IRONY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE IN SOCRATES

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ABSTRACT

IRONY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL ATTITUDE IN SOCRATES

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This thesis analyzes the reasons for Socrates' being presented as a paradoxical figure in the early dialogues of Plato. Irony as a fundamental philosophical attitude in Socratic philosophy is discussed with reference to some of the major philosophers of the history of philosophy. The thesis also suggests the possibility of seeing philosophy as an ironic activity and it traces the etymology of the concept of irony in terms of its philosophical importance.

Keywords: Irony, Socratic Irony, Paradox

ÖZ

FELSEFİ BİR TAVIR OLARAK SOKRATES'TE İRONİ

Korkut, Hacer
Yüksek Lisans, Felsefe Bölümü
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Bu çalışma, Platon'un erken dönem diyaloglarında Sokrates'in pardoksal bir figure olarak sunulmasının nedenlerini incelemektedir. İroni, Sokrates'te temel bir felsefi tavır olarak felsefe tarihinin önde gelen bazı üyeleri bağlamında incelenmiştir. Bu tez aynı zamanda felsefeyi ironik bir aktivite olarak görme olasılığını önermekte ve ironi kavramının felsefi önemi açısından etimolojisini incelemektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: İroni, Sokratik İroni, Paradoks

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The irony of this thesis is its being an academic work on the greatest anti-academist in philosophy. Socrates, who is in every way unfit for the definition of a traditional philosopher, both in his and our time, has always remained opaque to us due mainly to the reason that Plato depicted him with a constellation of puzzles. In Plato's dialogues one of the most outstanding characteristics that constitute Socrates and his philosophy, which also renders him so paradoxical, appears to be his irony. However, among scholars both ancient and modern, there is not even a consensus on Socrates' being ironic. Moreover those who accept Socrates' irony also debate on the nature of this issue. To what extent can appealing to irony explain away the puzzles of Socratic philosophy is the focus of this thesis.

The Socrates that I consider in this thesis and who has been subjected to prolonged disputes among scholars is the main character of Plato's "elenctic" dialogues, since the historical Socrates is generally thought to be pictured there. These are, according to Vlastos' classification: *Apology, Charmides, Crito, Euthyphro, Gorgias, Hippias Minor, Ion, Laches, Protagoras,* and *Republic I* (Vlastos (1), 46). The other two contemporary sources of Socrates; Xenophon and Aristophanes, may not be so relied upon since their depiction show a figure that is devoid the main concern of this thesis, irony. For the first he is like a sermonizing figure rather than a philosopher, and for the latter a caricature of a sophist.

Discussing Socratic irony usually brings forth the discussion of irony in general. The concept of irony, nevertheless, is also a controversial topic. Various interpretations present this concept almost indefinable. In effect, there appears an inexhaustible number of names given to different "kinds" of irony; such as, tragic irony, comic irony, irony of manner, irony of situation, philosophical irony, practical irony, dramatic irony, verbal irony, ingénue irony, double irony, rhetorical irony, self irony, Romantic irony, comic irony, sentimental irony, irony of fate, irony of chance, irony of character, etc., and "Socratic irony" is one of these. Regarding Plato as the most reliable source for tracing Socrates, we should bear in mind that, Platonic dialogues gave rise to various ways of reading from antiquity onwards. Christopher Gill in his "The Platonic Dialogue" makes three main groups of these.

The main point in the first style is the claim of a unity shared by all dialogues in expressing the same philosophical principles. In this respect Socrates is seen as a mouthpiece for Platonic doctrines. What really matters here are the ideas as part of a whole system. Such "unitarianism" is adopted among the modern scholars by Paul Shorey, Harold Cherniss and Jean-François Pradeau, and found in Aristotle and the Academics (Gill, 137).

The second style of reading is led by Gregory Vlastos, which is originally Anglo-American and today the focus of the analytic school. G.E.L. Owen is another leading figure in this kind of interpretative reading and it also dates back to Aristotle and later Platonic interpreters. The central point here is on "methods of argument" and "quality of argumentation" (*ibid.*). Especially modern philosophers like Frege, Russell, and Wittgenstein's emphasis on "logical and conceptual analysis" affected these scholars and for them "modern methods of analysis served as a model of what counted as 'philosophy' and also provided standards by which Plato and other ancient thinkers were judged" (*ibid.*). As in the examples of Vlastos' discussions, in this approach one is to take a Platonic dialogue and analyze the train of arguments in

it. The two main concerns for this approach are the analysis of Socratic elenchus and the theory of forms (*ibid.*).

Just the opposite style of the second interpretation is called by Gill the "esoteric" way of (*ibid.* 138). The central view of this approach is the belief that Plato does not depict his real system in his dialogues; he rather presents it orally to his more advanced students. Gill states two principals on which, as this approach takes it to be, this unwritten Platonic doctrine is based: the One and the Undivided Many. This approach finds its evidence in Aristotle and later ancient Platonic interpreters. The seeming absence of positive ideas in Platonic dialogues gives to these interpreters the idea that argumentation in the dialogues is only preliminary to the "unwritten" Platonic doctrine. This approach was taken by Konrad Gaiser and Hans-Joachim Krämer in the nineteenth century, and currently by Thomas Szlezák and Giovanni Reale. This approach takes the dialogues' "aporetic" character as aiming to stimulate the reader to think for himself. Inspired by Schleiermacher's ideas, the form of dialogue is, for these interpreters, is employed mainly to serve as a "catalyst" for "independent enquiry" (*ibid.* 139).This last style of reading also offers the way of reading for this thesis and will more be explicated in the following sections.

Apart from these three lines of interpretation Gill makes another distinction between those who

1. take the dialogues as intending to reach definite and positive conclusions, and
2. think that the dialogues are rather open-ended (*ibid.*).

The scholars of the former line of thought assign a "deeper" meaning to the Platonic dialogues and assume that "each detail of argument subserves an overall purpose" (*ibid.*). The followers of Leo Strauss are the ones who made up this style. According to them, when correctly worked out, the independent arguments in the dialogues will

lead to a definite Platonic doctrine. For example, in the *Republic*, we can reach the conclusion that "philosophers should not engage in politics in conventional societies and that programs of social reform, of the kind undertaken in many Western countries in modern times, are fundamentally misguided" (*ibid.*).

The latter way of interpreting Platonic dialogues contains both "analytic" scholars such as Michael Frede, and also "esoteric" scholars such as Rafael Ferber. Scholars from these both approaches agree in disclaiming an authoritative philosophical system for Plato. Gill calls these scholars' system as "literary-philosophical" and states that they "focus on ... the implications of the studied anonymity of the Platonic dialogue as inseparable from shared dialectical enquiry" (*ibid.* 140). For the investigation of Socratic philosophy in the dialogues this second line of thought lays a convenient foundation for this thesis.

Another point that matters for the depiction of Socratic philosophy is the question of whether the form of dialogue has a special philosophical importance. Partly as a result of the previous approaches that I will adopt in this thesis, I am rather disposed to think that it has.

I feel in no position to judge what philosophy pivots on and therefore the last chapter may be deemed to be only a suggestion inspired by the role of irony in Socratic philosophy.

CHAPTER 2

SOCRATIC ENIGMATA

Socrates is one of the most appreciated philosophers of all times; nevertheless, he was not always cherished as is obvious from the fact of his judicial murder. His philosophy is much disputed given that he did not write anything at all and neither did he form a philosophical doctrine in his oral communications. His philosophical conversations arose some bitter enmity as well as admiration among his fellow Athenians. Today, likewise, there is not a consensus on his philosophy and neither does it seem there will be in the future; once the facts in the past are so obscured, attempts to reconstruct a Socratic philosophy are somehow highly influenced by personal predilections and there appears as many critiques of Socrates as there are critics. In this respect Socrates the man and philosopher has turned out to be a concept of himself much digged out in the history of philosophy, and this Socrates has long been a meta-Socrates.

We are usually confident in what we maintain about a philosopher basing ourselves on his arguments. There is usually equality between a philosopher and himself as the total sum of his works; Kant is equal to Kant, Plato to Plato, and all to their entire corpus. However, as for Socrates there does not seem to exist such equality but always an x on the other side. Each time Socrates is equal to a different depiction of him, whether it is of Plato, Xenophon, or Aristophanes and these usually conflict with each other and have barely anything in common. Thus, for a philosopher like Socrates about whom none of the contemporaries can agree on a standard picture, it is not in any way difficult to find problems, quite the contrary, he always comes in riddles.

Socrates is charged with some paradoxes, riddles, puzzles, dilemmas, or perplexities. These are some nagging questions not only concerning the validity and consistency of Socrates' method and doctrines, which usually come out as paradoxes, but there are the criticisms concerning the application of his doctrines to his own life as well.

For instance, does he have the consistency in his claims which he so vehemently sought for in his interlocutors'? In his trial he says he would refuse to give up his philosophical activity even if he was forbidden, but he argues that one should obey laws and so refuses to escape from prison and his death sentence. In the *Apology*,[1] he says,

> For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls…
> Now if I corrupt the young by this message, the message would seem to be harmful, but if anyone says that my message is different from this, he is talking nonsense. And so, gentlemen, I would say, You can please yourselves whether you acquit me or not. You know that I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred deaths. (30b-c).

In the *Crito*, when Crito tries to coax him into escaping from prison, he answers:

> Then consider the logical consequence. If we leave this place without first persuading the state to let us go, are we or are we not doing an injury, and doing it in a quarter where it is least justifiable? Are we or are we not abiding by our just agreements? Look at it in this way. Suppose that while we were preparing to run away from here –or however one should describe it– the laws and constitution of Athens were to come and confront us and ask this question, Now, Socrates, what are you proposing to do? Can you deny that

[1] All the quotations from Platonic dialogues in this thesis are cited from: *Plato. The Collected Dialogues*. Edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1961.

