my teaching, he is speaking an untruth. (*Ap.* 30a6-b6 – our emphasis).

If Socrates cannot impart wisdom, which he admits he does not have, to his interlocutors the mechanism of improving their souls cannot rely on knowledge he imparts, whether that knowledge is about the world, or about the human soul and its ethics. We have witnessed Socrates explicitly admitting he is not a teacher of truths; and he denies that has any wisdom at all, but he also claims that his conversational method makes others improve. How does he achieve this?

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12 McIntire, 2008 p. 23. The Classical Greek text is already included in Chapter 2, ‘The Moral Status of the Eiron according to Aristotle; Perception, Distance, Motivation’.
What Socrates does is to ‘care’ for and to ‘improve’ the souls of his interlocutors. The improvement of the soul that comes from conversations with Socrates does not derive from a moral education of the soul, which Socrates declares he does not provide. Rather we propose, ‘the greatest improvement of the soul’ through conversations with Socrates is generated from learning how to come to desire and pursue truth, including moral truths. According to Socrates and his sturdy Socratic Intellectualism, everyone’s soul desires the good. Thus, in addition to this innate desire, learning how to desire truth as well, ensures that people’s desire for the good will never lead them to merely pursue the phenomenal good, which only appears to be good. Socrates’ conversations ‘train’ his interlocutors to desire the pursuit of truth, i.e. the real good. The improvement of their souls is not in virtue of wisdom being imparted to them. Socrates is an intellectual character builder and this paper shall explain and justify this claim. The ultimate aim of Socrates’ method is to help his interlocutors develop the right cognitive/epistemic dispositions.

1.3 SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE GOOD

Socratic Intellectualism manifests that everyone desires the good. Indicatively, in the Meno, Socrates notes that:

– No one then wants what is bad, Meno [...]. Were you not saying just now that [moral] virtue is to desire good things and have the power to secure them?
– Yes, I was. – The desiring part of this statement is common to everybody, and one man is no better than another in this? – So it appears. (Men. 78a-b – our emphasis)\(^1\)

Everyone is like any other in desiring the good. This is a type of democracy and equality amongst all human beings in desiring the good, which is a necessary presupposition in Socratic Intellectualism. The objection is lurking; since everyone desires the good, then how come there is evil in the world? It appears that not everyone

\(^{13}\) For instance, Socrates says in the Meno (94c): “But, friend, Anytus, virtue can certainly not be taught.” (translation from Grube and Cooper, 1981 p. 87).

\(^{14}\) Ibid. 67–68. “Οὐκ ἔρχεται υἱὸς Μένων, τὰ κατὰ ἀνθρώπην [...]. Οὗτος τὸν ἄτομον ἐρώτησεν ὁ μένων ἀνθρώπην τὸ τάφρον καὶ ἱδοναθήναι; – ΄Ως τραίνεται ὁ οὕτως τοῦ τρεῖς τὸν ἄτομος τοῦ ἐτέρης. Οὗτος ὁ μένων ὁ ἅγιος τοῦ ἐτέρης μὲν ἀτερῆς τοῦ ἐτέρης μὲν ἀτερῆς.” (Μεν., 78a0-b7).
is or even chooses the good, if we presume that there is no exception in who desires the good.

The counterargument proceeds as follows. Desiring the good does not entail that one is any closer to the good than the other. The differences between our (moral or immoral) qualities stem from identifying the good and from adequately finding ways to achieve the good. The problem Socrates pinpoints lies within the distinction between the *phenomenal* good (what appears to me to be good) and the *real* good (what is actually good). This division corresponds to the intended object of our desires and the actual object of those desires. To give an example, one may desire to constructively instruct a child with special needs (*intended object of desire which represents the phenomenal good*), but their mode of instruction may in fact be unsuitable for the needs of this child (*actual objects of desire which represent the real good*). According to Socrates, in the *Meno*, there is cognitive-opacity regarding the good; everyone’s intention is to pursue the real good, but the actual objects of their desires might be the phenomenal good. The solution to overcome this problem of cognitive-opacity of the good and to successfully achieve pursuit of the real good, is the attainment of knowledge of the good, namely, attaining truth about the good. Socrates says in the *Meno*:

--And do you think (Meno) that those who believe that bad things benefit them know that they are bad? -- No, that I cannot altogether believe. -- It is clear then that those who do not know things to be bad do not desire what is bad, but they desire those things that they believe to be good but that are in fact bad. It follows that those who have no knowledge of these things and believe them to be good clearly desire good things. (*Meno* 77d6-e2 -- our emphasis).\(^{15}\)

Socrates does not need to generate in his interlocutors the desire for the good, since this resides primitively in human nature. According to Socrates, “…no one goes

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\(^{15}\) *Ibid.* 67. “Ἡ καὶ δοκοῦσι σοι γεγούσαι τὰ κακὰ, ὅτι κακὰ ἔστιν, οἱ ἁγιοίμην τὰ κακὰ ὀφθαλμῆς - Οὐ πάντα μι αὐτὸ ταύτα γε. Οἷονόν δήλω ὅτι αὗτοι μὲν αὐτῷ τῶν κακῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν, οἱ ἁγιούστες αὐτὰ, ἄλλα ἔκειναν, ἢ ὅταν ἁγιά Εἰναι, ἐπιτο δὲ ταύτα γε κακὰ· ὅπερ οἱ ἁγιούστες αὐτὰ καὶ αἰσχρῶς ἁγιά Εἰναι δῆλον ὅτι τῶν ἁγιῶν ἐπιθυμοῦσιν” (*Mένων*, 77d6-e2). Additionally, the following quote from the Protagoras also reflects the difference between the real and phenomenal: “appearances lead us astray and throw us into confusion, so that in our actions and our choices between great and small we are constantly accepting and rejecting the same things, whereas the metric art would have cancelled the effect of the impression and by revealing the true state of affairs would have caused the soul to live in peace and quiet and abide in the truth, thus saving our life” (*Prot*. 356e).
willingly towards the bad or what he believes to be bad, neither is it in human nature, so it seems to want to go towards what one believes to be bad instead of to the good (Prot. 358c6-d2)”. Now, the aforementioned postulate that Socrates does not need to generate in his interlocutors a desire to know the truth about the good either. It does not make sense for an agent to desire the good but not to care to know the truth about the good. If one desires the good, one also necessarily desires to know the truth about the good. Socratic Intellectualism might be the theory behind the claim ‘everyone desires the good’ but, after having a closer look, it inevitably leads us to the claim that everybody desires the good, namely, what is truly good. Still, the vast majority of human beings are not successful in acquiring the good, even though they naturally desire it. Thus, the only burden is their ignorance, which misleads them to go after the phenomenal good instead of the real good.

Therefore, we conclude in the two following remarks. First, what Socrates needs is a method that will make his interlocutors realise their ignorance about the good and prepare them for their quest in finding the truth about it. Secondly, we come closer to the realisation that Socrates cannot be a teacher of ethics, because, as argued, being good and being virtuous cannot be a subject of conventional teaching. Socrates believed that everyone desires the good. Therefore, since the motivation for the good is already innately present in everyone, attaining goodness rests on attaining and implementing knowledge of the good. Since we all desire the good, but we attain goodness and virtue to different degrees from one another, what differentiates us is not desire for the good, but knowledge of what the good is. The challenge, then, is for the agent to be able to recognise the good. Consequently, it follows that there is only one

16 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 787. Aristotle also believed and introduced as an axiom that only when irrational or with a challenged mind would anyone avoid or not desire the good.

17 A number of contemporary virtue epistemologists refer to this desire for the truth as the motivational component of intellectual virtues (e.g. Zaganebski, 1996 p. 270). It is this love for the truth that motivates an agent to search for it.

18 See, for example, Socrates’ speech in the Apology “And if one of you disputes it and asserts that he does care, I will not immediately let him go, nor will I go away, but I will speak to him and examine and test him. And if he does not seem to me to possess virtue, but only says he does, I will reproach him, saying that he regards the things worth the most as the least important, and the paltrier things as more important.” (Ap. 29e4-30a1). Translation from West and West, 1998 p. 81.
virtue to develop in people to enable them to acquire knowledge of the good and be
good; that is their cognitive virtue, namely, the ability to recognise the good.

1.4 The Socratic Method

Our claim is that Socrates devised a cognitive method, namely the ‘elenchus’, as a
method of distilling truths in one’s belief system. It is a coherence test of one’s beliefs,
aiming towards weeding out false beliefs from their system. Socrates is not didactic.
He poses questions, but does not offer answers, for his interlocutors. Instead, his tactic
is to extract the answers from the interlocutors, while helping them in the process rid
their belief systems from false beliefs they hold. It is a method that exposes the false
beliefs the interlocutors hold by revealing contradictions in their belief systems and
showing them the false beliefs from the true beliefs they are committed to. So, the
elenchus, as a coherence test, identifies the problem of contradictions in their belief
systems, while Socrates assists them in discarding the false ones.

Socrates is not a conventional teacher, but his tactics can make others improve and we
shall see how. First of all, Socrates’ elenctic method helps his interlocutors purify their
belief systems, enabling them to discern beliefs about the phenomenal good from belief
about the real good. It is a training method for identifying beliefs expressing moral
truths. His interlocutors desire the good, but they attain the good if and only if they attain
the truth about the good. However, most often, the elenchus verifies the interlocutors’
ignorance about the good; their confidence in their beliefs about the good is shown to
be unjustified. Meno, in his discussion with Socrates, admits as much:

You certainly look like a numbfish (νάρκη), and you’re just the same in other
ways as well: because you know what a numbfish does? It makes anyone that
gets too close and touches it, go numb; and that’s pretty much what I think
you’ve done to me. My mind and my tongue have literally gone numb. I’ve
got no idea how to answer the question. And yet, damn it, I’ve talked about
“being a good man” thousands of times. I’ve made countless claims about it,
time and again, in front of loads of people, and perfectly good claims, too — or so I thought at the time, but now I can’t even say what it is. I haven’t got the faintest idea! (Meno 80a4-b)\textsuperscript{21}

So, the elenchus undermines their certainty about the good and ignites their desire to keep searching for it. The interlocutors desire the good, they desire to know the truth about the good, and through elenchus they are made aware of the fact that most of the times they are on the wrong track for it. In that sense, the Socratic elenchus leaves interlocutors wanting the good, but better off than wanting the phenomenal good.

