Orality and Philosophy

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We have mostly no problems in calling the Presocratics or the early Plato philosophers. In my paper, however, I shall point out that we should be careful in designating them as philosophers since their mere designation as philosophers might distort – because of some determinations involved in our concept of philosophy – the interpretation of their actual thought and social activity.

In the first part of my paper I am dealing with three approaches to the Presocratics in order to delineate a new interpretational approach to them. In the second and third part I shall proceed to Parmenides and the early Plato, respectively.

I.1. Three Accounts of the Presocratics

Let us open by examining three possible accounts concerning the Presocratics and the origin of philosophy. As to the Milesians, Vernant in his paper “Les origines de la philosophie” begins by first placing them in the context of the archaic culture that is oral. Since orality involves a complex of mental procedures, and since the Milesians –in Vernant’s view – represent another “kind of thought”, he concludes that there is a “radical innovation” in them, by which he means philosophy.1 Once philosophy has emerged, it continues to form a specific rationality, which is clearly separated from other rationalities, particularly from that of orality. This new rationality develops according to its intrinsic rules from a ‘theory’ of phusis in the Milesians to a ‘theory’ of being in the Eleatics. Although Vernant is always ready to look for (political, social, economical or religious) conditions which might account for its advent, he nonetheless insists on its continuity and autonomy.2 Once emerged philosophy constitutes a peculiar rationality manifesting itself in a theoretical inquiry into the nature of things. Hence, on this account, the Presocratics belongs firmly to the history of philosophy.

Another account is to be found in Havelock (“The Linguistic Task of the Presocratics”). Unlike Vernant, he does not see the Presocratics as a part of the history of philosophy. Since they “composed in a condition of increasing tension between the demands of the ear and the new possibilities afforded by the eye”3, he considers the essential split between orality and literacy, affecting the form and content of their works, as a substantial trait of their thought. That is why the Presocratics represent a stage different from that of philosophy understood as metaphysics and launched by Plato.4 If we
take into account (for the present only preliminarily) some aspects relevant to the
Presocratics (e. g., gradual and rather slow penetrating of writing into the oral culture;
problems concerning the form and content of their works; non-existence of the term
philosophy, etc.), Havelock’s account that separates the Presocratics from the history of
philosophy seems more appropriate than Vernant’s.

But his account has some problems as well. It will be useful to look more closely at
Havelock’s line of reasoning: Since in the oral cultures language serves as the only me-
dium to preserve the identity of a society and to store its practical and technical infor-
mation, and since it can be preserved only “in the individual memories of persons”, lan-
guage has to “meet two basic requirements, both of which are mnemonic. It must be
rhythmic, to allow the cadence of the words to assist the task of memorization; and it
must tell stories rather than relate facts: it must prefer mythos to logos.”5 These re-
quirements are at the same time restrictions because this kind of language is “unfriend-
ly to abstracted and conceptual speech”; that is, the possibilities as to what can be said
or thought are limited. Havelock’s principal aim in his paper is to present the Preso-
cratics as overcoming this oral language, as being primarily interested in a kind of lin-
guistic inquiry or “in pursuit of a new vocabulary”. He explains these linguistic or con-
ceptual innovations (or, in general, their thought as such) by means of a new
technology of communication which was brought about by the written word. He sug-
gests that the written word served as a
\[\text{direct}\]
“prompting mechanism”6 of linguistic,
conceptual and mental changes and “tended already to separate what was described
from the spoken speech of the describer. It rendered the logos in which it was written
an artifact, an object separate from the describer’s own consciousness.”7

The gravest problem of Havelock’s account is its speculativeness, above all his no-
tion of the “prompting mechanism” of writing.8 But there still remains another prob-
lem. Since, on Havelock’s interpretation, the Presocratics attacked the traditional
idioms of language or “common sense” in general,9 striving thus to devise a new lan-
guage, they are represented as a relatively homogenous movement; that is, despite all
the differences in the doctrines of the particular Presocratics, they had a common aim
which unified them as a homogenous movement and which, at the same time, distin-
guished them from all others. In sum, although this account that separates the Preso-
cratics from the history of philosophy seems more appropriate than Vernant’s, their as-
sumed homogenous movement may be called in question.

Let us now consider Tejera’s account of the Presocratics. Tejera begins by reviewing
our Presocratic fragmentary tradition to conclude: “It is only the post-Enlightenment
presumption that assertive prose is the medium most suited to rational thinking that
predisposes scholars to believe, on insufficient evidence, that the sixth-century Mile-
sians wrote prose. Rather, the evidence now available about the communicative activi-
ty of the period makes it probable that, like their later colleagues – Xenophanes, Her-
akleitos, and Parmenides – they conveyed their knowledge or insights in poetry, or, in
the case of Herakleitos, something more like poetry than what we think of as prose.”10

Now, if the Milesians expressed themselves in a poetic manner, it is probable that what
they said is not “theoretical but practical” [my emphases] inquiries, and so [they] were
not ‘nature-philosoph[er]’ after all, in spite of our college handbooks and histories of
Greek philosophy.”11
On this account, the assumed autonomy and continuity of the Presocratic thought is abandoned. What becomes now the important issue in the interpretation of the Presocratics is not to establish their difference from the (oral) culture but, instead, to present them (or their goals) in accordance with other representatives of the contemporary culture, e.g., with poets. “The earliest Presocratics, like the Lyric poets, lived within but were reacting against the Homeric-Hesiodic framework of traditional values, epic language, and assumptions. (...) The oral-aural habits of communication inherited from Homer and Hesiod had to be modified as well as used by them.”

I.2. Orality as the Field of Power

As the interpretations of the Presocratics discussed above have pointed out, orality plays an important role in their understanding. Let us now briefly deal with orality. Before writing becomes the only medium of how to preserve and convey the whole system of knowledge which is necessary for operating a society, that knowledge (primarily technical and moral knowledge) must be communicated orally. Similar to our literate societies where there are institutions fostering transmission of knowledge like schools or libraries, in oral societies public performance of poetry constitutes one of the most important oral institutions for its transmission. Hence the function of poetry in oral societies is not aesthetic – as in our literate societies – but paideutic, that is, it is the place where indoctrination or enculturation takes place. Since it was Homeric poems which were the most prominent subject of public performances, it is to conclude that “to convey an oral paideia was the fundamental cultural purpose of Homeric speech.”

Now, it is this oral paideutic setting dominated by Homer in which most Greek ‘texts’ – including the Presocratic ones – had to enter until Plato’s days. “[T]he control of Homer over Greek paideia is still firmly in place in the society disclosed to us in Plato’s early dialogues.” It is thus to be expected that those texts have paideutic practical character. To quote Tejera once again: “The earliest Presocratics, like the Lyric poets, lived within but were reacting against the Homeric-Hesiodic framework of traditional values, epic language, and assumptions.” Only in Plato’s days writing began to replace old oral habits of communication and new institutions like Plato’s or Aristotle’s school, which depended on writing, were established. To reiterate, until Plato’s days, written texts were not designed for silent reading with comprehension, for writing was used as “a mnemonic aid for the recollection of what was to be communicated orally than a text to be read in its own right.”