> by this act which you are contemplating you intend, so far as you have the power, to destroy us, the laws, and the whole state as well? Do you imagine that a city and continue to exist and not be turned upside down, if the legal judgments which are pronounced in it have no force but are nullified and destroyed by private persons? (50a-b).

Is he sincere in disavowing knowledge? He says if one knows what is virtuous he cannot act otherwise. He leads a virtuous life. What sorts of argument justify his moral beliefs? He claims he knows nothing about the answers to the questions he posed in his discussions, but his cross-examination reveals the ignorance of his interlocutors. In such questions Socrates' method and philosophy, his life and character and even his trial all assume each other.

John Beversluis, in his "Introduction" to *Cross-Examining Socrates*, brings out a point which, he claims, restrains him from revealing his doubts about Socrates. This is the grandeur of a "standard picture" that hinders one from fulfilling "something amiss" in the whole picture of Socrates. Because this is the picture "that venerable interpretive tradition painstakingly constructed by the best minds in the history of classical scholarship, past and present, whose scholarly erudition, linguistic competence, and analytical rigor one can never hope to equal", which spells his failure "to report what he did think" (Beversluis, 16).

This grand picture is said to have created a pro-Socratic tradition which Beversluis claims scares non-specialists out of expressing their "real" thoughts about Socrates; however, there is also an anti-Socratic line that cannot be underestimated. Perhaps the foremost voice of this is Nietzsche, who "recognized Socrates and Plato as symptoms of decay, as agents of the dissolution of Greece, as pseudo-Greek, as anti-Greek" (Nietzsche, 39-40). He calls Socrates, in his *Twilight of the Idols*, "*monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*, a monster in face, a monster in soul" (*ibid*. 40), and holds that

> Before Socrates, the dialectical manner was repudiated in good society: it was regarded as a form of bad manners, one was compromised by it. Young people were warned against it. And all such presentation for one's reasons was regarded with mistrust. Honest things, like honest men, do not carry their reasons exposed in this fashion. (*ibid.* 41).

For Nietzsche "Socrates was a misunderstanding" as "the entire morality of improvement, the Christian included, has been a misunderstanding"; Socrates saw life as a "sickness", when executed he wants his friend Crito to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius; and all in all he was a "decadent" (*ibid*. 39).

An ally, in this sense, of Nietzsche is the American journalist I.F. Stone, who shares Nietzsche's thought, although for different reasons, that "Socrates himself wanted to die". In a 1979 interview for *The New York Times Magazine* he argues that "Socrates evades the charge that he did not respect the city's gods, and proves instead that he is not an atheist", and he accuses Socrates for not pointing a finger at the Thirty Tyrants when they ordered the wealthy foreigners in Athens to be arrested in order to confiscate their property; instead, he says, Socrates just goes home but does nothing to help "put it down", "warn the victim" or "make a protest" (Stone, 4-5).

There are also these disparaging comments by

Wittgenstein:

"Reading the Socratic dialogues one has the feeling: what a frightful waste of time. What's the point of these arguments that prove nothing and clarify nothing?"

Ryle:

"Socrates has, like a gadfly, to sting Athens into wakefulness, with almost nothing to show what she is to be awakened to, saved to the existence of the gadfly."

And in a 1768 Gown Pamphlet, *Socrates Diabolic us* (*The Old Man Exploded*), *A Declamation against Socrates*, by an anonymous writer:

“Socrates’ ‘captious subtleties’ were designed ‘to poison the affections of men and to seduce them from the need of duty and morality’” (Beversluis, p.15).

Apart from the power of this grand “standard picture” Beversluis adds some other factors which block the passage all the way through: the difficulty of the dialogues to construe a unified meaning, sympathy with Socrates or the antipathy toward his opponents and “worries about one’s ignorance of the staggering (and constantly growing) secondary literature” (*ibid.* 16). In his book Beversluis casts his mission as saving the interlocutors of Socratic dialogues from the partiality imposed by “generations of unabashedly pro-Socratic scholarship” (*ibid.*).

In this chapter I consider some “problems” which seem to have recurring importance each time we try to understand “what Socrates tried to do”. These questions, brought up by different scholars, are reviewed under six titles: The Socratic Paradoxes, the Prudential and the Moral; Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge; the problems of *elenchus*; Socrates’ *daimonion*; the question of whether he is a historical character and the question of the way Socrates lived.

2.1 Socratic Paradoxes

In the interpretation of Socratic philosophy, one main question is the generally known “Socratic paradoxes”. Gerasimos Santas, in his “The Socratic Paradoxes”, states that Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, W. Jaeger, F.M. Corn ford and John Gould held the idea that “Socratic paradoxes contradict facts”, but Gregory Vlastos, A.E. Taylor, and R. E. Allen, and Santas’ himself, argue against them (Santas, 148). What is thought to be paradoxical in Socrates is his idea of the direct relation between knowledge and behaviour, and his supposed denial of the will in this issue. He is

thought to be paradoxical in arguing that "there is no such thing as *akrasia* or 'the weakness of will'", and that "knowledge is virtue". In his article Santas argues for different meanings of "knowledge" in Socrates, and that he is not as paradoxical as he is usually supposed to be.

Santas draws up a distinction in Socratic paradoxes and renames them as "prudential" and "moral". In doing this he maintains that "Plato himself used two distinct pairs of terms to state the two paradoxes" (*ibid.* 149). Plato employs *Agatha* and *kaka* for what he calls the prudential paradox; which mean good and bad things or things good or bad for one; as for the moral paradox the terms are *dikaia* and *adika* which mean what is just and unjust. He "takes it for granted" that *Agatha* and *kaka* are "in some sense definitional" and thus one "always" benefits its possessor and the other harms. On the other hand whether behaving justly always benefits the agent or behaving unjustly always harms him is the point of the debate in *Meno* and *Gorgias*, and he does not take it as a definitional truth. For Santas the difference lies in the fact that Plato assumes the truth of the former but he does not assert the truth of the second, he only "argues" for it (*ibid.* 149). He concludes that "The first [of the paradoxes, e.g. the Prudential paradox] is concerned with situations where no questions of justice and injustice (or, more generally, right and wrong) arise, and it appears to deny the fact of moral weakness; the second is concerned with moral situations and appears to deny the fact of moral weakness" (*ibid. 150*).

2.1.1 The Prudential Paradox

Gerasimos Santas describes the doctrine as "no one desires evil things and that all that pursue evil things do so involuntarily" (*ibid.* 147). Santas elucidates this "puzzling" and "paradoxical" doctrine by stating that "we commonly think that men sometimes harm themselves knowing that they are doing so" (*ibid.*). In T. Gomperz's words this is "believing an action wrong and yet yielding to the motives that impel to it", which, he says, is for Socrates "a sheer impossibility. He does not

combat or condemn, he simply denies, that state of mind, which his contemporaries called ‘being overcome by desire.’” (*ibid.*).

Santas maintains that one underlying idea behind the paradox is “what is usually labeled ‘intellectualism’ … that Plato overemphasized the intellect and neglected – even entirely neglected– the will” (*ibid.* 148). This is also the claim that “weakness of will” or “*akrasia*” is impossible for Socrates. Sally Haslanger states that “Standardly, cases of weakness of will are characterized as those in which one knows or believes that a certain action is better than another, but voluntarily does the worse action instead” (Haslanger, 1). Santas adds that “incontinence and moral weakness are supposed to be familiar facts of experience; yet the doctrines … seem to contradict these facts” and he asks “Are we to suppose that Plato held, and held most persistently through several dialogues, views that contradict facts with which presumably everyone is acquainted?” (*ibid.*). Here Santas cites Gomperz, who reminds the reader that “although the state of mind whose existence is denied by Socrates does really occur, its occurrence is a far rarer phenomenon than is generally supposed” (*ibid.*).

Sally Haslanger offers three possibilities for the paradox:

i. as a matter of fact, weakness of will is impossible. Ordinary cases are not what they may seem,
ii. the premise that we always desire what we judge best is false; judgment and desire is not linked in this way,
iii. the premise that we always act on our desires (where possible) is false. (Haslanger, p.3).

The doctrine is presented in the *Protagoras* and *Apology*. In the former dialogue Socrates relates his conversation with Protagoras:

> This position makes your argument ridiculous. You say that a man often recognizes evil actions as evil, yet commits

> them, under no compulsion, because he is led on and distracted by pleasure, and on it because he is overcome by the pleasures of the moment. The absurdity of this will become evident if we stop using all these names together – pleasant, painful, good, and evil – and since they have turned out to be only two, call them by only two names – first of all good and evil, and not only at a different stage pleasure and pain. Having agreed on this, suppose we now say that a man does evil though he recognizes it as evil. Why? Because he is overcome. By what? We can no longer say by pleasure, because it has changed its name to good. Overcome, we say. By what, we are asked. By the good, I suppose we shall say. (*Protagoras, 355b-c*).
> Then it must follow that no one willingly goes to meet evil or what he thinks to be evil. To make for what one believes to be evil, instead of making for the good, is not, it seems, in human nature, and when faced with the choice of two evils no one will choose the greater when he might choose the less. (*Protagoras,* 358c-d).

Santas finds three problems in this argument:

i. to see how Socrates can claim *consistently* both that these people do not desire bad things and also that they desire things which they thought to be good though *these things are in fact bad* (one might be tempted to infer from Socrates' last two claims that these people do desire bad things, and say that Socrates contradicted himself within the space of three lines,
ii. to see on what grounds Socrates can assert the first of these statements,
iii. to see how Socrates can plausibly infer, as he seems to do, that these people really desire good things (not simply things they *thought* to be good). (Santas,153).

Santas argues that the last proposition can be counted as "factual" which represents "a general fact concerning 'human nature'" and it does not "contradict any facts" (*ibid.* 157). For Santas "what Socrates has tried here to show is that in no case are bad things the intended objects of people's desires, though in some cases they are the actual objects" (*ibid.* 147). He offers three premises for the solution to this paradox:

i) desiring something is desiring to possess it,
ii) if one knows or believes that a thing is bad for one, he also knows or believes that it harms the man who has it and in proportion to the harm makes him miserable,
iii) no one desires to be miserable (in the sense that to be miserable is never the intended object of anyone's desire). (*ibid.*156-7).