When Socrates’ interlocutors in an elenctic discussion are confronted with a contradiction, it invariably leads them to bafflement, a state of aporia (ἀπορία), questioning the validity of their own beliefs. This state of perplexity that follows the elenchus is not at all, according to Socrates, a harmful state or a state that should be avoided. A common ‘teacher’ might have argued that the student (in Socrates case the interlocutor) should not be perplexed because that would indicate his method’s failure.

However, in the \textit{Meno}, we come across a critically contradictory attitude towards the slave-boy’s bafflement, when Socrates’ exposes one:

> Have we done him any harm by making him perplexed and numb as the torpedo fish does? — I, do not think so. (Meno 84b4-6)\textsuperscript{22}

And later on, in the same dialogue admitting this techniques’ benefits:

> At any rate, this should have helped him towards discovering the truth. Because now he’ll be happy [...] to try and find out what he doesn’t know, whereas before, he thought he could easily make perfectly good claims, time and again, in front of loads of people, all about how you need a line of twice the length to get twice the area. — Yes, probably! — So do you think he would ever have tried to find out, or learn, what he wrongly thought he knew, before

\textsuperscript{21} Translation from Brown, Beresford tr., 2005. “καὶ δοκεῖς μοι παντελῶς, εἶ δεὶ τι καὶ σκόπαι, ἀμωβώματος εἶναι τὸ τε εἶδος καὶ τάλλα ταύτη τῇ πλατείᾳ νάρκῃ τῇ ψαλαττίᾳ, καὶ γὰρ αὕτη τὸν ἅπαντα καὶ τὶ μηδαμίαν γυμνὰν ποιεῖ· καί σο δοκεῖς μοι νῦν ἔμεν τουοίτων τι πεποιηκέναι γυμναν. ἀλλην γάρ ἔγορος καὶ τὴν ψευδής καὶ τὸ στόμα ναρκά, καὶ σοῦ ἐγὼ ὁ τι ἀποφαίνωμαι σου, καίνος μεράς γε περὶ ἀφετῆς, πασχάλλων λόγως ἐφηκα καὶ πρὸς πολλῶς, καὶ πᾶν εἰ, ὅς γε ἐμνετὸ ηδόκειν νῦν ὑπὸ εἰδος ὑμι καὶ ὑπὸ τοῦ ἐποιήσας ἔγορο εἰπεν. (Μένου 80a4-b3).

\textsuperscript{22} Grube and Cooper, 1981 p. 75. “— Ἀποφαίνων ὁδῷ αὐτῶν ποιήσαντες καὶ ναρκαν ὑπερ ἡ νάρκη, μῶν τι ἠξιόθαμβης; — Ὅδη ἦμορε δοκεί.” (Mένου 84b4-6).
he tumbled into bafflement before he sensed he didn’t know and felt the need to know? – No, I don’t think he would, Socrates. (Meno 84b7-c7)

At this state, the state of aporia, the interlocutor’s desire for knowing the truth about the good could be easily satisfied by revealing them the truth. However, this is what a conventional teacher would do and not an Intellectual Character Builder. Socrates frequently inserts irony (eironia) at this stage, which we take to be an educational tactic: if the (assumed) innate desire for the good motivates the search for truth, ‘Socratic irony’, as we will see, motivates a personal-search for truth. We argue that Socrates’ ironic attitude has a unique characteristic that pushes the interlocutor further in order to move past the state of bafflement. Socrates acts as if he is wanting, not knowing the answers to the questions explored in the respective elenchus, while asking his interlocutors to help him get to the truth. Some of them are still not ready to accept this responsibility and they even get angry at him, as Thrasymachus does in the Republic:

When he heard that, he gave a loud sarcastic laugh. – By Hercules, he said, that’s just Socrates’ usual irony. I knew, and I said so to these people earlier, that you’d be unwilling to answer and that, if someone questioned you, you’d be ironical and do anything rather than give an answer. (Rep. 337a2-7)

Some others end up embracing their original faulty beliefs or their ignorance, without any sign of self-improvement or motivation for further personal-search. A clear example of this is when Socrates gets slightly frustrated with Euthyphro for giving up so easily on his investigation regarding piety in the homonymous Platonic dialogue.

23 Ibid. “’Πρόξυρον γαϊν τι πεποικαμεν, ώς ἐσσαι, πρὸς τὸ ἐξετεῖν ὅτι ξειν· νὲν μὲν γὰρ καὶ ζητήσειν ἂν ἠδύως αὐς εἴδως, τότε ὑἱοὶ διὰ καὶ πολλὸς καὶ πολλῆς ὡς ἡ ἥδει· ὡς δὲ πολλοὶ τὴν γραμμὴν ἔχει μῆκος· ἔσκαμε. ’Ωσαν. Ὅμων ἄλογον πρὸς πρότερον ἐπιθυμήσασθαι ὑπερῆκε· ὡς μινθήνει τοῦτο, ὡς ἐπετεύκαν αὐς εἴδος, πρὸς εἰκ ἀποφαίνει κατέσσειν ἴσηςίμυνοι μὴ εἴδον, καὶ ἐποθεῖν τὸ εἴδεναι; –Οὐ μοι διοικήτω, ὡς Σικουρατες.” (Ménon 84b7-c7).

24 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 971. For more on this quote see Chapter 1, Section 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’.

25 “I know well that you believe you have clear knowledge of piety and impiety. So, tell me, my good Euthyphro, and do not hide what you think it is. – Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now and it is time for me to go. – What a thing to do, my friend! By going you have cast me down with a great hope I had, that I would learn from you the nature of the pious and the impious” (Euthyph. 15e-16). Grube and Cooper 1981, p. 20
In an attempt to foresee and avoid future counter-argumentation, we have to make clear at this point that the fact that the Socratic method is not successful in a catholic way, as we already witnessed in the previous texts, does not entail a failure of the method *per se*. This paper suggests a reading of Socrates’ method that applies to virtue epistemology and introduces him as an *Intellectual Character Builder*, the very first *Intellectual Character Builder*. It is only realistic that the training he provides does not always fall on fertile soil. It only makes sense that the Socratic method is not for the sake of Euthyphro or the audience that Euthyphro represents, which fails to meet the method’s goals and targets.

Now, what is it that constitutes the uniqueness of Socrates’ ironic method and sets irony to be an important presupposition for the method’s success? Socrates’ irony is not a common ironical utterance but rather a phenomenon that entails *self-abatement*, which constantly targets Socrates and his own knowledge and not his interlocutors’. Socrates is an ironist, and more accurately a self-depreciator, who disavows his own knowledge, his own merits.\(^{26}\) He often praises his interlocutors’ knowledge and skills, even if it is not his honest opinion, but never his own merits in an attempt to show-off.\(^{27}\) In this way, he taunts and provokes his interlocutors, stimulating further philosophical inquiry. ‘Socratic irony’(*eironeia*) works as sting, it pricks and challenges the interlocutors who are now smitten, creating within them a *personal* motivation to keep searching for the truth.

If we take a step back and look at Socrates’ method as a whole, we will map it as follows: Socrates starts with *elenchus* as a coherence test to expose his interlocutors’ ignorance and show them that they have false beliefs and they haven’t yet reached the

\(\text{\textsuperscript{26}}\) Aristotle’s theory also justifies our claim: “Self-depreciators, who understate their own merits, seem of a more refined character, for we feel that the motive underlying this form of insincerity is not to gain but dislike of ostentation. These also mostly disown qualities held in high esteem, as Socrates used to do” EN, IV, 7, 1127b23-26 (our emphasis).

\(\text{\textsuperscript{27}}\) The two following texts from the Platonic dialogue *Euthyphro* depict perfectly Socrates’ ironic behaviour towards his interlocutor and the self-depreciation he projects through irony: “Yet you are younger than I by as much as you are wiser. As I say, you are making difficulties because of your wealth of wisdom. Pull yourself together, my dear sir, what I am saying is not difficult to grasp” (Euphr. 12a5-8, our emphasis and later on: “So, we must investigate again from the beginning what piety is, as I shall not willingly give up before I learn this. Do not think me unworthy but concentrate your attention and tell the truth. For you know it, if any man does…” (Euphr. 15c9-d3), (Grube and Cooper, 1981).
truth. The interlocutors are left desiring the truth because, as we already argued, everyone desires the good and they only have to find the truth about the good, discerning the phenomenal from the real good. The interlocutors, realising their false beliefs, are now in a state of bafflement. Since we already justified that everyone has an innate desire for the good, merely revealing them the truth about the good would probably suffice at this point. Their bafflement would be satisfied simply by telling them the truth and revealing them the real good. However, this is not at all what Socrates wants, aims to or does. Being an Intellectual Character Builder, and not a conventional ‘lecturer’, he needs to intensify or even revitalize his interlocutors’ desire. Socrates needs them to want to find out by exploring themselves being cognitively active and not through passive learning. He needs to turn this motivational desire into something personal. This is where his ironic method is inserted. It is the use of irony, as a depreciation of the authority, in this case Socrates, that personalises their motivation to keep searching on their own and it is used as a psychological trick by Socrates to help them get out of the state of bafflement. So, after he exposes cognitive emptiness in the interlocutor, he then declares cognitive emptiness in himself, triggering a personal motivation for further philosophical inquiry.