In order to appreciate orality for the interpretation of the Presocratics, a new term is to be introduced: the field of power. It should not only plead for a more complex analysis of Presocratic texts including their (practical) role in society, but it helps us expose a bias in the understanding of the Presocratics. They are interpreted by means of a one-dimensional, line-like image of a single autonomous movement or rationality which by itself suggests a gradual causal development. By interpreting the Presocratics, however, it is first necessary to place them in the field of power, which means pointing out their relations (not primarily to one another but rather) to oral institutions or other representatives of oral society like poets, sages, statesmen. If there is a connection between them (i.e., the Presocratics), it is to be described – traced like a path on the map; it can be the result of analysis but not its assumption.
Whereas it has been so far a habit to interpret the Presocratics within the history of philosophy beginning with Thales, their essential and constituting connections with the oral culture are now to be emphasized; it is the language they used and their practical concerns (see Tejera’s account) which place them firmly in the contemporary culture. The diachronic approach interpreting the Presocratics within a continuous line has to be given up on behalf of a synchronic interpretation placing them in the field of power. In other words, on the theoretical level the term field of power should serve as a counterpart to, and replace, that of the history of philosophy.

Finally, we have to reconsider our calling the Presocratics philosophers. Since our notion of philosophy entails lots of connotations, we are in danger that by the mere designation of a thinker as a philosopher we impose upon him some determinations that are strange to him. If we take into account that philosophy was established only in the Phaedo – where Plato conceives of philosophy as a lonely living at the edge of society devoted fully to a private theoretical inquiry into the nature of things –, we should stop associating philosophy as such with times before the Phaedo. (To reiterate, this Platonic definition is more or less present behind what we understand by philosophy in the Presocratics.) For the mere designation of someone as a philosopher can distort his position in the field of power all along; in other words, this designation makes some preliminary determination of how to proceed to and interpret his thought and activity. (Since philosophy – as conceived of in Plato’s Phaedo – suggests a lonely living on the edge of society implying a private inquiry, it might ignore the actual social role of a Presocratic, which actually could be that of a reforming poet, and thus even distort what he intended to say. Note that, on the common view as found for example in Vernant’s account, the Presocratics are understood only as being engaged in a theoretical inquiry into the nature of things, which entails a peculiar social role as well, that of (searching) outsiders.)

To be sure, it could be objected that all depends on our definition of philosophy and that we can, in turn, conceive of philosophy in such (general) terms so as to skirt those inappropriate determinations. Still, the point in calling the Presocratics philosophers does not primarily concern their (proper) designation but their interpretation. For, despite our definition of philosophy, this Platonic concept of philosophy is so influential and authoritative that we may be never in a position to conceive of (ancient) philosophy without those Platonic connotations, that is, the designation ‘philosophy’ might never be neutral enough to suppress the Platonic connotations.

In what follows I shall be concerned with two thinkers who are generally considered to be the most prominent philosophers in Greece in order to show that they are not philosophers (or at least not in an obvious sense): with Parmenides and the early (or Socratic) Plato. I shall point out that, as their texts show, they were not primarily (if at all) interested in a kind of abstract-theoretical speculation, but, on the contrary, they sought to enter the paideutic-religious system of Greek culture in order to improve or replace it.
II. Parmenides

If we take into account that Parmenides wrote a poem in which he used the Homeric language, and which was staged as the revelation of a Goddess, the aim of the poem seems to have been to enter the contemporary religious paideutic system or – more specifically – to overcome and replace the authority of Homeric poems. But this practical paideutic role of his poem suggested by its form seems to contrast with its content, for the poem is generally considered to be concerned with a highly theoretical doctrine: that of ontology.

This discrepancy between the form and the content is mostly ignored by assuming that the poem was designed for a small group of devotees, who would have been able to follow its highly abstract ontological expositions. That the wide audience of oral performances would have misunderstood the sophisticated ontological argument seems undeniable; it suffices to consider the difficulties which the scholars of today have in establishing its precise form in the poem. When, moreover, we take into consideration the variety of ontological arguments found by the scholars in the poem, it is hard to believe that the poem might have been – in this form – designed for public performances. However, since we are completely lacking historical evidence concerning the small group of devotees or even a kind of school, it seems more appropriate to abandon the assumption that the poem is concerned with ontology and try rather to make its content accord with the paideutic character suggested by its form. See also what Have-lock says about the audience control.

II.1. Preliminary Considerations concerning the Structure of the Poem

Let us begin by examining the usual structure of the poem. The poem is generally considered to be divided into three parts: the Proem, the aletheia-, and doxa-part. This division is closely combined with the tree ways. Verses B 1.28–30 of the Proem [“Meet it is that thou shouldst learn all things, as well the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth, as the opinions of mortals” (trans. Kirk and Raven)] suggest the two ways according to which the poem is divided into two parts: the one is concerned with the truth or being (the so-called aletheia-part, B 2 – B 8), and the other with human world (the so-called doxa-part). In B 2.3 and B 2.5 another alternative of the ways seem to occur: “the one way, that it is and cannot not-be// the other, that it is-not and needs must not-be” (trans. Kirk and Raven). The first way corresponds to the one of B 1.30, but the second one, which appears to assert non-being, is supposed to be established by denying the first way; hence it seems different from that of B 1.30.

Now, the division between the aletheia-, and doxa-part is not problematic since both parts are clearly separated by B 8.50–52. It is, however, possible to question the division between the Proem (understood as the fragment B 1) and the aletheia-part (B 2 – B 8). This strict division seems to be justified by the ontological understanding of the poem and the assumption of the three ways. In so far as ontology is concerned, there is nothing philosophically relevant in B 1; the subject of the Proem seems to be only the metaphorical description of a journey and the formal division of the poem into two parts mentioned at the end of the Proem. On this account, the actual ontological discussion is launched only in B 2.
The division between B 1 and B 2 seems further supported by the three ways. It is assumed that the two ways mentioned in the Proem (B 1.29–30) are different from those discussed in B 2. Nevertheless, this assumption is not inevitable at all. For if we consider that both fragments were likely to stand closely to one another in the original poem (we may even assume that B 2 followed immediately B 1), it is not so evident that the two alternatives (B 1.29–30 and B 2) which, moreover, are represented by means of similar grammatical structure should be different. If we take into account the oral reception (and it is a fact that the Parmenides' poem was designed for reciting and not for reading) of the Parmenides' poem, it is more probable that the two alternatives are the same.

But if the two alternatives are the same, there seems to be no dividing line between B 1 and B 2 and, moreover, there seem to be only the two ways in the poem. As to the three ways, another place that seems to testify to the assumption of the three ways is B 6.3. Its interpretation, however, rests on how we supplement the lacuna at the end of this verse. If we choose Diels' solution *eirgo*, three ways are to be assumed; if, on the other hand, we choose Cordero's proposition *arxei*, which is more appropriate, there are only two ways in the poem.

In general it is to be said that the usual structure of the poem seems improbable against the background of oral reception. For the means of dividing a text – at the very beginning – into (two) parts, which are discussed separately, is characteristic for a written text rather than for an oral one. Oral texts use another means of structuring or constructing, e.g. that of repetition. We may further add that, on the usual interpretation, there is a real confusion of ways in the poem. For whereas the so-called *aletheia*-part should discuss *eon* or the issues that are connected with the first way, it is astonishing that in B 6 and B 7 we encounter the way "on which mortals who know nothing wander" (B 6.4; trans. L. Tarán).