He holds that what Socrates has in mind is not the "actual" object of desire but the "intended" ones. The former may be evil however the latter not.

Vlastos separates "true opinion" from "knowledge" in explicating the paradox. Thus in Socrates' doctrine that "If a man knows good and evil, nothing will overpower him so that he will act otherwise than as knowledge commands"; what Socrates means is that "we cannot act contrary to our *knowledge*"; for otherwise, Vlastos argues, if Socrates has in mind something other than the "knowledge" of good that one cannot act contrary to, he counts it as "dogma unsupported by argument" (Vlastos (3), 43-45).

2.1.2 The Moral Paradox

Santas states two propositions that make up this paradox: "virtue is knowledge", and "all who do injustice do so involuntarily" (Santas, 147). The former proposition, says Santas, appears to be a biconditional: "if one has knowledge one is virtuous; if one is virtuous one has knowledge." (*ibid.* 157). Santas states that the "knowledge" here is generally understood as the "knowledge of virtue" and thus "the first part of the biconditional becomes 'If one has knowledge of virtue one is a virtuous man.'" (*ibid.*). He then states that this is very much the same to say that "if a man does something that is unjust (or intemperate, cowardly, or the like) then he does not know that it is unjust" (*ibid.*). Then here appears to be paradox that "contradicts facts", Santas says, on account of the familiarity "of experience that men sometimes do injustice or wrong knowing that they are doing so" (*ibid.*). He also asserts that

“we commonly think that men … often … do what is morally wrong knowing that it is morally wrong when it is in their power to do otherwise.” (*ibid.*). Santas states that the “strongest single piece of evidence for this interpretation is in the *Gorgias* 460b-d” in which “Socrates asserts that ‘he who has learnt what is just is a just man’; he then proceeds to make matters worse by adding that the just man always does what is just and never even desires to do what is unjust” (*ibid.* 157-8). For Santas “this position seems to be even more extraordinary than the previous one since, it seems to deny also the fact that sometimes men have morally bad desires (that is, the fact that sometimes to do injustice ir wriong is the *intended* object of men’s desires)” (*ibid.*).

Santas cites John Gould:

> Socrates was wrong in supposing that if a man achieved an understanding of what justice involves, he would necessarily become just in behavior, since the whole problem of choice intervenes between knowledge and action. (*ibid.* 148).

In the *Protagoras* Socrates holds e.g. :

> You on the other hand, who maintain that pleasure often masters even the man who knows, asked us to say what this experience really is, if it is not being mastered by pleasure. If we had answered you straight off that it is ignorance, you would have laughed at us, but if you laugh at us now, you will be laughing at yourselves as well, for you have agreed that when people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains – that is, of good and evil – the cause of their mistake is lack of knowledge. We can go further, and call it, as you have already agreed, a science of measurement, and you know yourselves that a wrong action which is done without knowledge is done in ignorance. So that being mastered by pleasure really is – ignorance, and most serious ignorance, the fault which Protagoras, Prodicus, and Hippias profess to cure. (357c-d-e).
>
> Then, if the pleasant is the good, no one who either knows or believes that there is another possible course of action, better than the one he is following, will ever continue on his present course when he might choose the better. To ‘act

> beneath yourself' is the result of pure ignorance; to be 'your own master' is wisdom. (358b-c).

In interpreting this paradox Santas states three doctrines from which it is derived:

> i) the prudential paradox,
> ii) no action (or at any rate, no unjust or wrong action) is ever done for its own sake and that every action (or, at any rate, every unjust or wrong action) is done for the sake of possessing what the agent considers a good – that is, something beneficial to himself,
> iii) Doing what is just (and, more generally, right) always benefits the agent and doing what is unjust always harms the agent, and consequently, that it is always better for the agent to do justice rather than injustice no matter what the circumstances (*ibid.* 158).

The solution to this paradox of Socrates that "virtue is knowledge" finds its way in the meaning attributed to "knowledge". Santas reports that traditionally this "knowledge" is taken to be the "knowledge of virtue" (*ibid.*), and sometimes "knowledge of one's own good" (*ibid.* 159). Santas' proposal for the paradox is: "if a man has knowledge what is virtuous and also knowledge that it is always better for one to do what is virtuous, and then he will always (so long as he has this knowledge and virtuous behavior is in his power) behave virtuously" (*ibid.*). Thus the contradiction is removed as Santas makes a place for "desire" leading to conduct.

Santas then argues that the proposition "knowledge is virtue" is not really a Platonic doctrine. For Santas Plato "does not argue nor does he hold… that there is a necessary connection between recognizing an action as just and desiring to do it" (*ibid.* 161). He holds that "in order to know that an action is just one" does not have to "know the definition of justice in the soul" (*ibid.*), since "definition of justice in the soul may be confirmed by 'commonplace and vulgar tests of justice'" and thus "on Plato's view knowing of believing that an action is just is logically independent of knowing or believing that just actions benefit the agent unjust ones harm him" (*ibid.* 161-162).

Santas also holds that for Plato "true belief" as a sufficient condition for behaving justly; while he takes true belief and knowledge differently, he does not contrast them with false belief or ignorance (*ibid.* 162). Santas argues that Plato acknowledges the universal truth desiring what is good in the first place and thus the Platonic statement, which is taken as paradoxical at first sight, becomes for Santas: "given that this universal desire for possessing (having, getting) things that are good for one, then knowledge of virtue and vice and knowledge that it is always to one's greater advantage to behave virtuously is sufficient for such behaviour" (*ibid.* 163). Thus Plato here does not really deny akrasia.[2] The generally known "Socratic Fallacy" that is the argument that "knowing is practicing" is thus solved by Santas, however, John Beversluis has his doubts in ascribing this principle to Socrates, he rather finds ambiguities in him, against the views of Santas (Beversluis, 168).

2.2 Disavowal of Knowledge

In the *Apology* Socrates relates how his friend Chaerophon goes to the oracle in Delphi and asks if there exists a person who is wiser than Socrates and the priestess answers "No" (*Apology, 21a*). Socrates expresses his surprise by repeating his well-known motto, disclaiming any knowledge: "I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, great or small" (*Apology,* 21b), and thus he starts his elenctic journey, as he claims, only to disprove the oracle but to his surprise, he would only to find out people "claiming" to wisdom but none who "really" possess it. However, his reliance on his virtuous life belies his profession of ignorance. Apart from the fact that the oracle proves right, once Socrates disavows any knowledge, any proposition he assents to will sound paradoxical. For Vlastos this is the "central paradox" of Socrates (Vlastos (2), 3). Donald Morrison poses the paradox of Socrates' "avowal of ignorance" and "his confidence in his own innocence" (Morrison, 108). What would Socrates be like if he were to non-paradoxically reject

[2] Santas does not argue that Plato is devoid of any paradoxes and nor that the doctrines he discussed here are true. What he tries to show is simply that these paradoxes "do not contradict what they are usually supposed to contradict." (Santas,168)

any knowledge? This might be Socrates' way of response to the conceit of knowledge. A skeptic Socrates would also be a candidate if we take him literarily, yet there are various interpretations and these are based on taking Socratic ignorance literal or ironical.

Nevertheless, "the standard view", says Vlastos, is that Socrates here in fact ironically renounces knowledge (Vlastos (1), 64). Vlastos presents Norman Gulley and Terence Irwin as the opposing parties who take Socrates as an ironist and take him literally (*ibid.*). Vlastos argues against both, claiming that in some places Socrates speaks sincerely and in some other places ironically, and holds that Socrates uses different meanings for "knowing" in different contexts (*ibid.* 65).

Hugh Benson "leaves the precise nature of the knowledge Socrates disavows undetermined", because "the texts [he] examines do so" (Benson, 168). He classifies the texts in which Socrates "professes his ignorance" as:

i. the passages associated with the Delphic oracle story in the *Apology*,
ii. the passages in which Socrates disavows definitional
iii. knowledge,
iv. passages which are of a more diverse variety,
v. passages in which Socrates disowns teaching (*ibid.*).

Benson holds that these passages exhibit a skeptical Socrates rather than irony or sincerity as Vlastos and Irwin suggest. However, for Benson Socrates is not a skeptic in the universal sense that "knowledge is unobtainable" yet this understanding of the concept is quite broad-ranging and he restricts the scope of scope of Socrates' scepticism especially to moral knowledge (*ibid.* 185-7).

2.3 The Problem of Elenchus

"Elenchus", Vlastos argues, "has become a proper name only in modern times"; Socrates uses the words "*elenchus* and *elenchein* (to refute, to examine critically, to censure)" in order to "describe", "not to baptize" his method (Vlastos (4), 37). This is what he calls the problem in Socratic method: "how it is that Socrates expects to reach truth by an argumentative method which of its very nature could only test consistency" (Vlastos (2), 15).[3] Donald Morison calls elenchus a "mistaken claim" and puts it thus: "If the theses D, A,B, and C are inconsistent, at least one of them must be false, but the inconsistency alone does not tell us whether the falsehood lies with the original definition D, or with one the other claims A, B, or C" (Morrison, 110).

Vlastos presents this "pattern" that "standard elenchus" generally obeys:

> (1) The interlocutor asserts a thesis which Socrates considers false and targets for refutation.
> (2) Socrates secure agreement to further premisses, say *q* and *r* (each of which may stand for a conjunct of propositions). The agreement is *ad hoc*: Socrates argues from *q* and *r*, but not to them.
> (3) Socrates then argues, and the interlocutor agrees, that *q* and *r* entail *not-p*.
> (4) Thereupon Socrates claims that *not-p* has been proved true, *p* false. (Vlastos (4), 46).