The following quote from the Meno, depicts quite accurately Socrates’ method works:

And as for me – unless a numbfish feels numb itself when it makes other people feel numb, then I’m not like a numbfish. Because it’s not as if I’ve got all the answers myself when I baffle other people. I only make other people feel baffled by being more baffled than anyone myself. Take our question about what exactly being good is: I certainly don’t know the answer. (Meno 80c5-d1, our emphasis).

Cognitive emptiness from the interlocutor is declared, as well as their bafflement. Socrates then declares his own cognitive emptiness. His authority is lessened and often equalized to the interlocutor/ ‘student’. It is this unique tactic that personalises the inquiry and spurs them, keeping the desire to know alive. Otherwise, the interlocutor

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28 Brown, Beresford tr., 2005 “ἐγὼ δὲ, εἰ μὲν ή γάρ ἡ γνώμη αὐτή νησχώμα ἀστώ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ποιεῖ γνωρίζει, ἔσσω αὐτῆ: εἰ δὲ ρηφ, ἐς ὅ γερ εὔπορων αὐτός τῶν ἄλλων ποιὸ ἀποφεῖ, ἀλλὰ παντὸς μᾶλλον αὐτός ἀποφεῖ καὶ ὀστὼς τῶν ἄλλως ποιῶ ἀποφεῖ: καὶ νῦν περὶ ἁμείας ὃ ἔστω, ἐγὼ μὲν οὐκ ὁδα.” (Μένων 80c5-d1).
is left baffled and ‘numb’ into cognitive complacency and patiently waiting for the initial, innate desire for the knowledge of the good to be revitalized on its own.

Socrates uses epistemic tools (i.e. elenchus, aporia, self-deprecating eironeia) as part of his method, in his only goal to help his interlocutors improve and help them get to the truth. He does this not by transferring knowledge to them directly, in the usual sense of teaching, but by showing them their ignorance and then pricking them with irony, without putting them down. Socrates never teaches truths or gives answers; he exposes his interlocutors’ ignorance and in doing so he enhances within them the desire to seek for the truth, develops their motivation and personalises this motivation through irony; he is building their intellectual character.

Still, despite its merits, the Socratic elenchus has been criticised as a deficient cognitive instrument for the discovery of truth because it does not establish truths (at least not in the way that the subsequent Platonic method of dialectic does).29 But this is the insight of Socrates. Socrates is not primarily proposing a method for the discovery of truth. He has developed a method for training people in the search of the truth – developing their cognitive character. The elenctic discussion prepares the mind for discovering the truth. Socrates is, indubitably an Intellectual Character Builder; the very first one.

Concluding Remarks
According to one of the most famous Socratic quotes “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being” (Ap. 38a5-6 – “ὁ δὲ ἄνεξήτοστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἄνθρωπος”).30 This quote describes perfectly Socrates’ ultimate goal when conversing with others. He is trying to persuade everyone he meets of the immense value of inquiry, he is showing them their ignorance and he is training them to seek the truth. Socrates is not lecturing

29 There is a way for the Socratic elenchus to move from coherence to truth through internal realism (see Scalsas, 1989) I will briefly comment on the elenchus in Section 2.3 ‘The Socratic Elenchus’ suggesting that truth might not be guaranteed but it is definitely a prospective outcome.
his interlocutors on the importance of being virtuous. He is helping them develop the right cognitive dispositions in order to acquire truth on their own.

**SECTION 2. DELINEATING SOCRATES’ METHOD AS AN EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL MODEL**

In this Section I further discuss the above paper, referencing some key notions and delineating Socrates’ methodology. My main concern is to defend Socrates’ method as epistemically coherent and educationally fruitful. Thus, I shall present the philosophical connotations with a focus on their educational features and applications rather than the analytic philosophy behind them.

It has been acknowledged in contemporary literature that Socrates is a unique educator – most popularly recognized as a teacher of moral philosophy— and that his method (i.e. disavowing knowledge, delving into methodical dialogues with his interlocutors, employing the elenchus) is currently widely interpreted as a method with pedagogical objectives. However, the reality is that the claim that Socrates is an educator has been viewed sceptically even in antiquity by Plato and Aristotle. Socratic Intellectualism was not easily accepted by either as a successfully applicable method in teaching the young, since it celebrates the intellect and is not at all concerned with the character, habits or dispositions of the agents/students. This accusation has also been

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31 I have already thoroughly discussed Vlastos, 1991; see also Irwin, 1991; and Rawls, 1951, who has commented that the ideal method for moral philosophy is Socratic.

32 I particularly appreciated Gulley’s interpretation of the Socratic method and mainly on Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge as “an expedient to encourage his interlocutor to seek out the truth, to make him think that he is joining with Socrates in the voyage of discovery” (Gulley, 1968 p. 69). My reading, however, differs on the limitations of this journey, whether it is Socrates’ journey that the interlocutor joins in or an individual discovery that Socrates facilitates, as an educator would do.
recently revived in contemporary philosophical circles. M. Nussbaum, for instance, refutes Socrates as an educator claiming that his teaching is largely negative, since he has “no convincing moral principles to substitute for what he ridicules. […] He is negligent to the moral training of the pupils: he mocks habituation without acknowledging that it might be essential in forming a pupils’ moral intuitions.”.

Now, even if we were to overcome the struggle of defining Socrates as a teacher, the subject of his teaching would be also dubious. Aristotle, for instance, depicts Socrates in his *Metaphysics* as a philosopher whose interests were restricted to the realm of the ethical. However, this is not particularly accurate or absolute. Socrates was an Intellectualist. He professed that knowledge was both necessary and sufficient for virtue and happiness. My approach supports that his subject-teaching is ethical, but his method is purely intellectual. Socrates’ method targets the *cognitive* rather than the moral character of the agent. This, of course, does not necessitate that moral education is automatically excluded, particularly when the issues examined are in reference to morality – as are the subjects discussed in the Socratic dialogues. Moral enhancement can be attained via Socratic method, given that the goal of ‘shaping’ a *cognitive character* is met.

My interpretation addresses the aforementioned issues. It defuses the accusation that Socrates’ method cannot be fruitfully applied to education because he is not concerned about the agent’s character. Socrates was an *Intellectual Character Builder*, a terminological conception that couldn’t have been used or introduced by Socrates because Aristotle was the first to develop a theory on the formation of the character of

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33 See for example, Burnyeat, 1980 and Nussbaum, 1980.

34 Nussbaum, 1980 pp. 79–80. Nehamas doesn’t resist a similar accusation, pointing out Socrates’ non-existent positive moral program as well as Aristophanes’ own characterisation of Socrates: “Aristophanes may have claimed against him that, because of this intellectualism, Socrates would engage in a conversation with anyone, whatever his moral character, and that his teaching could therefore easily lead to immorality.” (Nehamas, 1999 p. 46). I shall revisit the implications of this quote in Section 2.4.1 ‘The “Ideal” Audience’.

35 “Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole” (Met. I. 4. 987b2-3 – translation Barnes, 1984 p. 1561). “Σωκράτους δὲ περὶ μὲν τὰ ἠθικὰ πραγματευόμενον, περὶ δὲ τῆς ὅρθης φύσεως αὐθέν” (Μετά τα Φυσικά, 987b2-3).

36 I intend to thoroughly address these accusations on character, dispositions, habituation and Socrates.
the agent/student and, in particular, their moral character. Aristotle was the first to discern intellectual from moral virtues as well as intellectual from moral character. And while he discussed the ‘training’ of the moral character and introduced the moral exemplar, he did not do the same for the intellectual character. Therefore, it seems only reasonable that the two (moral and intellectual) coincide in Socrates’ practice. I reckon that the ever-lasting juxtapositions and the persistent misinterpretation of Socrates’ method can be largely attributed this terminological and conceptual deficiency. Socrates could not and should not be considered a teacher in the conventional sense because he has never been one. He is also not a teacher of moral philosophy because he is an Intellectual Character Builder. As the very first one his method cannot be flawless, nor do I intend to defend it as such. I shall present the most important key features of Socrates’ method as an Intellectual Character Builder that can be applied in contemporary education, defending their efficacy and rejecting anticipated objections when indicated.

Socrates’ method can be criticised for many things but one; consistency. I shall argue that every single step within Socrates’ method falls necessarily from the other, securing its coherence and effectiveness. Socrates has remained truthful and loyal to his method — ‘building’ the intellectual character — all the way down.

### 2.1 Socratic Intellectualism as a Paradoxical Theory

Socrates embraces Moral Intellectualism; hence the twofold assertion that everyone desires the good and no one errs willingly or knowingly. Regarding the first implication, that everybody desires the good, one could infer that, paradoxically, we could never desire what is inherently bad since anything bad would be considered a means to an end, the end being always the good which we truly desire. In the *Meno* 77b-78b, Socrates argues that those who desire bad things do not know those things are genuinely bad, otherwise they wouldn’t desire them. It must be always assumed, according to Socratic Intellectualism, that we constantly desire the good even though

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37 See quote in p. 156, *Meno* (77d6-e2).
we sometimes lack the accurate knowledge of what is good. The second implication, that no one errs willingly, is addressed as equally paradoxical. This particular connotation cancels akrasia (lack of self-control and weakness of will, the opposite of enkrateia) and for this Socrates has been also widely accused. Any bad action can be justified for it is inferred that no one chooses to act against a better judgement intentionally. They merely lack the relevant knowledge of an existing better option.  

Whether we agree or disagree with the paradoxical connotations of Socratic Intellectualism we take it as a given, to support the method’s coherence, for this is what Socrates declared. He maintained that everyone desires the good and fabricated a method to get to the good. While Socrates can be criticized for being paradoxical, he cannot be accused for being inconsistent. Everyone desires the good, thus everyone also desires to know the truth about the good. It doesn’t make sense for anyone to claim that they desire the good but not to know what the good actually is. The only thing standing between an agent and the good is realizing the distinction between the phenomenal and the real good. One must be able to recognise the real good from the

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38 Both Plato and Aristotle take a stance against Socratic akrasia. In the Republic Plato is arguing that “there are different sources of motivation, not only the rational desire for the good but also desires for pleasure and for reputation, which can oppose our rational desires (Rep. 439c ff.). If this is so, it seems that akrasia is possible, that there are other sources behind wrongdoing besides ignorance, and that knowledge is not sufficient for virtue, which also requires mastery of desire.” (Mason, 2010 p. 18). Akrasia in Aristotle occurs as a result of opinion, which only incidentally aligns with or opposes the good. See N.E. Book 7. For a detailed analysis on akrasia and its effect on moral education see Carr and Steutel, 2005 pp. 138–51.