II.2. New Structure of the Poem

These preliminary considerations of the structure of the poem justify and invite us to elaborate its new structure. I suggest dividing the poem into four parts according to the two ways. The first part, the Proem, does not fully coincide with fragment B 1. In my opinion the Proem ends where the Goddess starts speaking – in B 1.23. If the poem consists (as it is acknowledged) of the short description of the journey of Parmenides and of the expositions of the Goddess, there is no reason to dismiss the clear division suggested by the Goddess' beginning to speak and, instead, to see the Proem to be marked off from the rest of the poem by such an incidental hint as is our fragmentary preservation. The Proem is constructed according to the binary structure that is staged by means of the transition from the night to the light (the daughters of the sun leave the realm of night, convey into the light, throw back the veils suggesting the night; there are here the gates of the ways of night and day etc.).

In fact, it would be astonishing if this clear binary structure suggesting the two ways were not exploited in the further expositions. The binary structure occurs also in B 1.26–28a; B 1.29–30; B 2. 3, 5; B 6; B 7 and B 8.16–18. Hence I take the two ways to be the principal theme of the poem according to which it is clearly structured and constructed. (In this way, the poem will meet the requirements of oral reception because the
– alternative of the – two ways will be always present for the listener by way of constant repetition.)

After the motif of the two ways has been hinted at in the Proem (cf. also the ways of night and day in B 1.11), it is further elaborated in the second part (B 1.23 – B 7). As follows from B 1.29–30, the one way is connected with truth or eon, whereas the second is connected with the world. This part serves as a confrontation between both ways. But we shall only later see how this confrontation precisely operates.

The third part, starting clearly in B 8.1–2, where the Goddess announces to proceed to the first way (hos estin), is concerned with eon. The subject of the fourth part, which is clearly separated from the preceding one by B 8.50–52, is the human world.

II.3. The Fragment B 2

It is now necessary to provide an interpretation of B 2. But it is, first of all, to be considered that we are interpreting an (oral) poem in which one might not expect to find abstract or logical argument; for it is characteristic and constitutive for an (oral) poem that it uses polysemies, associations, evocations, in a word, strategies that are not argumentative. As to the very interpretation of B 2, there are two problems: subject for esti and its meaning. I suggest to take hodos to be the subject for esti in B 2.3, 5 and esti to be used in a veridical sense. But unlike Kahn who at once connects the veridical meaning with the (onto)logical speculation, I see it merely as a stylistic means to stress something as true – it is constructed according to the usual phrase esti tauta. In B 2.3, 5 Parmenides thus speaks about two ways that are characterized as true or untrue, respectively. The translation of these verses would be as follows: ‘The one way that it (the way) is true and that it is impossible for it (the way) to be untrue; the other that it (the way) is not true and that it is necessary for it (the way) to be untrue.’ But because of the triple occurrence of esti or einai, the meaning of these verses seems to be more complex than to characterize the two ways as true or untrue. It should evoke eon or me eon and so to make the firm connection between the two ways and eon or me eon, respectively. It is clear that given this double function of both verses (both to characterize the two ways as true or untrue and to connect them with eon or me eon) it is not possible to provide their unambiguous translation. (For the ultimate meaning of both verses see part II.5.)

II.4. Parmenides’ Conception of eon

But if we interpret fragment B 2 in the way proposed above, it is a question of how to account for eon. For Parmenides is thought to arrive at his conception of eon by means of a deduction from esti, and it is B 2 with its not quite clear syntactical usage of esti which seems to provide evidence for this speculation.25 Let us make some remarks on the so-called Parmenidean ontology. Given the fact that eon is conceived of as something spatial, the transition between the pure act of esti and the spatial eon is problematic. The transition is not hinted at in the poem at all. Moreover, one would expect such highly abstract operations, as are presupposed by this transition, only in Plato or Aristotle.

Hence I suggest that eon is derived from eonta which is the usual term of the contemporary usage meaning the world. On this account, Parmenides did not arrive at his
concept of eon by means of an (ontological) speculation, but seems to have been astonished “merely” at the word eonta. His line of reasoning could have been as follows: That it is possible to talk about the world as about eonta (i.e. the whole of particular things) suggests that each particular thing can be understood as (a particular) eon. Parmenides might have next asked: How do the particular things differ from each other? and answered: Since all the different things are understood as eonta, and since each thing is thus considered as (a particular) eon, they do not differ from each other at all; hence there must be merely a single eon.

Unlike the ontological interpretation that is based mainly on conjectures and speculations, the rightness of this origin of eon is attested by a clear track in the poem. This is the place B 8.22–25 where the (impossibility of the) divisibility of eon is discussed (see especially eon gar eonti pelazei; cf. also B 4). (In the next section we will see how this explication of eon out of eonta accord with the notion of the ways.)

II.5. Ways as Ways of Life

To reiterate: The poem is divided into four parts according to the two ways; the one way is connected with eon, the other with the world conceived of as eonta. The third part of the poem (B 8.2–49) discusses eon, the fourth one discusses the (human) world. But there still remains to elucidate three issues: (1) If the second way is connected with eonta, how is it possible that in B 2 it is connected with me eon? (2) What is the precise function of the second part of the poem? (3) How does the relation between eon and the world look like?

According to B 6.8–9 the people wandering on the second way “are persuaded that to be (pelein) and to be-not (ouk einaí) are the same, yet not the same” (trans. Kirk and Raven). As follows from B 4 and B 7.1, which continue B 6,20 Parmenides conceives of non-being (me eonta) in terms of presence (pareonta) and absence (apeonta). Given our sensual perception we experience some things as absent; and since these apeonta seem not to be, it is possible to speak about them as about me eonta. The second way, thus, must be connected also with non-being.

We must now appreciate and savor the strategy of how Parmenides exploits the conception of me eon in the exposition of the poem. We have already suggested that the second part of the poem (B 1.23–B 7) is staged as a confrontation of both ways. By combining the two ways with eon or me eon, respectively, Parmenides shows at once the priority of the first way since me eon is – as he often repeats – impossible. In this way our interpretation of B 2 makes perfect sense: the one way is true; the other is untrue.27

We are coming to the crucial point of our interpretation: to the nature of the ways. For the ways are not the ways of discursive thought – as is mostly assumed –, but represent two ways of life. If one wanders on the first way, one encounters a single eon; if, on the other hand, one wanders on the second way, one encounters plentitude and diversity of eonta. It is now important that the difference between eon and the world (eonta) is not an essential one, but merely a perspectival one depending on one’s ‘decision’ (krisis) for either way (cf. B 8.13–18). On which of the two ways one wanders depends on one’s noos. For on both ways there is a different noos by means of which one sees the world (cf. B 4 leusse noo). To reiterate: if one wanders on the first way where noos op-
erates correctly (that is, if noos gains an insight that eon eonti pelazei (B 8.25)), one sees the world as a single eon. If, on the other hand, one wanders on the second way where there is plaktos noos (B 6.6), one sees the variety of things (eonta): thus, some things may be considered as absent (apeonta, B 4.1) or even non-being (me eonta, B 7.1).