He disagrees with R. Robinson's argument that Socratic elenchus "consists in reducing the thesis to a self-contradiction" (*ibid.* 38) in that,

> If that were true, Socrates' procedure would have been as follows: when the answerer asserts *p*, Socrates would derive *not-p* either directly from *p* or else by deriving from *p* some

[3] Here Vlastos reminds us that "On Donald Davidson's theory of knowledge, consistency should suffice for truth. But no one, least of all Davidson himself, would suggest that Socrates could be regarded as a prenaturally prescient Davidsonian, two and a half millenia ahead of his time." (Vlastos 1991, 15)

> further premisses which entail *not-p* –in either case deducing *not-p* from *p* ‘without the aid of any extra premiss’. The trouble with this picture is that what it pictures is not in our texts. There are thirty-nine elenctic arguments by Robinson’s count in Plato’s earlier dialogues. Not one of them exhibits this pattern. The premisses from which Socrates deduces *not-p* generally do not include *p*; and even when they do, there are others in the premiss-set, elicited from the interlocutor without any reference to *p* and not deducible from it (*ibid.*).

Then he turns to the question again: “how Socrates can claim… to have proved that the refutand is false, when all he has established is the inconsistency of *p* with premisses whose truth he has not undertaken to establish in that argument: they have entered the argument simply as propositions in which he and the interlocutor are agreed” (*ibid.* 39).

Vlastos argues that elenchus is not a “verbal jousting” or “eristic” for Socrates, it is “first and last *search*” (*ibid.*), because, he asserts, the aim of elenchus is to reach “truth” which is suggested by the words employed: “searching (⁄ρευν∩, διερευν∩), inquiring (ζητ∩,⁄ρωτ∩, συνερωτ∩), investigating (σκοπ∩, διασκοπ∩, σκΥπτομαι, διασκΥπτομαι)” (*ibid.* 40).

On the other hand Vlastos attributes a second dimension to elenchus, it is “at the same time a challenge to his fellows to change their life, cease caring for money and reputation and not caring for what should be for everyone the most precious thing of all” (*ibid.* 44), and he cites from the *Apology*:

> And if one of you says… he does care, I will not let him go nor leave him, but will question and examine and refute him; and if he seems to me not to have the virtue he says he has, I shall reproach him for undervaluing the things of greatest value and overvaluing trivial ones. (*Ap.* 29e) (*ibid.*).

Thus, for Vlastos, elenchus has a two-way function: one “philosophical”, “searching for truth about the good life”, and the other “therapeutic”, “searching out the answerer’s own life in the hope of bringing him to the truth” (*ibid.* 44-45).

Vlastos argues against Richard Robinson that Socratic elenchus is not a “mere device for exposing confusions in his interlocutors”, but it is a “method of philosophical investigation”; its goal is “to discover and defend true moral doctrine” (Vlastos 1991, 14). He limits the aim of Socrates, of the earlier dialogues, to the “knowledge”, “not just true belief”, of “moral truth”, but “never venturing into meta-elenctic argument intended to probe the validity of his investigative method or the truth of its ontological presuppositions” (*ibid.*). For Vlastos “no *epistemological theory* at all can be ascribed to Socrates” and he answers the question of accounting for Socrates’ conviction “that moral truth is what he did reach by means of his elenctic arguments” (*ibid.*). He argues that Socratic elenchus does not merely expose the inconsistency of his interlocutors’ beliefs, he sincerely believes that they “already” have some “true beliefs” of moral truth that he could reach through his cross-examination, and “he could *always* count on the presence of these beliefs in their mind and could use them as the premisses from which the negation of their false thesis could be derived” (*ibid.* 15).

Another objection to Socratic elenchus is stated by Donald Morrison, who asks how Socrates can save himself from nihilism if all he can show is that no definition of virtue is valid (Morrison, 105). Even if Morrison could defend Socrates against nihilism, he poses us another related question: if we do not take Socrates as a sceptic or a nihilist, he asks “how and whether this negative procedure can produce constructive results” (*ibid.* 110). One of Socrates’ basic assumptions in philosophy is not to employ the sophistic way of rhetorical persuasion but true knowledge in argument. However, as Donald Morrison States, Socrates seems to refute his interlocutors’ arguments not on account of reason but by “verbal trickery” (*ibid.* 109). Socrates’ defense against Meletus’ charge that he disbelieves in the official

gods of the city is criticized by Morrison as “weak” and “not addressing to the substance of the charge” (*ibid.* 106). For Morrison: “what Socrates does is to show that Meletus is thoughtless and not a credible accuser” by making him to “restate ‘not believing in the gods of the city’ as a charge that Socrates is an atheist”, and then he says that “he cannot both be an atheist and believe in other new deities” (*ibid.*). And he saves himself from explaining what kind of deities he believes in, which perhaps was what others most wanted to know.

Whether we can really take elenchus as a test for truth is shadowed by an annoying characteristic of Socratic dialogue: sometimes Socrates seems to employ very sophistic movements in his discussions and leads his interlocutors in the way he wants them to think. J. Beversluis find many of Socrates’ arguments “fallacious or unsound” (Beversluis, 5). He relates these interlocutors’ accusations: “deliberately misconstructing their assertions, deducing absurd and obviously unintended inferences from them, employing faulty analogies, leading them into carefully prepared traps, employing shame tactics, and arguing for victory” (*ibid.* 12). Can Socrates really be such a sophist, as described by Plato, or are these objections just the “disingenuous subterfuges of soreheads”? (*ibid.*). Beversluis also reports Vlastos’ criticism of Socrates that he “is not persuasive at all. He wins every argument, but never manages to win over an opponent” (*ibid.* 5). In addition, Donald Morrison states that “Socrates’ interlocutors sometimes feel they have been refuted, not because they lack expertise in the subject, but by verbal trickery” (Morrison, 109).

Another problem is with the way Socrates employs his dialectic and the language he uses. J. Beversluis calls this “a dark side” of Socrates’ way of discussion in which he “does everything in his power…to deprive them of whatever shred of insight they possess, offering them nothing in return and … leaving them in a state of complete confusion” (Beversluis, 15). This “being at a loss” or *aporia*, ápor(os) [impassable] (Random House, 1996) might not actually be the “dark side” of Socrates; it may be

also be seen as the "sting" of Socrates that destroys the conceit of "knowing something". Moreover, Socrates would contradict himself if he were to "offer an alternative" to his interlocutor in *aporia* since he continuously makes it clear that he does not claim any knowledge; thus he cannot impose any kind of assertion to his interlocutor. This would be to renounce what he criticizes in the *Phaedo*, the "misology" and "misantrophy":

> But first there is one danger that we must guard against.
> What sort of danger? I asked.
> Of becoming misologic, he said, in the sense that people become misanthropic. No greater misfortune could happen to anyone than that of developing a dislike for argument. Misology and misanthropy arise in just the same way. Misanthropy is induced by believing in somebody quite uncritically. You assume that a person is absolutely truthful and sincere and reliable, and a little later you find that he is shoddy and unreliable. (89d).

2.4 *Daimonion*

Socrates' *daimonion*, Vlastos says, is first mentioned in the *Apology*, as "something godlike and divine, ψε⇑〉ν τι κα⇐ δαιμ〉νιον, or just τ∫ δαιμ〉νιον" (Vlastos 1991, 280). He states that in Riddell and Scott (1867:102) δαιμ〉νιον is said to be used "elliptically substantival" so, it is to be understood as "divine sign" (*ibid.*). He also cites Burnet that *daimonion* is not synonymously used with δα⇔μων, however, they are close in meaning; the first is a "divine sign" and the latter a "guardian spirit" (*ibid.*).

In the *Apology* Socrates tells us that this inner voice never gives him positive advice but warns him before taking some actions, he also relates his decision in not taking part in politics to his *daimonion*:

> It may seem curious that I should go round giving advice like this and busying myself in people's private affairs, and yet never venture publicly to address you as a whole and

> advice on matters of state. The other occasions –that I am subject to a divine or supernatural experience, which Meletus saw fit to travesty in his indictment. It began in my early childhood –a sort of voice which comes to me, and when it comes it always dissuades me from what I am proposing to do, and never urges me on. In this that debars me from entering public life, and a very good thing too, in my opinion, because you may be quite sue, gentlemen, that if I had tried long ago to engage in politics, I should long ago have lost my life, without doing any good either to you or to myself. (31d).

And through end of the speech he tells how his daimonion did not object to his obeying the execution: "This present experience of mine has not come about mechanically. I am quite clear that the time had come when it was better for me to die and be released from my distractions. That is why my sign never turned me back." (*ibid. 41d*).

The question here, as Donald Morrison argues, is that Socrates claims to count on reason in his search for truth, however, he also appeals to a certain "daimonion" as a guide to his actions (Morrison, 101-102). Certainly Socrates "listens to" his divine sign, but it might not be true, as Morrison claims, that Socrates appeals to his daimonion *in* his search for truth. Daimonion does not in fact seem to serve as a dogmatic authority in his philosophy. We see it playing role in some of his worldly affairs but not in his elenctic discussions. He says it does not lead him directly but just warns him before taking some steps. He relates his decision in not taking part in politics and not escaping from prison before his execution to this divine sign. But even if in his discussions in spiritual matters, of life after death or the existence of soul, in the *Phaedo*, he never alludes to this "divine sign" as a source of revelation. Given that Socrates is a philosopher whose actual life is closely intertwined with his philosophy, counting on such an "irrational" arbiter in his decision making might confuse one and render his philosophy rather delicate. However, even if in the incidents in which Socrates says he was advised by his sign, this inner voice is not the *only* authority. In the *Apology* he says it does not turn him back from his

execution, but also, in the Crito he gives an extensive argument why he cannot escape from the prison: he does not say that is because he cannot resist the *daimonion*, but he expounds his ethical principles on this issue at great length (*Crito*, 48c+).