39 Our desires are dispositional. Dispositions to pursue rational goods are rational desires. Knowledge and intellectual virtues in general are rational desires. For an intelligible reading on rational desires see Lorenz, 2006. The distinction between rational and non-rational desires is rather interesting.

40 I have already argued that Aristotle in his philosophy is very Socratic – if we can call him that. He holds a similar position on the phenomenal and the real good. In Aristotle’s Function Argument and his attempt to provide a successful relation between Eudaimonia and the human nature we can detect his conviction that if we cannot locate the benefits of the characteristic function that describes us, then we have mistakenly judged the function per se. “He (Aristotle) thinks that if men are characteristically social or political animals, then my exclusive preference for reading the Metaphysics (for example) reflects a mistaken judgement about what is good for me.” (Whiting, 1988 p. 34). Our inability to accurately judge what is good for us, to tell the phenomenal from the real good apart is the biggest burden and the main reason why human beings struggle so much to achieve eudaimonia and arete. We first and foremost have to find out the truth about the good.
phenomenal in order to achieve the good. Therefore, our cognitive character must be trained to discern the two and follow the real good. ⁴¹

Socratic Intellectualism actually reduces moral development to cognitive development. Socrates professed that in order for us to become moral we need to principally know the good – the real good. Only ignorance for the real good due to cognitive-opacity can explain our occasional pursuit for the bad, which in our understanding would merely represent the phenomenal good. There are no passions to be trained and no desire for the good to be taught or cultivated. Within us resides an innate passion for the desire of the good. Therefore, our passions towards desiring the good need no training, no teaching, no external work from an ‘educator’. We only need to work on our intellect, our ability to cognitively realise and attain the real good. Socrates reduces morals to rationality. We desire the good and we desire the knowledge of the truth about the good; we only need to ‘train’ our intellect to successfully discern the real from the phenomenal good, the real from the phenomenal objects of our desire. This is the principal justification behind the claim that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue and whoever argues that Socrates wrongfully estimated knowledge=virtue, has evidently misread his train of thought. Definitively, besides the moral character, as introduced by Aristotle, there is an intellectual character, which was implicated by Socrates. And this intellectual character is not built by propositional teaching but rather by a method which gradually ‘trains’, keeps alive an personalised our innate desire for truth and knowledge of the good using the epistemic tools the Socratic method indicates (dialectic, elenchus, irony). Socrates is the flipside of Aristotle. While Aristotle terminologically and conceptually supported that our moral character needs to be ‘trained’, Socrates implied that there are actually no moral dispositions that we need to work on, since they are predetermined to want the good. We decode this implication into a ‘training’ of the cognitive character (i.e. keeping the desire for the quest of the real good alive) of the agent which will translate into happiness.

⁴¹ One might object and wonder why doesn’t Socrates give answers about the real good then? I have already extensively argued in Chapter 3, though, that giving explicit answers would never benefit any of his interlocutors, since his answers would be of no use to them. See my argumentation on Chapter 3, Section 2 ‘The Defense Argument’.
In an attempt to anticipate potential objections, I want to clarify that my argumentation does not suggest that contemporary education should embrace or even accept a potentially paradoxical theory (i.e. everyone desires the good). Socrates’ position evoked a formation of a rigorous epistemic method with competent educational applications. The educator is in a position to develop the students’ epistemic character by ‘training’ their cognitive capacities to keep the desire for knowing the real good alive, to overcome the state of bafflement and abatement the elenchus creates and to prevent cognitive complacency. The ‘Intellectual Character’ is the genre Socrates introduced and the ‘Educational Character’ is the species contemporary education can ‘craft’.

2.2 The Dialectic

If there is a Socratic device widely appreciated and popularly endorsed in contemporary systematic education that is the Socratic Dialogue.42 Modern education fixates more and more on the formation of the character of the students and defuses the focus from propositional teaching, which pays more attention to transferring the information rather than cultivating creative thinkers. John Dewey, the well-known American philosopher, psychologist and educationalist of the early 20th century, illustrated an educational reformation, according to which the student should have the opportunity to actively participate in the learning process and the teaching should target our way of living as a whole.43 Employing ‘Socratic dialogue’ in a modern educational system is an apparent incarnation of this view. A fruitful employment of the technique of the dialectic in the classroom instead of direct, plain transfer of knowledge can have maximum beneficial results in creative thinking and reflective

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42 It would be an omission to not acknowledge that the dialectic (and in the same sense every aspect of Socrates’ method) owes a great deal of its shape and form to the Platonic idiosyncrasy, as it is Plato’s and not Socrates’ dialogues that we are studying. To be fair, much of Socrates’ ‘achievements’ as recognised in this thesis could be a result of Plato’s literary skills. Discerning the two, however, is a rather exhausting endeavour that asks for a separate, independent analysis, which could not possibly fit in the current project. See my argumentation in the thesis’ Introduction: ‘Methodology and Limitations’ p. 8.

dialogue can exercise both independent reflection and self-scrutiny as well as in social skills and in building communities.\textsuperscript{44} In general, the Socratic Dialogue seems to be gathering momentum across the world.\textsuperscript{45}

Considering the educational significance of the Socratic method as a presupposition for effective modern learning and teaching, I want to briefly address the epistemic controversies the dialectic and, consequently, the elenctic method have generated in philosophical circles. The research supporting both sides is rather extensive, therefore, I will succinctly present the justification of their effectiveness as methods that generate certain knowledge and, thus, can be fruitfully used in modern teaching.

The biggest concern regarding the effectiveness of the dialectic is its inability to convince and, ergo, lead to certain knowledge and truth. Nietzsche, who profoundly admitted his repulsive feelings for Socrates, held him responsible for the Athenian decay and one of the reasons was his dialectic method. Nietzsche denied the dialectic’s validity as an educational method arguing that it only arouses mistrust, it can never be persuasive and it actually weakens philosophical activity, as it opens the way to anyone to participate, including weak philosophical thinkers. We read in \textit{The Twilight of Idols}:

\begin{quote}
One chooses dialectic only when one has no other means. One knows that one arouses mistrust with it, that it is not very persuasive. Nothing is easier to erase than a dialectical effect: the experience of every meeting at which there are speeches proves this. It can only be self-defense to those who no longer have other weapons.\textsuperscript{46}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{44} Mercer’s and Wells’ contribution in the perks of the dialectic has been rigorous. See Mercer, 1995; Mercer, 2002; and Wells, 1999. See also the discussion on Reflective Dialogue in Gasparatou, 2019.

\textsuperscript{45} During my studies at the University of Edinburgh I participated in a seminar-training under ‘The Philosophy Foundation’ (\url{https://www.philosophy-foundation.org/}), in order to teach a 6-week Philosophy course at Portobello High-school, Edinburgh. The focus of the training concerned philosophical inquiry in the classroom and the epistemic and educational tools we were trained to use as philosopher-teachers were almost exclusively Socratic. The ‘Socratic Dialogue’ exerted in a classroom in a ‘Socratic Circle’ were conclusively the most important and the most effective ones. Peter Worley has authored a rather insightful book on how to practice philosophy and employ Socratic educational tool in the classroom from a very young age: Worley, 2010, especially ‘How to Do Philosophical Enquiry in the Classroom’, p. 1-29.

\textsuperscript{46} Nietzsche, Kaufmann tr., 1982.
This criticism is not only traditional but contemporary as well. And even though it is true that we do not see a full theory of truth in the Socratic approach, the Platonic conception and later on the Aristotelian theory do provide strong evidence on the dialectic as a coherence system of truths. The dialectic is a discovery and elenctic process, through which we are able to check each other’s rationality. In the hands of Plato and Socrates it works as a tool for inquiry and not for producing answers, which, my thesis argues is the most effective way to train our intellect and create strong cognitive characters and creative thinkers. Besides, Plato suggests that philosophy is not something that can be included in a written treatise (Phaedrus 275c). And although in the Platonic dialogues the dialectic appears as a method that checks consistency of truths, Aristotle’s approach comes to strengthen the truth element through his endoxa theory, justifying the dialectic as a rigorous scientific method for discovering truths.

The dialectic is a purely rational method that can lead to intellectual success. The concern for describing the dialectic as a scientific method resides in the fact that science (ἐπιστήμη) relies on premises that are deductive and certain, whereas in the dialectic it is admitted that we often start our deductive reasoning from the endoxa (respected opinions of society). According to Aristotle, it is impossible to start reasoning straight from First Principles, which represent certain knowledge, but relying on endoxa we reach First Principles without lapsing into contradiction through the dialectic (Topics I. 1. 100a18-20 and I. 2. 101b1-4). And that makes the dialectic a pertinent heuristic

47 Nehamas shares the same view in his essay ‘What Did Socrates Teach and to Whom Did He Teach It?’ (Nehamas, 1999 pp. 59–82). See also Burnyeat, 1980; Nussbaum, 1980.

48 By now it is fairly clear that I support a specific understanding when it comes to philosophical justification regarding some Socratic conceptions. I reckon that certain ideas were either uttered or implied by Socrates and then endorsed and developed first by Plato and later on by Aristotle. There are several cases which I examine (the dialectic being one of them), in which a characteristic contribution of the three philosophers is evidently detected. However, this definitely does not imply that the three philosophers shared philosophical theories or opinions. Their philosophical differences are still immense.