The conception of the two ways as ways of life, however, obtains its full meaning only against the background of the archaic anthropology. As Mansfeld, analyzing the fragment B 6, has pointed out, the archaic notion of man, which contrasts men as ignorant, helpless, deaf and blind with omniscience and omnipotence of gods, was binding for Parmenides as well. Since in B 6 there are only two ways (cf. note 23) a since they are firmly connected with the archaic anthropology, the archaic anthropology confirms that both ways have to be ways of life. (Against this background, the interpretation of B 2 provided in part II.3 makes perfect sense: The one way, which is divine, is true; the other, which is human, is untrue.)

II.6. Conclusion

So the traditional image of Parmenides as a philosopher engaged in a highly theoretical speculation entailing a withdrawn living must be replaced by that of a poet, whose function in the Greek oral society was that of an educator conveying a paideia, forming or reforming the religious paideutic system. Parmenides’ proper aim in composing his poem seems to be re-thinking and new foundation of archaic anthropology and thus – by creating new religious beliefs – question the authority of Homer.

In order to place Parmenides in the field of power more accurately, it would be of course necessary to examine his relation to Homer and other poets, to Pythagoras, Empedocles and Zeno, and to the oral institution in general. (In this way we would probably discover a specific Italian ambience slightly differing from that of the other parts of Greek world by the influence of Pythagoreism.) But for the purposes of our paper it suffices to situate him only preliminarily in the way just outlined.

III. Plato

In the last part of my paper I shall be concerned with Plato in order to show that the first period of his work (the ‘early dialogues’) cannot be straightforwardly considered as philosophic. The early dialogues seem to have had another aim than an engagement in a private theoretical inquiry. As their analysis shows, Plato’s aim was rather public action: to enter the paideutic system, which was still dominated by orality, in order to expose it and to replace it by a new way of life embodied by his hero Socrates.

But before developing this (controversial) thesis it will be useful to make some preliminary remarks concerning the interpretation of Plato’s dialogues as such. There are two major tendencies of how to proceed to the dialogues: a unitarian and a developmental view. Within the developmental view two accounts are to be distinguished: the transition between the early and the middle dialogues can be either gradual or sudden. That is, the early dialogues can be seen either as aiming at, and working towards, doctrines fully developed in the middle dialogues, or as representing a closed whole whose conception was suddenly abandoned and replaced by the metaphysical conception of the middle dialogues. I take the sudden developmental view as most appropriate for the interpretation of Plato's dialogues. As to the historicity of Socrates, I take this issue
as irrelevant to an interpretation of Plato because all we have are Plato’s own dialogues. Hence in interpreting Plato’s dialogues Socrates is to be seen only as a literary figure.31

III.1. The Early Dialogues

I suggest that the most important issue in interpreting the early dialogues is to determine the status of the dialogue as a literary genre. The dialogue is usually understood as a literary device for recording a conversation. The meaning of this conversation can be either to resolve a problem (e.g., find a definition) or – if the dialogue ends in an aporia – at least to awaken the reader’s (hearer’s) philosophical thirst for knowledge and inspire his own inquiry. But there is another account of the dialogue that suits this literary genre even better and that emphasizes the dialogical character of dialogue. The dialogue thus represents a room for confrontation of different forms of thought or different systems of values.

To confirm this intuition about the dialogue, let us start by examining the Apology. Plato’s strategy in defending Socrates sounds innocent. He has Socrates reject a kind of divine wisdom, and claim instead to have only a human wisdom (anthropine sofia, Apol. 20d) relying on ignorance (Apol. 21d). However innocent this claim may seem, it turns out to be a very serious attack on traditional beliefs and values. For Socrates proceeds to show that his human wisdom, which seems to be worth nothing in comparison with the positive wisdom based on knowledge, is in fact the only actual wisdom required by the god (the ignorant Socrates was designed by the Delphic god as the wisest man; cf. Apol. 23b). Now, we must appreciate what is at stake. Since the terms knowledge, sophia (wisdom) and techne (art or craft) are synonymous, Socrates’ polemic against the politicians, poets and craftsmen (Apol. 21b–22e) – which consists in showing them that they are not wise or that they do not dispose of knowledge or techne – is to be seen in the context of the contemporary discussion about techne.

To begin with, “‘techne’ was an important term used by the Greeks to refer to knowledge”,33 and confers “social as well as epistemic legitimation”.34 Hence to be deprived of the title of techne meant a considerable social disqualification. But Plato’s polemic must be seen on a much wider scale, for by exposing the poets as not being wise or not having knowledge Plato questions at the same time the very function of orality (whose main representatives and guarantors were poets) as the leading paideia and mentality.

As the evidence of the early dialogues shows, “Plato is dramatizing the oral mentality as still found embedded in the speech of an interlocutor, only then to sweep it away.”35 So, for example, Ion and Euthyphro from the dialogues of the same name do not represent bizarre and pathological characters (as may appear to us) created by Plato only for narrative sake. Ion articulates the views of an oral society about the role of poet. “In a word, Homeric speech conveyed the proper mores of class behavior, especially as those classes related to each other.”36 In the Euthyphro Plato does not explore “a contemporary legal case, but current ethical reasoning”, which is based on analogy, that is, on appealing to “epic as still providing moral exempla”.

In general it is to be said that Plato uses ignorance both to reject orality and to construe upon it a specific way of life embodied in the portrayal of Socrates. (Note that Pla-
to neither argues for nor dialogically construes this way of life, but simply depicts it as embodied by Socrates. Since ignorance is required from the god (cf. Apol. 23b), it is nothing to be attained easily, but something which must be struggled for and whose presence must be constantly confirmed. It thus involves an active life based on search and reason. Socrates is invited to a constant search for himself and others (φιλοσοφοῦντα με δεῖν ζεν καὶ εξετάζοντα εμαυτόν καὶ αλλούς, Apol. 28e). Life that is not such a search is not worth living (ὅδε ἀνεξεταστὸς βίος οὐ βιώτος ἀνθρώπω, Apol. 38a). This search leads man to himself, to his own soul. Finally, ignorance proves to be the basis of the care for the soul (Apol. 29de, 30b).

This practical aspect of ignorance provides us with the actual reason for rejecting orality, which consists in the way of life it entails. The Republic, unmasking orality as mimesis and dealing with it with respect to the soul, conceives of orality as exploiting “the irrational part (or parts) of the soul at the expense of the rational, thus ‘crippling’ it by producing an unbalanced psyche in which the function of one part (rational) is being encroached on by others (irrational or arational).” 37 Similar, but not so precise, account of orality is to be found in the Ion where Plato, discussing the psychology of performances of poetry as one of the most important oral institutions, exposes orality since one (rhapsode or auditor) identifies himself in an emotional act with what is related – being thus out of reason (Ion 533c–535e). In sum, orality, which is firmly connected with (emotional) performances of poetry, fosters emotional way of life and neglects reason which is the only true value for Plato.