2.5 Real of the Fictional or Fiction of the Real

Whether Socrates is a historical character or not is another question that bothers minds. Despite eminent scholars, such as Vlastos, whose discussions are held on the presumption that Socrates *is* an actual personage in the history of philosophy, arguing that “the philosophical views advanced by Socrates in the early dialogues represent the philosophical views of the historical Socrates (based on the independent testimony of Aristotle and Xenophon)” (Benson, 9), there are scholars who take Socrates as a literary character. Hugh Benson cites from Graham that Dupréel, Gigon and Chroust are “possible advocates” for whom Socrates is a mythic figure (*ibid.* 7).

Regardless of the Socrates in Plato’s dialogues, on the other hand, one would not find it difficult to believe that “any” character that enters into a literary text will be fictional. We should allow for the idea that a character in a text is rarely the mirror image of an actual person, yet this might range from a slight change to a complete making up. This Socrates will in the end be inevitably of Plato’s and thus is not to be expected to report verbatim the speech of the historical figure on whom he is based. However, this does not require us to believe the Socrates of the earlier dialogues to be a mouthpiece of Plato, either. The character that interests us is the Socrates as Plato understands him and, for instance, not the one as understood by Xenophon or Aristophanes, not at least in the same sense anyway. The words in Plato’s early dialogues are perhaps not what Socrates did say, but what he would say.

What actually matters here is in what way Socrates being a historical or a fictional character affects the importance of "Socratic" philosophy. I hold that this question matters according to the attitude we adopt in construing Socratic philosophy. From certain standpoints this question may not matter; for the arguments attributed to Socrates have the primary importance, and the question of the owner belonging to historical examination. For Hugh Benson "The mere fact that the early dialogues may represent the philosophical views of a purely mythical and literary figure no more diminishes their philosophical significance than does the fact that they may be representing the views of the historical Socrates" (*ibid.* 8).

Benson gives as an example for the former view, Berkeley's *The Dialogues between Hylas and Philonus.* He argues that the views represented by Hylas do not lose anything from their philosophical importance even if Hylas is a fictional character as opposed to Philonus who is regarded as representing Berkeley's views (*ibid.*). However, Socrates has his place in the history of philosophy with his difference from Hylas rather than similarities for those who take Socrates as more than the total sum of the metaphysical or epistemological arguments represented by the character in Plato's earlier dialogues.

For Alexander Nehamas the two distinguishing characteristics of Socrates are that he "wrote nothing himself" (Nehamas, 9), and that "he appears ready-made, that we have no idea how he came to be who he was" (*ibid.* 9). That Socrates wrote nothing himself is truly a peculiarity of Socrates, however, it is not peculiar only to him. Apart from Socrates, Zeller mentions a considerable number of ancient philosophers "who wrote nothing at all", such as, "Thales, Pythagoras, the sceptic Pyrrho, the heads of the middle and later Academy –Arcesilaus and Carneades, the stoic Epictetus and the founder of neo-Platonism Ammonius Saccas" (Zeller, 90). Nehamas holds "it difficult to believe that Plato's Socrates is not the Socrates of history" (Nehamas, 7). Nevertheless, he takes this Socrates as a "fictional character" in the sense that "even if we could isolate those elements in Plato's representation

that correspond to his historical origin, it is the whole character who confronts us in those works, not some smaller cluster of his features, that has fired the imagination of the tradition he created" (*ibid.*).

Nehamas takes Socrates as the initiator of his concept "the art of living", and Montaigne, Nietzsche and Foucault as his followers in this tradition (*ibid.* 6) and adds that "we know much less about his life than we do about theirs" (*ibid.*7). This Socrates from the point of Plato, he argues, "appears ready-made: he is already one; he never makes an effort. His own unity is so extreme that he even believes that the human soul, the self, is itself in principle indivisible and that it is therefore impossible for us to do anything other than what we consider to be the good" (*ibid.*).

Nehamas argues that Socrates' being a "literary character" does not distinguish him so much from Nietzsche, Montaigne or Foucault, "whose biographies are available to us" (*ibid.*). Because he maintains that what should concern us is the "self" depicted in the text, for "their readers can find in their writings convincing models of how a unified, meaningful life can be constructed out of the chance events that constitute it" (*ibid.*), and whether these philosophers could apply that way of life to their actual lives or not "is a matter of biography" (*ibid.*). What Vlastos regards as a "philosophical matter" is "the image of life contained in their writings". Consequently what we also should consider is "the nature of the character constructed in their writings, the question whether life can be lived, and whether it is worth living, as they claim" (*ibid.*). Vlastos concludes that "the same is true of Plato's Socrates" (*ibid.*).

Nehamas, on the other hand, does not make it very clear whether a completely fictitious character in a philosophical text would also serve as model for what calls "the art of living". I argued before that a character inevitably gains a "literary" quality once it has entered a text and it is my contention that for the life depicted in

those works to be of philosophical importance, Socrates there as a literary model should refer to a "historical" figure somehow, even though there may be no a complete overlap between them. In addition to this, to understand Socrates as a philosopher is not a purely biographical matter. We need a proper guide like Plato, to lead us through the right track in this Socrates of miscellaneous discussions. As Nehamas reminds us, even the philosophers to whose biographies we can have access, Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault, are not all clear images before us: "their biographies have been disputing even the most basic facts concerning their lives and personalities" (*ibid.*). We might here take into account V. Woolf's observation in that "every secret of a writer's soul, every experience of his life, every quality of his mind is written large in his works" (Woolf, 103).

2.6 The Life worth Living

Alexander Nehamas in his *The Art of Living* poses the question of whether it is possible to live the way Socrates lived and whether it is worth living? However, this question is not about an actual historical person but the person created and the life he led which are constructed in the writings of Plato, which Nehamas describes as "the art of living… practiced in writing" (Nehamas,8). Nehamas then turns the question to why it is desirable to live life as in Socratic fashion.

For Nehamas "the art of living" appears in three "genres": the Socrates of Plato's early dialogues belongs to the first one. This Socrates is convinced that his way of life or the life of philosophy is the true one but he does not strive to prove it: "He remains tentative and protreptic" (*ibid.* 9). However, this does not make the point for Nehamas' concept of "art of living". What he cares for is the third genre; the art of living that is the "least universalist" of the three and that is "aestheticist" (*ibid.* 10). He points at Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault as the role models for such a life.

Socrates' importance appears in here. Nehamas holds that these philosophers "always" take Socrates as their models (*ibid*). For Nehamas, Socrates' irony is the key that makes him the model of models for the "ideal" way of life. This "ideal" kind of living in fact consists in its not claiming to be the ideal one.

The matter of the kind of life that Socrates finds worth living is the last question of Socratic "enigmata". It is extensively discussed in Nehamas' *The Art of Living* and I place it last in the first chapter especially because it makes a direct link to Socratic irony, which is the subject of the following chapter. This question of how to lead a Socratic mode of life is perhaps the paramount matter that causes Socratic philosophy to be so formidable to tackle. Plato does not present Socrates as a sermonizing figure who "teaches" others how to lead their lives, unlike the rather pedantic depiction of Xenophon. Socrates, nevertheless, seems to have power to affect the direction of people's lives when his interlocutors are scrutinized under his elenchus. It is also a question concerning to what extent he can transform a character unless that person has already have some certain wisdom and virtues in place.

In the *Symposium* Alcibiades mourns that he just could not manage to conduct his life in the way Socrates advised him.

> Yes, I've heard Pericles and all the other great orators, and very eloquent I thought they were, but they never affected me like that; they never turned my whole soul upside down and left me feeling as if I were the lowest of the low. But this latter-day Marsyas, here, has go on living the way I did – now, Socrates, you can't say that isn't true– and I'm convinced that if I were to listen to him at this very moment admit that while I'm spending my time on Politics I am neglecting all the things that are crying for attention in myself. So I just refuse to listen to him –as if he were one of those Sirens, you know– and get out of earshot as quick as I can, for fear he keep me sitting listening till I'm positively senile.
>
> And there's one thing I've never felt with anybody else –not the kind of thing you'd expect to find in me, either– and that is a sense of shame. Socrates is the only man in the world

> that can make me feel ashamed. Because there's no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he tells me to do, and yet the moment I'm out of his sight I don't care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can, and then next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed. There are times when I'd honestly be glad to hear that he was dead, and yet I know that if he did die I'd be more upset than ever –so I ask you, what is a man to do? (215e-216c).

This question is therefore not only *one* of the Socratic enigmata but it is a passage to his irony as well. There is yet a preliminary question to be answered: Why does such an issue of one's personal life interest us philosophically? Nehamas' reply assumes philosophy not as a purely "theoretical" but as a "practical" discipline (Nehamas, 1). For those who regard philosophy in the latter fashion it becomes a matter of "theory that affects life", while "the truth of one's views is sill an issue… what also matters is the kind of person, the sort of self, one manages to construct as a result of accepting them" (*ibid.* 2). And for him this "sort of self one constructs as a result of adopting certain theories is not simply a biographical matter. It is, much more importantly, a literary and a philosophical accomplishment" (*ibid.* 2-3).

CHAPTER 3

SOCRATIC IRONY

Irony has been a devil of a discussion in Socrates. He was an apt character for satire in Aristophanes and a humble sage in Xenophon. He inspired the Socratic Schools of the Megarians, Cyrenaics, and the Cynics which regard the “summum bonum” all differently from each other. While he was charged with atheism in his time, he becomes a saint in the following centuries, a recipient and a transmitter of prayers: "Sancte Socrates ora pro nobis”[4], wrote Erasmus (Jaspers, 28). Nehamas holds that “Socrates is a mystery because of his irony” (Nehamas, 9). Regarding such a variety in his portrayals I view Socratic irony not as “one” of the Socratic enigmata, but as the element that renders Socrates so enigmatic. We might thus explain away the Socratic puzzles by appealing to his irony.

Irony seems to be the proper context in which we may depict Socratic philosophy. In this sense, that Socrates exhibits a constellation of paradoxes is not a coincidence. Regardless of their usage in Socrates, irony and paradox seem to usually connote each other. For Friedrich Schlegel “irony is the form paradox. Paradox is what is good and great at the same time” (Booth, 21). As for Socrates, interpretations of his irony range from a rhetorical device to a mode of existence. Paradox and irony appear as the characteristics of Socrates’ style in early Platonic dialogues.