49 “The purpose of the present treatise is to discover a method by which we shall be able to reason from generally accepted opinions (ἐξ ἐνδόξων) about any problem set before us and shall ourselves, when sustaining an argument, avoid saying anything self-contradictory.” (Top. I. 1. 100a18-22). And “[…] for it is impossible to discuss them (the sciences) at all on the basis of the principles peculiar to the science in question, since the principles are primary in relation to everything else, and it is necessary to deal with them through the generally accepted opinions on each point. This process belongs peculiarly, or most appropriately to dialectic (διαλεκτικὴ); for, being of the nature of an investigation, it lies along the path to the principles of all methods of inquiry.” (Top. I. 2. 101b1-4). The translations for Aristotle’s
device for the truth. We are able to establish First Principles by discerning and determining which among our initial endoxa withstand sustained philosophical investigation.\(^{50}\)

Thus, endorsing and employing the dialectic method in modern teaching not only engages students to conversation, promotes belief exchange and training of their creative thinking but, epistemic-wise, it can be argued that it provides certain knowledge and truths when practiced properly.

### 2.3 Socratic Elenchus

Concentrating on Socratic elenchus, the philosophic mistrust is even stronger for elenchus is considered a rather insufficient method for knowledge. According to Nehamas, Vlastos main argument in *Socrates’ Disavowal of Knowledge* is that “though Socrates possesses a sort of dialectical, fallible knowledge reached by means of the elenchus, he is also aware that he lacks the kind of knowledge, which is philosophical, deductive and certain.”.\(^{51}\) And although Vlastos did attempt a defense on the view that elenchus leads to knowledge through true beliefs, he admits that it wasn’t an easy claim to prove as “the puzzle of elenchus” remained vivid and strong: “How it is that Socrates expects to reach truth by an argumentative method which of its nature could only test consistency” – (my emphasis).\(^{52}\) Vlastos’ defence argument maintains that elenchus offers...

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\(^{50}\) Contemporary scholars such as T. Scalsas, T. Irwin, J. Owens and G. L. Owen have argued that Aristotelian First Principles begin in the dialectic.


\(^{52}\) Vlastos, 1991 p. 15. In a nutshell, Vlastos, following Irwin, supports the theory that even though we are not in possession of knowledge on every matter, we always have within us true beliefs. Knowledge is actually justified true beliefs (see Meno 96e-98a; for Irwin see Irwin, 1995. Edmund Gettier changed that when he argued that we might think this knowledge is justified when it is actually conventional, diminishing the value of true beliefs in our belief system; the so-called Gettier problem (e.g. Yesterday I put 3 coins in my pocket. During the night my husband replaced the 3 coins with 3 other identical ones. In the morning, when I check my pockets 3 coins are there. I believe, casually, that it is the 3 coins I put in my pocket yesterday. I have a belief, which I consider to be true because the 3 coins are there. I also have a completely rational, justified belief, that these are the three coins I put there myself yesterday. This belief, however, is false and this has nothing to do with the justification. Therefore, justification does not establish truth).
more than we think in epistemology because it provides consistencies with Socrates’ beliefs. Socrates is used as a ‘truth-board’ against which we examine our beliefs or as a filter to filter out the inconsistencies among our true beliefs; and this is as good as it gets.

However, elenchus is so much more. First of all, Nicholas White takes issue with Vlastos’ argument and particularly with the claim that Socrates considered his own belief set to be true. If we were to accept that Socrates is used as a filter for our belief system it would imply two things: (1) Socrates possesses knowledge of everything and is, at the end of the day, an omniscient know-all. Socrates needs to be a catholically dominant connoisseur in order for the elenchus to have results. As arguably discussed in Chapter 3, this is not the case. Socrates’ role in the process is entirely different. We read in *Theaetetus*:

> And the most important thing about my art is the ability to apply all possible tests to the offspring, to determine whether the young mind is being delivered of a phantom, that is, an error, or a fertile truth. For one thing I have in common with the ordinary midwives is that I myself am barren of wisdom. (*Theaetetus* 150c1-5).

Socrates, which has been substantiated as a unique educator who builds our intellectual character, plays a crucial role in our epistemic journey towards the truth. In the above quote he gives a very accurate explanation for his duty in the process: he is there to “test the offspring” and value whether the outcome is truthful or erroneous. Let us consider a parallelism and picture Socrates as a chief scientist in a laboratory. He is conducting experiments on chemistry with his fellow research team or his students, passing on to them the methodological process of the experiment, while searching for valuable experimental results. Socrates does not have the knowledge of all possible outcomes the experiments will show (otherwise there would be no need to conduct an experiment in the first place) nor does he conduct the experiment focusing blindly on the training of the team. He does care about the outcome; therefore, he orchestrates the process towards the right direction, but he cannot constantly

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33 White, 1995.

34 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 167.
guarantee fruitful results. Socrates’ role as a chief scientist of the team is that he is the only one in a position to evaluate whether the results of the experiments are faulty or accurate. If the experiment turns out to be successful, Socrates will be able to assess its success and move forward with the research. Similarly, he is needed in the belief-discerning process while we are under the practice of the elenchus, because he is the only one that can evaluate the outcome of the inquiry. We definitely are not – yet – in a state to self-evaluate our beliefs and, thus, we cannot depend entirely and from the very beginning on our own strengths and capacities to find out the truth about the good. We are in need of an educator as unique as Socrates to train our cognition towards knowledge of the good.

(2) The second implication stemming from the above claim (i.e. to use Socrates as a truth-filter for our beliefs) is that, if that were the case, Socrates would be always needed in the process and that he would be an irreplaceable facilitator. The ultimate goal of the Socratic method is to generate creative and independent thinkers that will be able to depend on their own strengths to curry on with the inquiry on the truth about the good. Scholars have accurately argued that the most crucial development of the Socratic method is that it leads to self-improvement. And although the common ideology is that self-improvement concerns morality, I argue that it is primarily an intellectual self-improvement with potential moral effects.\(^5^5\)

So, what is the method of Socratic elenchus? First of all, it is not a heuristic device but rather a discerning device for the truth. The elenchus does not generate truths that go outside the belief system of the interlocutor, but it does generate truths within the interlocutor’s belief system. Therefore, the assumption that Socrates always possesses all the truths on which the interlocutor compares and contrasts their beliefs is inaccurate or epistemically incorrect.\(^5^6\) The elenchus identifies contradictory beliefs within one’s belief system, which then the interlocutor has to discern; drop one of the contradicting beliefs. Normally, the interlocutor drops the belief which contradicts

\(^{55}\) See, for example: “[...] his (Socrates’) dialogue with his fellows is meant to have, and does have, the effect of evoking and assisting their efforts at moral self-improvement.” (Vlastos, 1991 p. 32).

\(^{56}\) Socrates doesn’t know everything. In my analysis his atopia (strangeness) is secure.
Socrates’ original position. Therefore, Socrates needed as someone who has the knowledge to guide the agent-interlocutor through this discerning process and value its outcome. Socrates’ method does not presuppose that he is the only one that can do this. A knowledgeable educator can play Socrates’ role and help the agent-student successfully through the elenctic process.

Scaltsas has argued on the elenctic method: “The elenctic method presupposes that the interlocutor believes both truths and falsehoods and by systematic applications of the elenchus the falsehoods are exposed and discarded. Therefore, it is not the aim of the elenchus to get the interlocutor to believe certain truths (after a didactic exercise), because the interlocutor already does believe them. Rather, it is getting the interlocutor to realize that he/she is committed to a contradiction, and to drop the one set of beliefs in favour of the other. [...] The point here is that knowledge, for Socrates, comes by recognition rather than by acceptance.”

Elenchus cultivates within the interlocutor the ability to weed out false beliefs continuously, so the filtering process leads to purification of true beliefs. It is namely a ‘purification process’ within our own existing beliefs. Like a water filter purifies and cleanses the water, elenchus filters our belief-system again and again until it is clearer and clearer each time. And this is the best form of knowledge we could ask for in a new-age systematic education which supports development of independent, creative thinkers. The elenchus, as part of the Socratic method, is a necessary tool for knowledge. Deliberation that goes on through elenchus is not sufficient for truth but definitely necessary, for, as already discussed, elenchus is not a truth generator but a discerning device for the truth. Rational deliberation is a necessary tool and it is a system of seeking knowledge through deliberative dialogue with our environment. For the truth is not a quality of one – or even a few – privileged.

Elenchus undoes certainty that we hold for our beliefs. Our confidence on our beliefs regarding the good is proven unjustified. The interlocutor-student is now in a state of bafflement (apuriosis) gifted with the natural state for desire of the good but disappointed and on the edge to quit the search for the real good. Socrates, as an Intellectual Character Builder, needs an epistemic tool that will further-motivate and intensify

within the agent-student the desire to keep searching for the truth about the good. The personalised motivational aspect is, evidently, inserted in his methodological process. His students need to be personally and emotionally stimulated to keep the desire for the knowledge of the real good alive and vibrant. I argue that the epistemic tool used at this stage is Socrates eironeia.

2.4 THE GADFLY EFFECT

Eironeia’s qualities and functions as a term, a philosophical concept and a speech act have been thoroughly discussed. I will present the last characteristics of this phenomenon as an epistemic tool, which shall underline the essentiality of eironeia in Socrates’ method. For Socratic eironeia as disavowel of knowledge and self-deprecation may have been reviewed for their educational potential but never under the perspective of building the students’ intellectual character towards the truth.

After the Socratic method employs elenches, the agent-student is, as discussed, left in a state of oblivion. The revealed inconsistencies within their belief system undoes certainty and although everyone desires the good, the desire for knowledge about the good needs to be further stimulated. Socrates needs something, a personal motivation, which will keep the interlocutor wanting to proceed with the inquiry and, eventually, reach knowledge of the truth about the good, for in a state of bafflement an agent-student can easily give up. The desire for knowledge of the good still exists but due to the mistrust and bafflement the elenchus has created, cognitive complacency (either for a brief or for a significant amount of time) is anticipated. Therefore, Socrates needs a tool that employs cognitive triggering, for he wants to keep the desire for the knowledge of the real good alive and well in his interlocutors’ inquiry process.