Now we can appreciate our initial intuition about the dialogical or confrontational character of the dialogue. The dialogue serves as a room for confrontation of two different ways of life: the one embodied in the portrayal of Socrates invites us to the constant search, to the activity of reason that proves to be care for the soul; the other, the oral way of life, which was common at that time, consists in passive emotional identification leading thus away from oneself or from one’s soul. To be sure, Plato is too much an artist to cling to this confrontational pattern without qualification. This underlying pattern is often obscured by the vividness of his description; both poles of confrontation are not always clearly stated, are sometimes hinted at, sometimes only assumed. 38 The early dialogues as a whole, however, are best understood in the light of this (interpretational) pattern. So the Apology, fixing a new way of life, can be seen as a kind of Plato’s program, which is developed in the other early dialogues by being (in various ways) confronted with orality or oral way of life. 39

Against the background of what has been said about the early dialogues it is not easy to insist in the traditional vein on taking them as philosophic works. For Plato’s goal is not to make (or describe) a theoretical inquiry into the nature of things, which would justify their philosophic message, but his principal aim is “only” to confront two ways of life in order to expose, and show the inferiority of, the oral one. As to the position of the early dialogues in the field of power, they must be seen as being essentially intertwined with oral institutions, as replacing them by pleading for Plato’s new ideal of living embodied in the portrayal of Socrates, and not as belonging (i.e., as being interpreted) within the history of philosophy. Hence the early dialogues are to be regarded as paideutic textbooks.
III.2. Elenchus

It is now necessary to examine the Socratic elenchus since interpreted as a kind of (positive) search it could contradict our account of the early dialogues. Although the notion of the elenchus as a search has started to gain ground in the recent time, I take the elenchus in its traditional negative spirit to mean refutation. The merit of this interpretation is provided by not having to account for the fact that the early dialogues ends in aporia; for it follows by itself from negativity of the elenchus.

The elenchus as pursued by Socrates in the early dialogues has an elaborate and standardized form. Socrates first elicits a thesis from his partner. Second he makes sure whether his partner agrees on some (mostly two) obvious premises. Third he contrasts or contradicts his partner’s initial thesis with what follows from the additional premises, and thus to refute him. Hence the elenchus serves Plato as a very efficient device for inducing ignorance (by shattering all fixed beliefs and opinions), and thus invites Socrates’ partner to a reflexive life caring for the soul.

This account of the elenchus seems to be in contrast with the so-called definitional elenchus (i.e., the elenchus which starts with ‘What is X?’ – question), which is often interpreted as searching for the definition of a virtue and thus as aiming at positive knowledge. Still, the definitional elenchus is also to be interpreted as a kind of negative elenchus not searching for definitions but, because of its sustained focus, serving as a ‘battering ram’ which could not be resisted by any positive thesis or opinion. The so-called definitional elenchus I suggest is an utmost elaboration of elenchus. (This negative interpretation of the definitional elenchus is all the more convenient if we consider the difficulties which its positive account is faced with and which range from the problem of the priority of definition to the problem of whether the definition entails an ontological commitment or not.)

The definitional elenchus is sometimes combined with some conditions which the definition (as an answer to the question ti esti) has to meet. (For example in the Euthyphro the answer to the question ‘What is holiness?’ – question, which is often interpreted as searching for the definition of a virtue and thus as aiming at positive knowledge. Still, the definitional elenchus is also to be interpreted as a kind of negative elenchus not searching for definitions but, because of its sustained focus, serving as a ‘battering ram’ which could not be resisted by any positive thesis or opinion. The so-called definitional elenchus I suggest is an utmost elaboration of elenchus. (This negative interpretation of the definitional elenchus is all the more convenient if we consider the difficulties which its positive account is faced with and which range from the problem of the priority of definition to the problem of whether the definition entails an ontological commitment or not.)

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Although the elenchus is sometimes regarded as leading away from the Apology towards the doctrine of Forms, in its negative interpretation, however, Plato’s program as expounded in the Apology is deepened and elaborated by the conception of the elenchus, for the elenchus serves as an efficient device for inducing ignorance. In this way, its practical or existential dimension stands out. It is invoked not only (implicitly) by the portrayal of Socrates in the Apology (where all examination is meant to be combined with the peculiar Socratic mission resulting in care for the soul), but also (explicitly) by the Laches (187e ff.): “I don’t think you realize that anyone who has contact with Socrates and enters into conversation with him is necessarily drawn into argument; and whatever the subject he begins, he will continually be carried round and round until at

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last he finds that he has to give an account of his life, both past and present; and when
he is once entangled, Socrates will not let him go until he has thoroughly and properly
put all his ways to the test.”

That the early dialogues are not concerned with a theoretical or philosophical
search seems to be further conformed by the dialogical plot of the particular dialogues.
The Laches, for example, deals with how to educate young men, and the question
‘What is bravery?’ makes sense only within its educational pursuit or examination. In
the Charmides Socrates does not use the elenchus as a device for finding a definition of
sophrosyne, but only as a means of providing an incantation or a remedy for Charmides’
headache. In the Euthyphro Socrates is engaged in the pursuit of the definition of hol-
iness only in order to make Euthyphro see that the indictment of his father is unjusti-
ified.

III.3. Plato’s Creation of Philosophy

We have seen that Parmenides’ self-understanding concerning his role in society
was not that of a philosopher but rather that of a reforming poet. But what about Plato
(or more specifically: his Socrates)? Of course, his self-understanding in the early dia-
logues may be described as that of a philosophos. This however does not mean that he
was a philosopher. As Nightingale puts it: “philosophein and its cognates were not often
used before the fourth century, and they certainly did not have a technical sense that
indicated a specific group of thinkers practicing a distinct discipline or profession.
When it did appear, the term was used to designate ‘intellectual cultivation’ in a broad
and unspecified sense.”44 A survey of the early dialogues with respect to the term
philosophia and its cognates confirms that this term is here used “in a broad and un-
specified sense” meaning ‘intellectual cultivation’, and thus corresponding to the con-
temporary usage.45

The term philosophia occurs in the four early dialogues the Apology, Charmides,
Hippias Minor and Protagoras46 and only in the Apology does Plato seem to seek to nar-
row and specify its semantics; three of the four occurrences of philosophoen hint at the
peculiar Socratic mission by being combined with the examination of one’s life or ex-
hortation of citizens (cf. Apol. 28e, 29c, 29d).47 Nevertheless this specified meaning of
philosophoen must not be understood in the sense we ascribe to philosophy since the
kind of search (exetazein or zetesis) that specifies the term philosophoen does not mean
a theoretical search, which is indispensable in our concept of philosophy. After all, we
cannot attach great importance to this specification because in Apol. 23d Plato has Soc-
rates conceive of philosophoun in general terms as those who make natural inquiry,
disbelieve in the gods and play with words, i.e., as typical intellectuals of the Greek en-
lightenment.

To reiterate, Plato’s self-understanding in the early dialogues may be described as
that of a philosophos. This designation, however, has nothing to do with what we call
philosophy; for it places Plato (or his Socrates) in the broad stream of the contempo-
rary intellectuals like poets, lawgivers, sophists, Presocratics, mathematicians, etc.48,
who used to be designed besides the term philosophoi also as sophoi and sophistai. To be
sure, as the analysis of the early dialogues has pointed out, his position in the field of
power might be determined more accurately since – unlike some late Presocratics or
astronomers whose concern was a theoretical inquiry – he intended to enter into, and reform, the contemporary paideutic system. But nothing of this is to be found in the meaning of the term *philosophos* and its cognates used by Plato in the early dialogues.