It may be seen in the previous chapter that Socrates *can* be cleared of the paradoxes attributed to him; but to what extent this would be sufficient to elucidate his philosophy is questionable. Even if we can take for granted all the answers to his

[4] “St. Socrates, pray for us” (Beversluis, 14).

"riddles" something crucial to his philosophy is nevertheless left *annoyingly* missing. Why does Socrates appear as an enigmatic figure and his philosophy exhibit so many puzzles? On the other hand these puzzles are also an intrinsic part of the Socratic picture. What Socrates would be like without any paradoxes might be seen in Xenophon's Socrates: a didactic and a rather dull personage.

"The paradox in Socrates", says Vlastos, "is Socrates" (Vlastos (3), 6). In his Introduction to *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher* he tells us how he gave up publishing his one-year project work on "Plato's Socratic Dialogues" in 1953. After a second reading he sees that even though he could answer properly the questions posed in the work, he notices that it was "the strangeness of Socrates" that was missing and he attributes this "strangeness" as the key point to Socratic philosophy (Vlastos (2), 2). Taking this peculiar "strangeness" of Socrates into consideration, "irony" seems as an apt way to explore his philosophy and it would allow us see it from a wider angle.

3.1 Definition of Irony with Respect to Socrates

Socratic irony usually denotes disingenuousness. In Webster's Dictionary it is defined as a "pretended ignorance in discussion [1870-75]". In its ancient use irony is usually an indication of prevarication and Socrates gets his share from this. He is criticized by being an *eirōn* in Plato's dialogues. He is lampooned in Aristophanes' plays, *Clouds* and *Birds*, and pictured as a sly rogue. Xenophon does not explicitly represent Socrates' ironic nature, but shows him as rather naïve and pedantic. In Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, ε⇒ρϖνε⇔α, "self-deprecation", is presented as the "deficient" form of the ideal mean □λ→ψεια, "truthfulness", the "excess" of which is put as □λαζονε⇔α, "boastfulness" (Rusten, Cunningham, Knox, 13). Vlastos states that even though the *eir>n* is not an "admirable" character for Aristotle, it is "incomparably [the] more attractive" of the two (Vlastos (2), 24).

In Aristotle's portrayal, the example of *eir>n* is Socrates. Vlastos maintains that "Aristotle takes a lenient view of such dissembling in the case of Socrates" when he contrasts Socrates to his opposite "alaz*>n*", and praises him for his humble underestimation of the "prestigious" qualities he possesses (*ibid.*). When it comes to Socrates there seems to be a noteworthy change of tone in Plato and Aristotle in their evaluations of irony. All those traditional denigrating connotations of the term notwithstanding, Socrates exceptionally preserves his virtuous character as an *eir>n*. Vlastos holds that Aristotle assumes that "amiable" view of ironic Socrates because "the qualities he disclaims are the prestigious ones and his reason for disclaiming them –'to avoid pompousness'– is commendable (*NE 1127B23-6*)" (*ibid.*). It rather seems that the word drops its negative meaning when it is applied to Socrates. It leaves off its sense of "deception" and becomes a praiseworthy trait in him. Vlastos also notes that the way Plato employs the term. While he retains the traditional sense of abuse in the meaning of irony, he keeps Socrates out of it. Vlastos says that Plato in his *Sophist* contrasts Socrates and the sophists "pronouncing Socrates' dialectic a superior form of sophistik0" and putting the latter "into *eir>nikon* species of the art" (*ibid.*23). For Plato, "not Socrates, but his arch-rivals are impostors…the ones he calls *eir>nes* (*268A-B*)" (*ibid.*).

So, Socrates' own contemporaries differ in reflecting him, and so do modern scholars. Dane reminds us of U. Japp's statement that there are different versions of Socratic irony but a later version affects the former and we cannot separate these interpretations in a definite chronological order (Dane, 31). This might be seen in Vlastos' interpretation of Plato's depicting Socratic irony. We cannot place Plato's Socratic irony as a usual representation of irony in the antiquity or even in the middle ages; it differs from and surpasses them. Another example may be the definition of Cicero; he frees the word of its negative connotations before his time, yet definitions after him retain the word's usual denotation of deceit.

We learn of Socrates' ironic manner mainly from Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. Alcibiades says that Socrates "spends his whole life ironizing (*eirōneuomenos*)". Dane relates that "the image of the Silenus and the word 'irony' had become the fixed and stereotypical descriptions of Socrates" (*ibid*, 19). In the *Republic* Socrates' irony is presented as an annoying habit for his interlocutors (*ibid*, 21). In the *Sophist* irony is associated with the sophists, including Socrates. The *eirōnikon* are the group of sophists who practice "run-of-the-mill *sophistikē*"– as opposed to Socrates' dialectic which is seen as a superior form of sophistikē" (Vlastos, 23). The *eirōnes* are again impostors, but Socrates is not an *eirōn* in this sense. The Stranger describes a public and a private ironist. The first one is identified with a demagogue who "ironizes in his speech in front of public"; the second employs his simple language in order to reveal contradictions in his opponent's arguments (Dane, 20). The Stranger's definition of "private ironist" may sound relevant in describing Socrates; however it is still a question whether it suffices to call Socrates a sophist. In the *Laws* irony refers to the "hypocrisy of the atheist" that pretends to be religious (Dane, 21). Plato uses the term *eirōnikon* to designate the hypocritical as a species of the class of heretics when prescribing penalties for them (Vlastos (2), 24). In the *Euthydemus* the word is used without reference to Socrates. It is the "ironic pause" of Socrates' opponent which is used as a rhetorical weapon (Dane, 21).

Dane states that there are "two traditional and opposing approaches to Socratic irony" represented by Paul Friedländer and W. K. C. Guthrie. Friedländer argues that "Platonic irony is a higher form of irony than ordinary irony" as irony has different types which stand in a hierarchical position (*ibid.* 26). For Friedländer this "higher form of irony" brings Socrates and his interlocutors to the same level unlike the case with sophists who hold their students at a distance (*ibid*.). Socrates has actually a "wordless irony"; his "silent presence" incurs an ironic tension – "unspoken yet felt" (*ibid.* 27). He also argues that Socrates' eroticism is "not a mask, but permeated with irony" (*ibid.* 26). He also points out Trashymachus' view of irony as "arbitrary dissimulation", and argues that Trashymachus fails to understand Socrates' irony. He holds that Socratic irony "is not willful, but necessary" (*ibid.* 27). Concerning the relationship between Plato and Socrates,

Friedländer argues that both can be said to have an ironic relation to the other; Plato ironizes Socrates and Socrates ironizes Plato (*ibid.* 28).

Guthrie, on the other hand, prefers the "more strictly scholarly" interpretations of Zeller to those of Friedländer and Kierkegaard which he finds "attractive" but not really to be relied upon (*ibid.*). He rejects the translation of *eirōneia* as "irony" in Plato. He focuses on the point that in the 5th century irony, or *eirōneia* was a term of abuse which plainly meant "deceit" or "swindling", as was the use in Aristophanes (*ibid.*).

Dane argues that Zeller, with his definition of irony, tries to hinder the influence of Romantics, especially that of Hegel and Kierkegaard. According to Zeller we should not understand Socratic irony only as a "manner of conversation" in which he plays the ignorant who in fact aims to reveal the other's ignorance. Socratic irony is not the "absolute subjectivity", as Hegel puts it; nor the "denial of all general truth" as it was interpreted by the romantic school. Zeller regards Socratic irony as having the function of yielding to knowledge. Socrates pretends to be ignorant in order to expose his interlocutor's ignorance and "this results in a dialectic in which knowledge is possible" (*ibid.* 37).

Knox argues that Socratic irony "was usually referred to during the English classical period as simply the rhetorical device of blame-by-praise" (Muecke, 50). Muecke argues that Socrates does not pretend to ignorance, but he pretends in his attitude that he could learn something from others; he, in fact knows that in the end they will see their own ignorance (*ibid.* 88). He also argues that "the ironist is not a philosopher", he rather takes the ironist as an artist who "sees the world 'aesthetically' …from the proper aesthetic distance but not outside human context" (*ibid.* 121).

3.2 Irony as Sincerity in Socrates

We can count on the thought that Socrates does not intend to deceive his interlocutors, he rather seems to convey a message by employing irony. But this gives rise to questions concerning the use of saying something indirectly or implying the opposite of what one literally says in Socratic philosophy and whether it makes any difference for Socrates. Putting the questions this way does not much help us understand the role of irony in his philosophy. For Socrates irony does not seem to be for the sake of anything at all. It is an end in itself. Just as Socrates regards his task in life as philosophizing, the way to do it is irony; he has no other choice. It is in our modern conception and daily use that we employ irony *for* something: humour, mockery, sarcasm, etc. In Socratic philosophy irony comprises all these and surpasses them.

In the *Symposium*[5] Alcibiades relates what Socrates means to him:

> Notice, for instance, how Socrates is attracted by good-looking people, and how he hangs around them, positively gaping with admiration. Then again, he loves to appear utterly uninformed and ignorant –isn't that like Silenus? Of course it is. Don't you see that it's just his outer casing, like those little figures I was telling you about? But, believe me, friends and fellow drunks, you've only got to open him up and you'll find him so full of temperance and sobriety that you'll hardly believe your eyes. Because, you know, he doesn't really care a row of pins about good looks –on the contrary, you can't think how much he looks down on them– or money, or any of the honors that most people care about. He doesn't care a curse for anything of that kind, or for any of us either –yes, I'm telling you– and he spends his whole life playing his little game of irony, and laughing up his sleeve at all the world.
>
> I don't know whether anybody else has ever opened him up when he's been being serious, and seen the little images

[5] Although *Symposium* is regarded as belonging to Plato's middle period, Vlastos accepts the Socrates speaking there as the one in the earlier dialogues, the doctrines belonging to Plato. (Vlastos 1991, 27)

> inside, but I saw them once, and they looked so godlike, so golden, so beautiful, and so utterly amazing that there was nothing for it but to do exactly what he told me. I used to flatter myself that he was smitten with my youthful charms, and I thought this was an extraordinary piece of luck because I'd only got to be a bit accommodating and I'd hear everything he had to say –I tell you, I'd a pretty high opinion of my own attractions…
>
> Well, gentlemen, as I was saying, I used to go and meet him, and then, when we were by ourselves, I quite expected to hear some of those sweet nothings that lovers whisper to their darlings when they get them alone –and I liked the idea of that. But not a bit of it! He'd go on talking just the same as usual till it was time for him to go, and then he said good-by and went. (*216d-217b*).