Let us assess what Socrates has to say for himself in the *Apology* 30e-31a:

I was attached to this city by the god – though it seems a ridiculous thing to say – as upon a great and noble horse which was somewhat sluggish because of its size and needed to be stirred up by a kind of gadfly. It is to fulfil some such function that I believe the god has placed me in the city. I never cease to
Socrates functions like a gadfly; he stings, he pricks, he spurs the interlocutor. In this way, he aims to ‘annoy’ the agent, in order to achieve motivation and desire for cognitive commitment to the inquiry of the truth. And he makes it personal. Eironeia, as self-deprecation, is the epistemic tool he uses for this incentive. At the state of bafflement Socrates, or any educator, could have given the answer in order to keep the students satisfied and avoid disappointment in their own cognitive skills after their confidence in their beliefs has been revoked. Had he given an answer though, the journey of this inquiry would have come to an end and the destination would have been revealed (although I reckon not properly reached). The journey, however, is a crucial presupposition for compelling cognitive results. ‘Building’ and ‘architecting’ the epistemic character of agents-students shall not be achieved by propositional answers. Socrates needs to keep the audience alert and at the edge of their sit for the successful development of the philosophical quest. He needs to allure them and further excite them in the inquiry in order to ‘train’ their intellect, otherwise he would have been a lecturer or even a sophist, a casual teacher advertising his own knowledge and aiming to convince and persuade the interlocutors-agents in order to exert his superiority.

Socrates’ ironic attitude does the exact opposite though. Socrates understates his own merits in the on-going discussion, he claims that he doesn’t have the relevant knowledge or that he is not brilliant or wise enough and encourages the interlocutor to carry on being sympathetic towards the philosopher’s deficient understanding. This is Socrates’ “habitual irony” (εἰρωνεία εἰρωνεία). Socrates undermines the authority (his authority) and his interlocutors are, therefore, smitten.

This aspect of the Socratic method (eironeia) has never been discussed for the essentiality and effectiveness it encompasses. The authority of the educator is challenged and questioned precisely when the agent-student feels hopeless (state of aporia). The educator demotes his authority to equalise himself to the student’s level (and in the case

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58 Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 28.
59 Rep. 337a3. For an analysis of the quote see Chapter 1, 2.2 ‘Irony in Plato’.
of Socrates even lower) and triggers the latter to intellectual commitment through the personalised motivational effect he creates. Undermining the authority in the classroom can have radically beneficial effects in the same manner. When the teacher claims they don’t have the answer or don’t possess the relevant knowledge to aid the student and, instead, asks for the student’s help to make them understand, the tables turn and the effect is twofold: (1) The students feel motivated to prove themselves worthy of the teacher’s trust and encouragement. They are not certain that they believe the teacher’s disavowal of knowledge, but this suspicion gets them excited and triggered to move further with the inquiry (‘What if the teacher really doesn’t know and I get to teach them something by finding the truth in the inquiry?’). The personal challenge to outdo the teacher in a classroom can have catalytic effects on the motivational enhancement of the students, exercising their emotional intelligence and forming their intellectual character. (2) The agent-students are now not stepping on the unstable ground the elenchus created for them. Having the reassurance of the authority that they are, too, lost in the inquiry and don’t have an answer, recreates for their confidence a more solid ground to continue in their search for the truth about the good. Socratic eironeia is – what I like to call – an antidote to intellectual complacency.

Eironeia is the motivational element that has been missing from the understanding of the eiron’s intentions. The eiron-educator aims to personalise and the motivation and further enhance the innate desire for knowledge the real good. As I have already determined, eironeia is a peculiar speech act, which encloses the eiron’s intention in the illocutionary act and aims to have the relevant perlocutionary effect; motivate the student towards epistemic enhancement. I shall hereafter introduce the term Socratic Challenge instead of Socratic method, as the first attempt to emphasize within it the significance of Socrates’ eironeia, which, along with all the features of the Socratic method (Socratic Intellectualism, dialectic, elenchus, discerning phenomenal from the real good etc.) pave the way towards intellectual self-improvement.

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60 I shall thoroughly argue on the emotional intelligence as well as the relationship between the authority and the student in Section 3 ‘The Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education’. The function of eironeia, as self-depreciation, in the classroom will be thoroughly unfolded in the last Section 3.2.3 ‘Socratic Emotional Intelligence’.
The Socratic Challenge is a novel and rather fruitful pedagogic methodology that shall be introduced in contemporary educational systems. My analysis will conclude with a methodical portrayal of a classroom dynamic and will bring Socrates’ tactic in modern systematic education under this new perspective.

2.4.1 The “Ideal” Audience

Socrates has been often criticised for not standardizing the audience with which he dialogued. We have witnessed interlocutions between him and credible, high-esteemed Athenians, such as Protagoras, as well as personalities that resembled comic caricatures, like Euthyphro. There seems to be a shared opinion amongst scholars according to which Socrates did not choose his audience wisely and, as a result, he carelessly allowed access to interlocutors with questionable moral character, jeopardising the (moral) conclusions of the dialogue. Nehamas argues: “Aristophanes may have claimed against him that, because of his intellectualism, Socrates would engage to conversation with anyone, whatever his moral character, and that his teaching could therefore easily lead to immorality”\(^\text{61}\). Similarly, Nussbaum claims that Socrates includes anyone really: “He entrusts the weapons of argumentation to anyone who will expose himself to teaching, without considering whether he is one of the people who will be likely to put the teaching to good use.”\(^\text{62}\)

I choose to endorse the inclusiveness of the Socratic approach as one of its greatest advantages. First of all, this is supplementary proof that Socrates kept the consistency of his method intact. He advocated that everyone desires the good. Consequentially, it wouldn’t have been fair or reasonable to reinforce a moral gradation within his

\(^{61}\) Nehamas, 1999 p. 46.

\(^{62}\) Nussbaum, 1980 p. 80. These last two accusations reach out to the criticism Socratic Intellectualism held as a whole, due to Socrates’ undivided attention towards the intellect (as opposed to the character, dispositions, habit, etc.). My thesis takes issue with the ongoing misinterpretation of Socrates’ tactics, particularly for character and dispositions. I have already argued that Socrates’ method is genuinely a method on the agent’s character, the intellectual character and, eventually, the moral character. By the end of the thesis I shall defend that, similarly, Socrates may have avoided explicit discussion on dispositions and emotions, but his method employs crucially emotional influence on the agent-student. I will also present my theory on future research regarding Socratic method and habituation.
interlocutors’ characters. Socrates’ belief is that whoever presents a ‘deficient’ moral character is a result of lack of knowledge between the real and the phenomenal good. I do not suggest that Socrates believed anybody he talked to was equally capable of becoming good (*eudaimon*) nor do I assume that everybody can attain the same degree of knowledge and understanding. Intellectualism does not presuppose that we all have the same capacities to acquire knowledge, only that we share the same desire for attaining it. I have already argued that desiring the good does not necessitate attaining the truth about the good. Nevertheless, the basis of our moral character should be considered equally entitled for attaining true knowledge. Therefore, Socrates is justified to refer to all types of interlocutors-agents.

In modern educational system, contemporary classroom models could use this technique in their benefit to include all students, regardless of their moral or intellectual background and dismissing favoritism. The *Socratic Challenge* is a ‘celebration’ to inclusiveness, proving that the teacher, having the appropriate tools, can educate and ‘form’ the students’ epistemic character focusing on each student’s skills and using them to their own advantage. Following John Dewey, who innovated in reforming contemporary systematic education (both for the teachers and the students), it appears that Socrates has offered a method through which we can train the students to have the full and ready use of all their own capacities for the greater good.63

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63 Dewey, 1925. John Dewey was an American philosopher, psychologist and educationalist whose contribution in Philosophy of Education has been substantial. He wrote extensively on educational reformation and his most insightful and momentous essays and articles, such as the aforementioned, are included in Dewey, 2010.
SECTION 3. THE SOCRATIC CHALLENGE IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

My aim in this Section is to arguably show that a novel interpretation of the Socratic method (the introduced Socratic Challenge) matches the insights of a new-age educational system, which fosters active thinkers instead of passive receivers of information and successfully promotes the students’ motivation to find the truth counting on their own skills and abilities.

3.1 INSTILLING SOCRATES’ METHOD IN CONTEMPORARY EDUCATION

Since the years of J. Dewey educational reformation has been a reality crucially affecting the roles of the student, the teacher and the educational institution.\(^64\) Innovative teaching perspectives would come to agitate the traditionalist approaches of education, which maintained that the duty of an educational system should be a passive and direct transfer of knowledge from the educator to the student propositionally. The more effective the reception of the information the more successful the teacher and his method. And, later on, D. Carr similarly argued that “it seems to have been a regular complaint of past and present educational philosophers that education has too often been focused upon the transmission of such useless or mere facts to young people in schools.”\(^65\) A new-age educational approach however, namely the constructivist approach, shall introduce teaching as a facilitated learning process, which targets the student’s character.

Educationalists like Dewey and Carr have focused on the formation of the character in education (both the character of the student and the character of the teacher). Dewey understood education as a means to an end; the end being social consciousness.\(^66\) He demonstrated that the importance of education does not rely on

\(^{64}\) For a more detailed reading see Dewey, 1966.
\(^{65}\) Attfield and Carr, 1991 p. 118.
\(^{66}\) See also Dewey, 1899; Dewey, 1997.
gaining content education nor should it revolve around the acquisition of a
predetermined set of skills. The purpose of education should refer to learning how to
live and train students to realise their own full potential by using their own skills for the
greater good, which, according to him, would be an ethical participation in society.
Carr, follows this thinking and argues for educational techniques that are indifferent
to truth transfer, promoting solely the formation of the moral character of the
students. They also both are particularly interested not only in the formation of a
students’ character through education but also in the norms that are followed by those
who profess in education, i.e. the teachers’ character. The significance of ‘teacher
education’ is present in contemporary system education as scholars understand the
effective cultivation of reflective, autonomous and ethical students to be the teacher’s
responsibility.