It is only the transitional dialogues in which Plato started to distinguish himself from the broad stream of the contemporary intellectuals adopting the term *philosophia* as the basis of his new peculiar activity and social self-identification. Let us now examine the *Lysis* and the *Gorgias*, in order to see how, by means of what strategies, Plato establishes his new discipline called ‘philosophy’. The most striking feature of these dialogues is that they abandon the negative conception of the elenchus toward the positive theoretical search. That corresponds to the change in the status of the dialogue; for whereas in the early dialogues Plato exploits the dialogical or confrontational character of the dialogue, from now on he seems to seek to record a (‘philosophical’) conversation aiming at some positive results

The *Lysis* abandons the elenchus in a double way. (1) As we have seen, it is characteristic for the elenchus that it has practical or existential character; that is, Socrates uses elenchus so as to examine one’s life (cf. the passage from the *Laches* 187e ff cited above). In the *Lysis* this does not (in fact cannot) take place because Socrates converses with children who have not yet their own views. (2) In the last third of the dialogue (216c) Plato has Socrates propound and examine his own theses. That this is to be taken as a positive or theoretical examination is borne out by the double use of the word *manteuomai* or *apomanteuomenos* (to prophecy). If we take into account the fact that among the Greeks divination had a profound relation to truth and that Socrates, as depicted in the *Apology*, was a man deeply conscious of his religious mission, it is inconceivable that the dialogue author would have Socrates articulate only a sudden and fleeting idea; as it is, for example, in the *Euthyphro* (11e) where Socrates takes the initiative only in order to stimulate Euthyphro. At the same time it is necessary to consider another context where we find the word *manteuomai* or its cognate. It occurs in the *Symposium*. If the last third of the *Lysis*, anticipating the *Symposium*, is introduced by the double use of *manteuomai*, the part of the *Symposium* that elaborates and develops the same motifs is put into the mouth of *gyne mantike* (prophetess) (*Smp*. 201d).

As to the term *philosophia* and its cognates in the *Lysis*, six of seven uses occur in quite new semantic relations meaning ‘love for wisdom’. In this way a new element indicating an activity of aiming at a goal enters its semantics. But despite all these innovations we lack some unifying elements that would, for example, account for combining the new conception of *philosophia* with a new positive kind of search, and thus for establishing a new peculiar discipline. Hence although the *Lysis* is likely to aim at defining philosophy, all we can – without speculation – infer from it is that the elenchus is replaced by a positive search and that the semantics of *philosophia* is specified.

Let us now turn to the *Gorgias*. Although it is often assumed that the kind of search pursued in the *Gorgias* is the elenchus, three passages that avowedly bring some positive results (see *Gorg*. 475e; 479e; 508ε–509α, where Socrates says that he has found out something *true* or *firm*) contradict this account. A hint suggesting a switch to a positive search is furthermore to be found in the very dialogical frame. The starting point of this dialogue represents Socrates’ assertion that he wants to converse (dialegesthai) with Gorgias in order to learn (pythesthai) what his art is about. That is to say that
Socrates is likely to lead a conversation in the hope of finding out some positive results. That dialegesthai here suggests a change in Plato’s conception of search is borne out by Socrates' explicit opposition between rhetoric (rhetorike) and conversation (dialegesthai) (see Gorg. 448d; 471d); contrasted with the persuasion of rhetoric, conversation is conceived of as an art of how to come – by means of questions and answers (see Gorg. 449b) – to an assent about a matter, and thus to a positive result.

As to the term philosophia, it is first of all its abundance which must be taken into account. It occurs eighteen times. It could be of course objected that with respect to the length of this dialogue (only the Republic and the Laws are longer) such an abundance might testify to nothing because it may be only accidental. But what cannot be accidental is that it occurs twelve times within two Stephanus pages (484c–486d) in the second part of Callicles’ speech (482c–486d) whose importance in the dialogical frame needs not be mentioned. For our purposes it is not important why Plato has Callicles, and not Socrates, define philosophy. The point is that Plato has Callicles explicitly contrast philosophia with political practice. As follows from the passage 500c, where Socrates confronts two ways of life, that of politics (politeuesthai) and that of philosophy (bion ton en philosophia), Plato combines philosophy with the (art of) conversation (dialegesthai). (Since politics is here combined with rhetoric, and since rhetoric has been opposed to conversation, it is to be inferred that Plato conceives of philosophy as being combined with conversation.) In this way, philosophy is defined as a distinctive activity with its own theoretical regime (that of ‘searching’ conversation) enabling peculiar social self-identification (which is thought to be in contrast with the political activity of the Athenian democracy). Hence, in the Gorgias philosophy is first established in our sense as a peculiar discipline entailing theoretical and practical consequences.

Of course, the transitional dialogues like the Lysis and the Gorgias represent a first step in the immense task of defining philosophy which might be regarded as accomplished only in the middle dialogues. The strategies, however, Plato uses there for defining philosophy remain essentially the same. To reiterate: in order to define philosophy, Plato uses a double gesture\(^51\): an internal elaboration of the specific subject matter of philosophy (like the doctrine of Forms) and, at the same time, an external delimitation from other ways of life.\(^52\)

Let us summarize the issue concerning philosophy in Plato: In the early dialogues Plato had no peculiar word to designate his (paideutic) mission. As we have seen, all he intended in these dialogues was a public or paideutic action. There is no theoretical (not to mention metaphysical) inquiry there. All this changes in the middle dialogues. (We are not allowed to say much about the reasons why Plato abandoned the program of the early dialogues, for this is only a matter of autobiography, and thus psychology. All we have are Platonic texts where we find only traces or expressions of these changes, and not their motifs.) Since then Plato identifies his mission as philosophy which he constructs internally as a kind of positive theoretical search (issuing in the doctrine of Forms) and at the same time externally by opposing it to other forms of thought and life. Thus theoretical and metaphysical speculation based upon a new way of search called dialectic becomes a necessary, even a constitutive part of Plato’s activity. Whereas the original Socratic mission was designed for everybody, intended to improve all Athenian citizens, philosophy is accessible only to a small part of people, and a philos-
opher becomes an outsider making a private inquiry or purifying his own soul because of a life after death (cf. the *Phaedo*), rather than caring for others (cf. the *Apology*).