The rest of the story is well-known: Socrates rejects Alcibiades to the latter's great surprise and despair. In fact for this reason Alcibiades tells his story with him: how Socrates "turns his whole soul upside down" (*ibid.*215e). The detail that carries perhaps the most importance in hinting at the "sincerity" of Socrates in his "irony" is when they are alone Socrates' "talking just the same as usual" –that is, he is the same man in the agora or at the banquet. This is not irony for him, he never calls himself like that, and it is always the others, but not him, who call him an ironist or *eirôn*. This is who he is, he does not assume irony as his attitude; it is an intrinsic characteristic of him as much as philosophizing is inherent to his life.

Thomas A. Szlez〈k maintains that Plato employs his irony in a way quite differently from the Romantics; for him "irony stops short of what he calls the 'divine' realm of the eternally existent, and of the 'divine' *philosophia* as the attempt to grasp the realm of the eternally existent noetically. It is often remarked that the attitude in which Plato speaks of the realm of the Ideas has a clearly religious element. For Plato, irony is only a means for producing this attitude in the reader as well, by revealing the falsity and risibility of opposing positions." (Szlez〈k, 94-95). On the other hand, Szlez〈k holds that Romantic irony "is a specifically modern phenomenon", it "is not directed towards a specific opponent, but against everything and anything; it penetrates the point of view of the ironist himself, in fact the ironist

in particular; in essence, it is self-irony, and its most important function is to leave nothing, absolutely nothing, untouched which might escape ironic treatment. For the Romantic thinker there can be nothing absolute which might be immune from being relativised by irony." (*ibid.* 94). So the difference of irony lies in the "all-pervasiveness" of the Romantic concept and the comparably "limited range" of its use in Plato however "versatile" it is (*ibid.*).

This impalpable definition of irony that Szlez⟨k gives for the Romantic concept, is actually quite similar in temperament with that of Socrates. He does not make any comments about the irony of Socrates; however, not Plato but Socrates shows the congruity with such a "modern" sense of the term. Szlez⟨k says that we need to have recourse to irony in order to solve Platonic riddles in the dialogues, which otherwise will remain as puzzles (*ibid.* 95). for Socrates is both for the clarification of his paradoxes and still for something more central to his philosophy; the paradoxes that Socrates is charged with are not the products of a philosophical manoeuvre that need irony to be clarified, but they are the "sincere" articulations of an ironic attitude of a philosophical character.

The two Socratic paradoxes that Santas named as the Prudential and the Moral actually defy first and foremost the commonsense. Who, for instance, does not think that his will is "weak"? We all actually pass our lives doing hazardous things for us knowing that they are so: we smoke, we drink, we eat hamburgers, we listen to walkman at over-volume, and these are unfortunately all physical and the mildest examples of our lack of "s>phrosyn0", let alone how much we neglect our moral and intellectual side, or our "soul". We see Alcibiades as the perfect example of the one who seems to "err willingly" and "know what is right but act otherwise". In the *Symposium* Plato presents him as a man who is deeply chagrined at his inability to keep up with acting in the way that he thinks right. He deeply laments over himself. It is actually Socrates who induces the thought in Alcibiades and that is why the latter is so indignant with him.

> Yes, I've heard Pericles and all the other great orators, and very eloquent I thought they were, but they never affected me like that; they never turned my whole soul upside down and left me feeling as if I were the lowest of the low. But this latter-day Marsyas, here, has often left me in such a state of mind that I've felt I simply couldn't go on living the way I did –now, Socrates, you can't say that isn't true– and I'm convinced that if I were to listen to him at this very moment I'd feel just the same again. I simply couldn't help it. He makes me admit that while I'm spending my time on politics I am neglecting all the things that are crying for attention in myself. So I just refuse to listen to him –as if he were one of those Sirens, you know– and get out of earshot as quick as I can, for fear he keep me sitting listening till I'm positively senile.
>
> And there's one thing I've never felt with anybody else –not the kind of thing you'd expect to find in me, either– and that is a sense of shame. Socrates is the only man in the world that can make me feel ashamed. Because there's no getting away from it, I know I ought to do the things he tells me to do, and yet the moment I'm out of his sight I don't care what I do to keep in with the mob. So I dash off like a runaway slave, and keep out of his way as long as I can, and then next time I meet him I remember all that I had to admit the time before, and naturally I feel ashamed. There are times when I'd honestly be glad to hear that he was dead, and yet I know that if he did die I'd be more upset than ever –so I ask you, what is a man to do? (*Symposium,* 215e-216c).

Here in Alcibiades' words, and also in the very modern day lives of our own, we see that with his "paradoxes" Socrates could make us think for ourselves, and isn't this what philosophy is for, too? Santas works out the two paradoxes by attributing the conundrum to some differences in the sense that Socrates uses the key terms, which quite satisfies the reader. On the other hand just an uneasiness that these doctrines create in the confidence of our moral conduct as in Alcibiades may suffice us to leave them as they are; maybe they are not meant to be solved. As the Romantics take irony to be –being inspired by Socrates– Socrates does not in fact "direct his irony towards a specific opponent", this is his attitude against everything.

The criticisms against Socrates' method of "elenchus" bear a similar standpoint. When his dialogues with his interlocutors taken in part he rather sounds like a sophist that he very much despises. Even his arguments against his accusers in his defense speech may seem like an evasion, e.g. does he answer the question of whether he believes in the same official gods of the city? Why doesn't he conclude his discussions on the nature of the concept that is under scrutiny? Again the picture of Socrates changes if we regard him as an ironist that Rorty describes him to be. For Socrates philosophy is like search for a new language aiming to displace the hegemony of any "final vocabulary".

3.3 Hegel, Kierkegaard, Vlastos, Nehamas and Rorty on Socratic Irony

These five philosophers all present us with a depiction of irony and the ironist that directly or indirectly lead to Socrates and his philosophy. Despite the analyses of particular doctrines of Socrates, these philosophers take the whole issue in terms of irony and it proves to depict a much more vivid picture of Socratic philosophy.

3.3.1 Hegel

Hegel has a decisive role in the interpretation of irony and he particularly criticizes the Romantic views. In his *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, he discusses irony with reference to Socrates. He considers Socratic irony as the way Socrates pretends to know nothing about the conceptions he discusses and with his peculiar disingenuousness he poses questions to his interlocutors seeming to be instructed by them (Hegel, 398). He calls Socratic irony a "negative dialectic…a subjective form of dialectic, a particular mode of carrying on intercourse between one person and another", for him "real dialectic deals with the reasons for things" (*ibid.*). All in all, for Hegel the concept of irony keeps its basic function of "opposition" in Socrates (*ibid.* 399). He maintains that this similarity between Socratic irony and dialectic in that the former "gives force to what is taken immediately, but only in order to allow the dissolution inherent in it to come to pass" (*ibid.* 400).

Dane argues that Hegel considers three kinds of irony. The first is the "'irony of our time' which is pure negation or 'negative dissimulation'…the irony of scorn and hypocrisy" (Dane, 85). This type of irony is what Hegel derides in Romantic irony, specifically in relation to Schlegel. The second sort is the irony of Socrates that has two forms: "the irony specific to Socrates" which is "a manner of conversation, social brilliance"; and Socrates' "tragic irony", which is "the opposition of his subjective reflection to established morality – not a self-consciousness of his own superiority to it, but rather the unfettered goal of moving toward 'true' good, toward the general idea" (*ibid.*).

Hegel holds that Socrates is ironic both when he claims to have no knowledge and when says he could learn something from others (Hegel, 398). He describes Socratic irony as a particular mode of relationship between two people, and it is "only a subjective form of dialectic, for real dialectic deals with the reasons for things" (*ibid.*). One crucial point in the discussion of Socratic irony is Hegel's argument that Socrates' disavowal of knowledge may in fact be taken as a genuine fact since he did not construct a systematic philosophy. Yet he did this consciously; he did not aim to establish a science at all (*ibid.* 399). Hegel calls special attention to what he calls "making abstract ideas concrete", which is accomplished by the irony of Socrates (*ibid.* 400). For Hegel we all have different sets of vocabulary that we presuppose common to all, and we employ this vocabulary when discussing objects. For a true understanding we need to investigate these presuppositions. He maintains that "the explanation of what we think is understood" makes understanding possible. Otherwise, discussing some abstract ideas by different people who have different vocabularies does not help them understood. Such abstract ideas should be explained in order to become concrete and we should understand that we cannot know what those abstract ideas really are (*ibid.*). Socratic irony, for Hegel, "has this great quality of showing how to make abstract ideas concrete and effect their development, for on that alone depends the bringing of the Notion into consciousness" (*ibid.*).

Hegel also develops a critique of irony reviewing Solger. He discusses irony by contrasting Schlegel and Solger. For Hegel, Solger's irony is "a principle, the negative principle of irony," however Schlegel's is "a notorious and pretentious phantom". Schlegel's irony is "a nihilistic negativity" whereas Solger's is the "dialectical negativity". The irony of both, Hegel asserts, are derived from Fichte's philosophy but it is Solger's irony that is the true representation of it and "part of a dialectical assent". Schlegel, on the other hand, "has turned irony against the very world it is intended to explain, and in so doing, has "perverted the 'guiltless' name of Socratic irony" (*ibid.* 87). Solger's irony is not a "purely abstract negativity, but arises as that negativity reflects on particular concrete concerns. Irony appears in the 'transition' where the speculative category of negativity reflects on the particular, 'on the field where duty, truth, and fundamental principles begin'" (*ibid.*).