I want to parenthetically discuss that the responsibility of the educator is, indeed,
dubitably immense. However, I shall clarify that I do not endorse the claim that
Socrates (or any other teacher using his method) should be blindly blamed had a
student not achieved the desirable result. As already discussed, the intention of the
educator and the effect they have on the students, which are incorporated in the
illocution and perlocution of eironeia as a speech act, might not necessarily meet when
employing the Socratic challenge. The method is not a panacea guaranteeing
indubitably and catholically successful finds; that would be highly ambitious. Socrates
is ‘building’ the students’ intellectual character so that they will be epistemically
enhanced, motivated and confident to find truths on their own. The find of their search
is not the teacher’s responsibility. Let us think of a teacher in Mathematics. When a

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67 His works on moral education are both insightful and plenty: Carr and Steutel, 2005; Carr, 2003; Carr, 2005; Carr, 2018.

68 Especially, Carr, 2018 presents a rather knowledgeable study which employs contemporary neo-Aristotelian virtue theory and argues on the importance of character and virtue in professional practice in a wide range of human occupation, including teaching.

69 See Chapter 2. On the educator’s responsibility and speech acts we read in Gasparatou: “Emotions influence the whole speech act spectrum. They influence illocutions and perlocutions, for both the speaker’s and the audience’s evaluations, interpretations and reactions are crucial here. And interpretations are open.” (Gasparatou, 2018 p. 514). I will further comment on the emotional effect of eironeia as a speech act (see 3.2.3 ‘Socratic Emotional Intelligence’. Regarding Socrates, though, and the strong emotions he generated for his interlocutors I shall add: “And the more important the encounter is to you, the more you struggle with interpretations” (Gasparatou, 2018).
Chapter 4: Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education

A mathematician teaches their student a certain methodology to solve a problem or prove a theory, the result the student will come up with is not necessarily accurate. The teachers, of course, cannot possibly teach them how to solve every single mathematical problem in order to secure their students’ results. Even if this were possible, this tactic would not create confident, independent agents that could carry on in solving Math problems on their own. I will seize the opportunity here and make use of this parallelism with Mathematics. In Chapter 3, I argue that Socrates’ subject-teaching (i.e. morality, virtue, aretē) does not correspond to anarchy or subjectivism. If we consider Mathematics, the teacher gives us a methodology to prove certain things. The results could differ from one another or from the desirable answer, but they couldn’t be irrelevant (i.e. conclude to a find that concerns the weather). Similarly, the finds resulting from Socrates’ method cannot be irrelevant or subjective or conform to anarchy. Rationality of the community (endoxa) provide intangible limits to our search.\(^{70}\)

Now, even though the aforementioned new-age educational approaches innovate in terms of their teaching practices and their focus on cultivating the students’ character, they address the moral character exclusively. Dewey mentions: “They (the teachers) have a quick, sure and unflagging sympathy with the operations and process of the minds they are in contact with. Their own minds move in harmony with those of others, appreciating their difficulties, entering into their problems, sharing their intellectual victories.” (my emphasis).\(^{71}\) The aim is the moral character and the target is to cultivate morally enhanced students to be active member of the society. However, his wording fairly implies that the intellectual function is a presupposition for the students’ moral enhancement. The teacher aims to the intellect (the mind) and the subject of the teaching shall reach the morality. Socrates has already reduced morality to rationality and intellectualism in his method. The Socratic approach implies that nurturing the growth of the students’ intellectual character is in alliance with fostering their moral character, since intellectualism advocates that everyone desires the good. Education should, therefore, aim towards aiding the students with the proper epistemic tools that

\(^{70}\) See Chapter 3, 3.2 ‘Aristotle’s endoxa (Second Criterion of Objectivity)’.

\(^{71}\) Dewey, 2010 p. 36 (from his essay To Those Who Aspire to the Profession of Teaching, 1938).
will build within them the dispositions to seek and acquire epistemic goods, such as knowledge of the good.\footnote{For instance, Pritchard has argued: “We don’t just want an education to provide children with a body of true beliefs that they can call upon, but also to provide children with the cognitive skills to be able to determine truths for themselves” (Pritchard, 2013 p. 237). See also Battaly: We want our students to become skilled in deductive and inductive reasoning, to become open-minded, conscientious, and intellectually courageous, and to care about truth for its own sake. In short, we want our students to become intellectually virtuous” in Battaly, 2006 p. 191. And Bachr: “conceiving of education as properly aimed at nurturing growth in intellectual character virtues provides a much better way of capturing the putative meaning and purpose of teaching and learning” in Bachr, 2013 p. 112.}

And it is only very recently that contemporary research started examining the epistemic character and the potential incorporation of epistemic virtue in education.\footnote{That is after E. Sosa reintroduced the concept of intellectual virtues (Sosa, 1980).} Mason claims: “We must be motivated to pursue truth, and only if we have the right motives shall we discover it.”\footnote{Mason, 2010 p. 98.} This motivation is, finally, detected in the Socratic Challenge and the epistemic tools used when practicing it (such as eironeia).

### 3.2 The Socratic Challenge as an Epistemic & Educational Tool for Emotional Motivation

As already discussed, Socratic Intellectualism holds Socrates accountable for his indifference towards the character, the dispositions and habituation of the agent-students. It is for this reason that scholars have vividly criticised Socrates’ method as a non-effective or applicable educational method in teaching the young, for it celebrates the intellect and the intellect only.\footnote{See Burnyeat, 1980; Nussbaum, 1980; Nehamas, 1999 pp. 27–82; and my analysis previously in this Chapter.}

First of all, it has been proven that the accusation regarding the character cannot possibly apply. Socrates’ method did aim the interlocutor’s character; the intellectual character. Now, in addition, I dare support that Socrates may have avoided explicit discussion on dispositions and emotions, but his method as interpreted in this thesis, namely the Socratic Challenge, employs crucial emotional influence on the agent-student and affects manifestly their emotional intelligence. The Socratic Challenge overall uses epistemic tools to develop the interlocutors’ cognitive virtue: the intellectual disposition of...
agents to desire the truth. Socrates did pay attention to dispositions. First, by acknowledging that everyone desires the good and then by employing a method that focused on developing our cognitive disposition, the right cognitive disposition for intellectual virtues (desire for knowledge and desire to acquire truth). Everyone desires the good and the Socratic Challenge keeps this desire alive.

3.2.1. Eironeia as a Speech Act in Formal Education

The current interpretation innovates by arguing on the essentiality of the speech act eironeia (i.e. Socratic irony as self-depreciation), which Socrates uses as an epistemic tool to cultivate dispositions. Before I examine the dispositional effects eironeia evokes and outline its practice on the students and its function in a classroom I want to briefly revisit eironeia’s quality as a speech act, focusing now on speech acts’ utilization in systematic education. Following Gasparatou that Austin’s speech act theory should be reassessed and treated as an educational theory, I argue that the unique speech act of eironeia asks for a similar treatment. The connection between the two domains (speech act theory and education), when examining their key features, even seems transparent. Austin talks about three main factors in the speech act’s performative function: “(a) the speaker’s intentions when uttering the sentence (b) the following of certain conventions depending on the context, and (c) speaker’s authority.”. Gasparatou detects all three aspects in formal education contexts, i.e. that the teacher has the intention to teach and the student the intention to learn, that formal education is by definition a conventional process with certain obligations and rules and that both teachers and students have certain authority in a classroom. Consequently, an attempt to admit the Socratic Challenge in a classroom is reinforced under the perspective of a contemporary correlation between speech acts and education, precisely due to

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76 I found the following quote really useful to grasp the importance of the educational character of speech acts: “Educators are transmitters of information, facilitators for developing knowledge and skills, performers, researchers, professionals, morality coaches, authority figures, role-models etc. Each of these roles is vague and complex. Yet, any educator complies with all such roles easily, with their every speech act” (Gasparatou, 2018 p. 511). In the above list I would merely add ‘epistemic coaches’.

77 Gasparatou, 2018

78 Ibid.
eironeia’s speech act character. And although, at first, connecting irony to education might have seemed curious, it is eventually proven that this specific understanding and function of ‘Socratic irony’ enhances the connection. The refinement of Socratic eironía, which makes it acceptable to a classroom, lies within the eiron’s motive, in this case, to aid agents-students pursue the truth.\textsuperscript{79}

\hspace{1cm} 3.2.2 Epistemic Dispositions & Education

Now, the Socratic Challenge targets the cognitive character of the interlocutor. However, we also witnessed that the way to form the cognitive character is through training dispositions to acquire epistemic goods and develop the student’s rational desires (such us knowledge for the truth). We read in Gasparatou: “Over the past decades, there has been an ongoing debate on whether education should prioritise students’ emotional flourishing or whether it should only aim at their cognitive development.”\textsuperscript{80} I reckon that the Socratic Challenge, when employed methodically can combine both. The dispositional effect, though, shall be twofold: (1) generate emotions between the teacher and the student (how the student feels for the teacher and vice versa), and (2) generate emotions within the student for knowledge itself (developing the students’ rational desires).

(1) Regarding the emotions between the students and the teacher, it is a common truth that in the Platonic dialogues both Socrates and, more evidently, the interlocutors are emotionally charged. Socrates’ emotions are incorporated within his intentions, which in the case of the eiron are incorporated in his motive to effect cognitive development and attract the students into inquiry.\textsuperscript{81} As for Socrates’ audience-students the emotions

\textsuperscript{79} For more on Socratic eironía’s peculiar function as a speech act see Chapter 2, Section 2 ‘Socratic Eironía as a Speech Act’.

\textsuperscript{80} Gasparatou, 2016 p. 319.