4 Cf. “But I do not think there is any metaphysics in Parmenides, properly speaking – any more than there is in any other Presocratic.” (Ibid., p. 26)

5 Ibid., p. 13.

6 Cf. “Why did the Presocratics undertake this linguistic task? Aristotle replies, “out of curiosity”; but it is difficult to understand why such an instinct should have been aroused to action at this particular time, unless the prompting mechanism was the changing technology of the written word.” (Ibid., p. 14–15)

7 Ibid., p. 15.


9 “By the time we reach the Presocratic prose writers the issue as between philosophic language and the pre-philosophic has been formally reduced to a collision between the idiom of ‘common sense’ and that of philosophy. (…) In this way, an attack originally launched against the vocabulary and syntax of speech orally composed and communicated is turning itself into an attack on the way our physical senses report the environment to us.” (Ibid., 20)

10 V. Tejera, *Rewriting the History of Ancient Greek Philosophy*, London 1997, p. 25. Cf. also: “In sum, no fragment of Thales’ own words survives; one three-line passage of Anaximander’s survives; and the wording of Anaximenes’ sentence is uncertain. Thus, if it is claimed that I have not marshaled sufficient evidence to prove that ‘the Milesians’ composed in poetry, it is clearly the case that those who claim them to have written prose have also not marshaled sufficient evidence to prove this. The difference between the latter hypothesis and the alternative offered here is that the alternative is based on more objective kinds of evidence than an inherited consensus.” (p. 25)

11 V. Tejera, op. cit., p. 21. Cf. “So that there is even a question whether the lost context of Thales’ or Anaximander’s single, respective fragments were cosmogonic and not just (as is more probable) part of such an oral-oral navigator’s guide.” (p. 21); “Anaximander was a geographer rather than what came to be called a ‘philosopher’.” (p. 23)

12 Ibid., p. 72.

13 K. Robb, op. cit., p.166. Cf. E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, p. 118–119: “The conservation of Mycenaean memories in Homer is not a symptom of romantic nostalgia. Rather it provided a setting in which to preserve the group identity of the Greek-speaking peoples. It was a matrix within which orally to contain and preserve their nomoi and eishe. Homer’s stories of Mycenaean heroes are often interpreted as designed for the amusement of a small group of Greek aristocrats whose political power was buttressed by claims to descent from the Homeric heroes. (…) If it were, then the universal hold of Homer upon the polis-civilisation of Classic Greece would be inexplicable and incredible. (…) The essential vehicle of continuity was supplied by a fresh and elaborate development of the oral style, whereby a whole way of life [my emphasis], and not simply the deeds of heroes, was to be held together and so rendered trans-
missible between the generations. But it was developed (...) essentially as the *encyclopedic and moral instruction* [my emphasis] of Greece.”

14 K. Robb, op. cit., p. 159.

15 R. Thomas, *Literacy and Orality in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge 1992, p. 91. Cf.: “Yet most Greek literature was meant to be heard or even sung – thus transmitted orally – and there was a strong current of distasteful for the written word even among the highly literate: written documents were not consider adequate proof by themselves in legal contexts till the second half of the fourth century BC. (...) Even where a written text existed, it was read aloud. The historian Herodotus was said to have given public readings. (...) Herodotus had recited his *Histories* to the huge audiences at Olympia – rather than separately in different places – simply because that was the most rapid and economical way of propagating his work. (...) In other words, whether or not a written text existed, oral transmission, performance, and discourse were predominant.” (p. 3–4)

16 This term was first introduced by Bourdieu so as to account for some aspects of literary texts which are not to be explained from the *structural* analysis of the text alone and which must be therefore ascribed to the author’s political or social attitudes or aims. Still, I do not take this term exactly in Bourdieu’s sense. In Bourdieu there are many different fields (e. g. the politic, literary, scientific field) which have their own *structure*, and the field of power is introduced to account for the author’s (political or social) attitudes or aims. In my opinion, however, the different structural fields are to be dissolved into the field of power, which is thus to be analyzed with respect both to its *structural* (i.e., *contextual*) and social aspect. It is all the more appropriate since in the ancient Greece other *specific* fields were not yet established and distinguished from one another.

17 As to the name ‘Presocratics’, I take it only to signify an *incidental* (traditionally formed) group of *diverse* persons and not to designate a closed autonomous social group of thinkers or philosophers.

18 Note that interpreting a text always presupposes a *context* where to place it and against the background of which to interpret it.

19 For a more detailed account of Plato’s creation of philosophy see part III.3 of my paper.


21 E. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, p. 46: “It is certain that all his [Homer’s] poet successors were writers. But it is equally certain that they always wrote for recitation and for listeners. They composed it can be said under audience control. The advantages of literacy were private to themselves and their peers. The words and sentences they shaped had to be such as were repeatable. They had to be ‘musical’ (...). And the content had still to be traditional. Bold invention is the prerogative of writers, in a book culture. In short, Homer’s successors still assumed that their works would be repeated and memorized. On this depended their *fame* and their *hope of immortality* [my emphasis]. And so they also assumed, though in the main unconsciously, that what they should say would be appropriate for preservation in the living memory of audiences.”

22 Attempts to establish two or four ways in the poem (as found in Cordero or Heitsch) represent only unimportant modifications of the usual interpretation.


24 In fact, the fragmentary preservation might be responsible for our unconscious and rather mechanical identification of B 1 with the Proem.

25 Cf.: Ch. H. Kahn, “The Thesis of Parmenides”, in: *The Review of Metaphysics* 22 (1968/69), S. 700–724: “I am primarily concerned here to elucidate Parmenides’ thesis: to see what he meant by the philosophical claim which is compressed into the one-word sentence *est* , *it is* . “I take this to be the premise (or one of them), from which he derives his famous denial of all change and plurality.” (700–701), G. S. Kirk, J. E. Raven, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, Cambridge 1982: “The premise *est* is by now established as the only possibility: the only significant thought or statement is that a thing is. (...) From now onwards until the end of the Way of Truth he is concerned, in other words, to deduce all that can be deduced from his chosen premise about the properties of Being.” (272)

26 See J. Wiesner who points out that the fragment B 4 was originally situated between B 6 and B 7 (J. Wiesner, *Parmenides. Der Beginn der Aletheia*, Berlin, New York 1996, p. 237–250).
In general it is to be said that the second 'confrontational' part of the poem is borne out by Empedocles' fragment B 17 where he varies and develops the dialectic *hen* and *pleona* in a similar way as Parmenides develops the motif of the two ways which are connected with *eon* and the world (*eonta*), respectively.

Whereas, on the ontological interpretation, *eon* is conceived of as a kind of *vision* of one ungenerated and imperishable *eon* and thus completely incompatible with the world, *eon* as derived from *eonta* has not only the same nature as the world, but should be in some (dialectical) relation with *eonta*.

My position is similar to that of G. Vlastos, Socrates. Ironist and Moral Philosopher, Cambridge 1991, p. 46: “In different segments of Plato's corpus two philosophers bear that name [Socrates]. The individual remains the same. But in different sets of dialogues he pursues philosophies so different that they could not have been depicted as cohabiting the same brain throughout unless it had been the brain of a schizophrenic. They are so diverse in content and method that they contrast as sharply with one another”.

That is not to say that I would deny his historicity as such; in this issue I agree with Kahn's 'minimal view': “any historical account of Socrates' philosophy (as distinct from his personal actions, appearance, and character) must be drawn from the writings of Plato alone. But Plato is one of the most original thinkers of all time, as well as a great creative artist.” (Ch. H. Kahn, Plato and Socratic dialogue, Cambridge 1998, p. 88)

The early dialogues, listed in alphabetical order: Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Protagoras.

Roochnik 1996, 18.

D. Roochnik, Of Art and Wisdom, Pennsylvania 1996, p. 64.


Ibid, p. 165.

Ibid., p. 224.

In the Laches, for example, this confrontation is present in the confrontation between the traditional education proposed by Nicias and Laches and Socrates' educational mission.