\textsuperscript{81} “Emotions authorize or de-authorize. Especially in educational contexts, you need a certain set of intentions and emotions in order to perform educational acts. Being a teacher comes with a recommended emotional repertoire. For example, I have to care about my students; it is ok to love them; it is forbidden to fall in love with them. Step out of this prescription and you are hardly recognized as a teacher.” (Gasparatou, 2018 p. 513).
Chapter 4: Socratic Challenge in Contemporary Education

towards the philosopher-teacher are significantly strong, whether good or bad. The majority of the platoic corpus presents characters that either love Socrates or are enraged by him or feel annoyed by his tactics. It is actually fairly rare to detect interlocutors indifferent towards Socrates.  

(2) Now, I shall support that the emotional span is expanded further from the teacher-student relationship to the student-knowledge relationship. Socratic Challenge as a methodology uses epistemic tools which promote emotional intelligence and target principally the students’ cognitive development. Eironeia in particular challenges the addressee both emotionally and intellectually. I have argued that eironeia works as a ‘sting’, after the interlocutor reaches the state of bafflement and aims to create dispositions to further pursue the truth. The students were left in limbo and it is within the teacher’s responsibilities to get them out of the state of cognitive uncertainty. An eiron-educator shall willingly demote himself against the agents-students, only to motivate them into further inquiry for the truth. Undermining the authority triggers certain emotions within the agent-student, who feels more confident and stimulated to outdo the teacher in a classroom and challenged into some sort of implicit, benign antagonism with Socrates. This is precisely the reason why I perceive eironeia as an essential epistemic tool, which generates emotions for knowledge and cognitive development. It is the character of eironeia as a unique speech act that secures this reading of dispositional effects for “language is a very powerful tool for the expression and manipulation of emotions”.

82 Take for example Alcibiades in the Symposium who first is outraged: “Good lord, what’s going on here? It’s Socrates! You’ve trapped me again! You always do this to me—all of a sudden you’ll turn up out of nowhere where I least expect you!” (Sym. 213c1-2); then he is embarrassed and feels ashamed: “Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame” (Sym. 216b2); and then he appears desperate for Socrates’ love: “you can have me, my belongings, anything my friends might have. Nothing is more important to me than becoming the best man I can be, and no one can help me more than you to reach that aim” (Sym. 218d1-3). Cooper and Hutchinson, 1997 p. 495,498,500.

83 Gasparatou, 2016 p. 321. It is striking how Austin omits entirely emotions from his study on speech act theory.
3.2.3 Socratic Emotional Intelligence

Introducing Socrates as an *Intellectual Character Builder* and as a philosopher who focuses on developing the intellectual character to desire intellectual virtues, would justify the term that we have been so far experiencing Socratic Virtue Epistemology. Of course, Socrates did not introduce the concept of Virtue Epistemology nor that of the *Intellectual Character Builder*. I have already argued that he couldn’t possibly have, since both theories were developed years later by his successor, Aristotle. However, this did not prevent him from employing this method to his interlocutors-students, not unconsciously or by accident, but merely missing the relevant terminology.

I introduce *Socratic Challenge* as over and above Socratic Virtue Epistemology, exercising Socratic Emotional Intelligence on the students, to aid and motivate them in their pursuit of epistemic goods. For *Socratic Challenge* can be understood as a paramount epistemic tool, which aids his Virtue Epistemology pursuit of the truth. In this tactic the epistemic tool of *eironeia* as a speech act is irreplaceable, for, as proven so far, it is the key feature which generates the desirable dispositions. It is the main reason why the interlocutors are challenged and motivated to seek and learn on their own. So far, Socratic method has been decoded the in numerous ways with a plethora of interpretations. However, the addition of *eironeia’s* function as the self-depreciation of the authority with educational, epistemic and dispositional motives is the one which unfolds it altogether. The *Socratic Challenge* is now an epistemically and educationally powerful method, which both teaches intellectual virtue and prepares the agent to an emotional surrender to their cognitive desires.

Socrates achieves 2 breakthroughs with his method: 1) He moved from lecturing on virtue to actually teaching virtue, and 2) He did not teach conceptually but dispositionally. Socrates did not deliver lessons and when he talked about virtue, he did not argue for it, but he practiced it, ‘training’ his students as a coach does to an athlete. For the method of the coach does not use arguments or lectures on how to be a good athlete. The coach puts athletes straight into the field training them under his

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84 To be precise, Aristotle did not introduce the ‘intellectual character’ either. Only the ‘moral character’.
guidance, until they are able to run and practice on their own. Similarly, Socrates did not lecture his students on the benefits of being virtuous or on what virtue is, trying to convince them. He would draw them with him in the philosophical inquiry and ‘train’ them to improve towards achieving the truth about virtue on their own.

Socrates would ‘train’ his students’ rational desires ‘architecting’ their intellectual character. As an educator he took over the role of an ‘epistemic coach’, leaving behind a unique method for his successors to employ and practice. Socrates was the very first Intellectual Character Builder.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

This Chapter has shown that Socrates is not and never should have been considered neither a conventional teacher nor a teacher of morality. Socrates is the very first Intellectual Character Builder, who aimed to ‘train’ the students’ desire for knowledge and encouraged them to seek for truths on their own. This is Socrates’ Virtue Epistemology.

The effect of the Socratic method lies within eironeia’s character as a speech act, which promotes the demotion of the authority’s level, exercising the interlocutor’s Emotional Intelligence. Socratic Challenge can be a ground-breaking technique in modern teaching. When engaging in the Socratic Challenge, the classroom can work on inquiring truths whistle the educator can focus on facilitating the quest towards the right direction, valuing the inquiry’s outcomes.

Socrates is putting method to desire; the desire to know the truth about the good. And this signifies a method that can combine intellectual, moral and emotional commitment.
The Socratic Challenge: Reinventing Socratic Irony’s Educational Character
This thesis is shaped around a defense of Socrates’ eironeia as an epistemic tool with fruitful educational applications and a portrayal of Socrates not as a teacher of moral philosophy but as an *Intellectual Character Builder*.

In this regard, I have methodically worked towards proving that irony and ‘Socratic irony’ are two different conceptions and, therefore, irony’s definitional attributions in modern literature should not coincide with Socrates’ eironeia. My line of argumentation initiates by proving that ‘Socratic irony’ does not entail the notions of deception, mock humility or feigned pretense, as commonly anticipated for the concept of irony. ‘Socratic irony’ (or eironeia) is best described by Aristotle, when the latter attributes to the eiron Socrates was, the qualities of a self-depreciator, a character who understates his own merits and undersells his knowledge and wit. First Plato and then Aristotle, describe an ennobled and refined eiron when addressing Socrates and his ironic tactic. Establishing eironeia’s subtle character has been integral for the purposes of this venture. For a justification of a technique that implies deception or has any reprehensible connotation would simply not suffice as educationally appropriate.

I have subsequently elaborated on the reasons why Socrates’ eironeia is favored with an ennobled interpretation focusing on the function of irony as a speech act. Speech acts signify that all utterances in our language are intertwined with a performative profile, which affects the behavior of the addressee. The perlocution of eironeia as a speech act embraces the eiron’s intentions and motives, which, in the case of Socrates,
educational. Socrates is ‘performing’ self-depreciation in order to epistemically provoke the addresses and allure them into an advanced inquiry.

The thesis advanced towards a further defense regarding Socrates' knowledge and his adequacy as a teacher. Chapter 3 has arguably proven that Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge is neither honest nor pure. I have attributed Socrates’ embrace of his ignorance and incompetence as a teacher to the following two reasons: (1) The very nature of morality and (2) Socratic Intellectualism. I have first argued that Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge does not stem from the fact that Socrates was ignorant of the truth about aretē. It is the particularistic nature of Virtue Ethics (as discussed by Aristotle) that prevent him from being a conventional teacher. Since moral truths are not governed by catholic, universal rules, Socrates’ subject teaching couldn’t have been taught propositionally or transmitted from the educator to the student as a solid piece of knowledge. Socrates admitted his ignorance to the questions asked because his knowledge was of no use to his interlocutors. They would have to find their own moral truths through inquiry. The Chapter proceeded to support the non-subjective nature of Virtue Ethics through Aristotle’s Function Argument and his theory on endoxa. Maintaining an objectivity criterion of virtue has been proven crucial for the effective function of Socrates’ method (eironeia included).

Socratic Intellectualism has been discussed as the second reason behind Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge. Socrates has been misunderstood as a teacher of moral education when, in fact, he protests that morality cannot be taught. Since he demonstrates that everyone desires the good, there is no moral knowledge to teach. Socrates’ method targets the intellect of his students-agents and the outline of his technique has proven exactly that. Socratic eironeia’s role in this method is epistemically crucial, for it works as a unique motivator for pursuing the truth. Socrates has put method to desire and has reduced morality to rationality. He has been determined as an Intellectual Character Builder, a peculiar educator who targets our cognitive character in the pursuit of aretē. His ironic attitude works as an underestimation of the authority, inciting the students’ Emotional Intelligence. This thesis has shown that eironeia affects our emotions and Socrates performs it in a way that these emotions will be orchestrated towards desiring knowledge. The Socratic Challenge is established as a philosophical term.
that encapsulates all the unique functions of Socrates’ method (intellectualism, dialectic, elenchus, eironeia) and is defended as a pioneer epistemic and educational methodology. This thesis concludes by demonstrating that the Socratic Challenge can be prominently added in contemporary Formal Education.

Socrates worked methodically using his ‘habitual irony’ to train our intellect towards the ‘improvement of our soul’. Maybe he didn’t teach moral truths directly but he ‘trained’ our cognition to desire them and to effectively pursue them. Maybe Socrates was deeply inspired and affected by his own mother, whose name seems prophetic: Phainaretē (Φαιναρέτη); she who brings virtue to light.
Socratic Challenge: Reinventing Socratic Irony’s Educational Genius
Translations used for Plato’s Dialogues


Translations used for Aristotle’s Works


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