Cf. Robb's account of the early dialogues: “Plato's early ethical dialogues put philosophy and the oral way of life as it still flourished in contemporary Greece into deadly opposition, and he intended that philosophy would prevail. The Platonic dialogues reveal that for most Greeks no serious inroads had been made in the Homeric way of thinking, especially in the area of popular morals or the procedures of formal logic.” (Ibid., p. 173)


The standard account of the negativity of elenchus offers R. Robinson: Plato's Early Dialectic, Oxford 1953. Cf.: Plato “thought and wrote as if all elenchus consisted in reducing the thesis to a selfcontradiction.” (p. 28); “The aim of the elenchus is to wake men out of their dogmatic slumbers into genuine intellectual curiosity.” (p.17)

For the standardized form of elenchus see R. Robinson, op. cit., p. 7: “He is always putting to somebody some general question, usually in the field of ethics. Having received an answer (let us call it the primary answer), he asks many more questions. These secondary questions differ from the primary one in that, whereas that was a matter of real doubt and difficulty, the answers to all these seem obvious and inescapable, (...) But at last Socrates says: 'Come now, let us add our admissions together' (Prt. 332D); and the result of doing so turns out to be the contradictory of the primary answer.” Similar account is to be found in G. Vlastos, op. cit., p. 39.

See R. E. Allen, Plato's 'Euthyphro' and the Early Theory of Forms, London 1970, p. 67–68: “Socrates' aim in the Euthyphro is to obtain an answer to the question, 'What is holiness'? He assumes, in pursuing his inquiry, that there is an *idea*, or *eidos*, a Form, of holiness, and that this Form is a universal, the same in all holy things (5d, 6d-e). He further supposes that that Form may be used as a standard, by which to judge what things are holy and what are not (6e); that it is an essence, by which or in virtue of which holy things are holy (6d).”


Ibid., p. 17, n. 11: “In the early dialogues, Plato uses the 'philosophy' word-group only in the general sense of 'intellectual cultivation' outlined above; nowhere does he suggest that the title of 'philosophy' should be given only to Socrates and his circle. Indeed, it is in the Gorgias, which is generally thought to come at the end of the early period, where we find the first attempt to define 'philosophy'”.

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The term *philosophia* occurs once in the *Hippias Minor* (363a) in the phrase *tes en philosophia diatribes*. From the context, which is framed as a conversation following a sophist’s display speech, it is clear that this phrase must be rendered as intellectual activity in a broad sense. It occurs twice in the *Charmides*: in 153d where Socrates, after returning from the war, ask about *philosophia*, i.e., the intellectual climate, how it looks like now; and in 154e where Critias describes Charmides as *philosophos* and *poietikos*, i.e., as someone with intellectual and poetic gifts. Four times in the *Protagoras*: in 335d Socrates says about Callias that he admires him because of his *philosophia*, i.e., his intellectual curiosity or his care for spiritual things; its further tree occurrences appear within Socrates’ interpretation of a Simónides’ poem (342a–347a) where Socrates conceives of *philosophia* as an ancient ‘art’ or ‘activity’ one of which peculiar forms is to be found in Crete and in Sparta, being combined with the Laconian brevity.

In 342a *philosophia* is even synonymous with *sophistai*. Apol. 28e: *philosophou* με δεό 下巴 και αντίπαρτα ἐμαυτοί καὶ τίς ἄλλος: Apol. 29c: μοιχεί τὸ τοιτή τῇ κτετείχε μεθὰ φιλοσοφῶν: Apol. 29d: ὅ μη παίκτημαι φιλοσοφῶν καὶ ἐμὸ παραπλησίων τὸ καὶ ἐθνικώμος οὕτως ἐκ τοῖς ἑστήχοις ἡμῶν. 

47 See A. W. Nightingale, op. cit., p. 10. That Plato in the early dialogues does not distinguish between *philosophia* and *sophistai* seems to be confirmed in *Prot*. 342ab.

48 The so-called transitional dialogues, listed in alphabetical order: *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, *Hippias Major*, *Lysis*, *Menexenus*.

49 That we are discussing the *Gorgias* after the *Lysis* does not mean that the *Lysis* was written earlier; we choose this succession only for the sake of argumentation. Since it is sometimes very difficult to situate a dialogue into a group of dialogues, it would be too speculative to try to establish (only on the basis of the content) a precise chronology of Platonic dialogues.

50 A. W. Nightingale, op. cit., p. 10–11: “In order to create the specialized discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish what he was doing from all other discursive practice that laid claim to wisdom. It is for this reason that, in dialogue after dialogue, Plato deliberately set out to define and defend a new and quite peculiar mode of living and thinking. This alone, he claimed, deserved the title of ‘philosophy’. It should be emphasized that gestures of opposition and exclusion play a crucial role in Plato’s many attempts to mark the boundaries of ‘philosophy’.”

51 Ibid., p. 11: “By analyzing the ways in which these definitions respond to the ideology of the democracy, we can better comprehend Plato’s creation of ‘philosophy’ in the context of fourth-century Athenian culture.”; cf. also p. 17–18: “The ‘definition’ of philosophy found in the *Republic* does not, however, offer a ‘simple’ identification of the philosopher. To be sure, Socrates has a good deal to say about the epistemic aspects of philosophy. In particular, he indicates, the true philosopher will develop the rational part of his soul in order to make the journey from appearance to reality, from opinion to knowledge, from the physical world of particulars to the immaterial realm of the Forms. But this is just the tip of the iceberg; for the ‘definition’ articulated in books 5–7 is a rhetorical tour de force which ranges far beyond the intellectual activities that characterize philosophy. Recall, for example, the ‘monstrous’ eikon of the wise man on a ship with a purblind captain and savage crew, which is expressly designed to allegorize the relations of the true philosopher to the democratic city (488a–489a); (…) or, finally, the allegory of the cave, which returns to the theme of the dangerous position of the philosopher within the democratic polis. The list could go on. But enough has been said to demonstrate that this is very far from a neutral definition of philosophy as the practice of a certain kind of thinking.”

**SHRNUTÍ**

Ve svém článku *Orality and Philosophy* se zabývám problémem vzniku filosofie. To, do jaké doby umístíme její vznik, popř. jakému autorovi přisoudíme její ustavení, není jen formální či historický problém postrádající skutečnou, filosofickou relevanci, nýbrž je to problém, který má pro interpretaci (presókratiků) zásadní význam. Protože filosofie jakožto specifická disciplína s vlastním teoretickým praktickým řežemem byla ustavená teprve u Platóna, zdá se vhodné, přestaneme-li presókratiky chápat jako filosofy. Označíme-li je totiž za filosofy, riskujeme, že nepochopíme povahu jejich myšlenkového snažení a jejich společenské postavení. S obtížemi považovat presókratiky
za filosofy souvisí i to, že bychom je neměli apriorně interpretovat v kontextu dějin filosofie, resp. v kontextu otázek a myšlenkových postupů filosofie, nýbrž naopak v kontextu dobové kultury. Abychom ovšem mohli tento kontext interpetačně uchopit, je třeba zavést nový pojem: pole moci. V druhé a třetí částí svého článku se pokouším tyto teoretické závěry použít při interpretaci Parmenida a raného Platóna.