Regarding what Socratic irony is not, Hegel gives the Romantic interpretation of it. He distinguishes Socratic irony from Romantic irony. For him the latter takes everything as a play; it is nihilistic and "can transform all into appearance" (Dane, 84). Friedrich Schlegel argues that Socrates' irony is the way to free one's mind from "limited things", through irony the soul "raises itself above all limited things". With Ast he brought forward the idea that Socratic irony is "the highest attitude of the mind", extending it into a "universal principal". For them "The most ardent love of all beauty in the Idea, as in life, inspires Socrates' words with inward, unfathomable life". This life, for them, is irony. Hegel argues that this irony is actually derived from the Fichtian philosophy and it is an "essential point in the comprehension of the conceptions of most recent times" (Hegel, 400).

Hegel describes irony as the "subjective consciousness" which "maintains its independence of everything" (*ibid.*). The subject declares itself as the arbitrary determiner of concepts like "right, good, morality, etc.". He maintains that "Greek gaiety" is ironical: "Vulcan, limping along, serves the gods with wine, and bringing upon himself the uncontrollable laughter of the immortal gods… there is irony in the sacrifices of the ancients… in the pain that laughs, in the keenest joy which is

moved to tears… in every transition from one extreme to another – from what is best to what is worst" (*ibid.* 401). But, Hegel argues that, this is not like the modern hypocritical way of living, e.g. "passing the Sunday morning in deep humility… striking the breast in penitence, and the evening… going round of pleasures, thus allowing self to reassert its independence of any such subjection" (*ibid.*). He identifies hypocrisy with genuine irony but says that "Socrates and Plato were falsely stated to be the originators of this irony" which the Romantic ironists describe as the "inmost and deepest life" (*ibid.*).

Romantic irony makes "the consciousness of the nullity of everything ultimate" but this, for Hegel, is not "depth of life" but "the depth of emptiness" (*ibid.*). For Hegel such an attitude reduces everything to a trifling matter; nothing remains serious. This contemporary Romantic notion of irony, which shifts its focus on the perception of vanity, is, Hegel thinks, not the case with Socratic and Platonic irony. Socrates' irony is a "premeditated" one and "may be called a manner of speech, a pleasant rallying; there is in it no satirical laughter of pretence, as though the idea were nothing but a joke" (*ibid.* 402). Socrates' tragic irony, on the other hand, is his "opposition of subjective reflection to morality as it exists"; it is not "consciousness of the fact that he stands above it, but the natural aim of leading man, through thought, to the true good and to the universal idea" (*ibid.*).

3.3.2 Kierkegaard

Kierkegaard, in his *The Concept of Irony,* starts his discussion by accepting that "the concept of irony makes its entry into the world through Socrates" (Kierkegaard, 8). He reminds us the fact that the word "irony" has always been attached to Socrates, but, he says, "It by no means follows that everyone knows what irony is" (*ibid.* 11). He argues that with Hegel the view of Socrates shifted once and for all (*ibid,* 220). He says that Hegel is not interested in the problem of Socrates' historical authenticity (*ibid,* 221). For Kierkegaard the importance of Hegel's view of Socrates

resides in calling him the "founder of morality" (*ibid.* 225). He quotes from Hegel regarding his view on the importance of Socratic philosophy:

> Socrates expresses essence as the universal I, *as the good*, the consciousness resting in itself; the good as such, free from existent reality, free toward the relation of consciousness to existent reality – it is individual sensuous consciousness (feeling and inclination) –or finally free from the theoretically speculative thought about nature, which, if it is indeed thought, still has the form of Being and in which I am not certain of my existence. (*ibid.* 226).

For Hegel, he says, Socratic philosophy is "negative", and Aristophanes should not be blamed for his description of Socrates, since he "recognized the dialectical aspect in Socrates as being negative and… presented it so forcibly" (*ibid.* 227). Hegel sees the negative aspect of the "universality of Socrates" in the "annulment of truth" and in "natural consciousness" and "this consciousness thus becomes the pure freedom over the determinate content, which for him was valid in itself" (*ibid.*).

Kierkegaard describes irony as a "qualification of subjectivity" and claims that "subjectivity first asserted its rights with Socrates and with this manifestation of subjectivity, everything changed once and for all" (*ibid.* 260). For him irony is the "infinite absolute negativity: it is negativity, because it only negates; it is infinite, because it does not negate this or that phenomenon; it is absolute, because that by virtue of which it negates is a higher something that still is not" (*ibid.* 261). He also argues that "irony establishes nothing, because that which is to be established lies behind it" (*ibid.*).

He finds no clear exposition of irony in modern philosophy. It has almost no history; however it was mentioned, suggested and presupposed many times after Fichte. Hegel laments that Schlegel, Tieck and Solger gives no adequate information and only brief mentions of irony. Kierkegaard also laments in another sense that we cannot find a development of irony in Hegel other than it is referred to. He does not

say anything very different from the ones he criticizes and he directs his attention against the particular and often disparate ideas about irony. As a result, his usage is not constant and his polemic unclear (*ibid.* 220).

Kierkegaard mentions two elements in irony that are absolutely necessary: "the essence" and "the phenomenon"; "the thought or meaning" and "the word" (*ibid.* 247). Thus with regard to this he also quotes from Plato that "all thinking is a discourse" (*ibid.*). He makes a distinction between "positive" and "negative freedom" in language. The ironic mode of speech makes one negatively free because what one says is not what he means and it makes one free in relation to others and oneself. One is positively free when one says what he means and assumes that his interlocutor also understands his meaning. In this case one is bound in what has been said and also bound with respect for oneself and cannot free himself any time he wishes (*ibid.* 248).

Sometimes an ironic figure of speech can be misunderstood as aiming at trickery, but this, for Kierkegaard, is not the fault of the speaker. Irony "cancels itself" when the hearer understands the speaker; "the immediate phenomenon" is negated and "the essence becomes identical with the phenomenon" since we assume that "truth requires identity" (*ibid.*). If the hearer could not grasp the irony there arises a "seeming untruth" because irony could not "cancel itself in the hearer" (*ibid.*). What, in this way is missed is that "sometimes earnestness is not in earnest". This is a shared feature of all irony: "to say something earnestly that is not meant in earnest". It is like a riddle which needs to be solved by the hearer. Kierkegaard takes it as a shocking earnestness only if the hearer could share the secret lying behind it (*ibid.* 249).

Another property of an ironic figure of speech, for Kierkegaard, is its superiority deriving from its not "wanting to be understood immediately" (*ibid. 248*). Just as a jargon makes the content of speech shared by a higher circle, the ironic mode of

speech is the form practiced. Irony has two modes of expression in relation to “the existence it ironically interprets”,

> i) the ironist identifies himself with the odious practice he wants to attack,
> ii) the ironist takes a hostile stance to the practice he wants to attack. But he is always aware of the fact that his appearance is in contrast to what he embraces. (*ibid,* 249).

It is also a characteristic of irony “to emerge in an antithetical situation” (*ibid.* 250). “The more naïve the ironist’s stupidity appears to be, the more genuine his honest and upright striving seems, the greater his joy” (*ibid.*). The most important feature of the irony, for Kierkegaard, is “the subjective freedom”. The subject thus becomes free and above the actuality.

For Kierkegaard there is a “pure irony or irony as a position”, which is to be differentiated from all the other manifestations of irony (*ibid.* 253). Among the latter there is a quantitive difference from each other, whereas irony “sensu eminentiori” qualitatively differs from them (*ibid.* 254). Kierkegaard makes the difference clear by the analogy “that speculative doubt differs qualitatively from common, empirical doubt” (*ibid.*). This irony “sensu eminentiori”, or irony “in the eminent sense”, is not directed against particular entities but against the “entire given actuality at a certain time under certain conditions” (*ibid.*). It does not arrive at its total view by destroying actuality in successive portions. It is not the particular phenomena but the totality of existence that it contemplates “*sub specie ironiae* [under the aspect of irony (*ibid.*).

Kierkegaard states that we can also see the negative side of Socrates for Hegel, in his observation that Socrates’ philosophy cannot be called speculative philosophy but it is rather “an individual doing” and he moralized to incur that doing (*ibid.* 227). Hegel argues that Socrates manifested his moralizing by leading his fellow citizens into reflecting about their thoughts and beliefs; he “directed their thinking away

from the specific incident to the universal, the in-and-for-itself truth and beauty" (*ibid.*).

Kierkegaard argues that, Socrates' being the founder of morality in the Hegelian sense, and his position as ironic do not contradict each other; the good "as the infinitely negative corresponds to the moral that is the negatively free subject" (*ibid.* 235). For Kierkegaard

> if we wish to add the qualification of irony, which Hegel so frequently stresses, that for irony nothing is a matter of earnestness, then this can also be claimed for the negatively free subject, because even the virtues he practices are not done with earnestness – and Hegel certainly would agree with this – true earnestness is possible only in a totality in which the subject no longer arbitrarily decides at every moment to continue his imaginary construction but feels the task to be something that he has not assigned himself but that has been assigned to him. (*ibid.* 255).

Kierkegaard argues that Hegel wants to claim the idea of good for Socrates but the trouble arises at this point for Hegel when he tries to show how Socrates interpreted the good. He then maintains that what is even more fallacious in Hegel is that his view does not mean that Socrates arrived there some time in his life but that "his life was a continual arrival at the good and having others arrive at this" (*ibid.* 235).

Kierkegaard argues that for Socrates "the whole given actuality had entirely lost its validity" (*ibid,* 264). He also argues that Socrates destroyed Greek culture using irony and his attitude toward this culture was always ironic. He was sincere in disclaiming knowledge and wanting to learn from others. Kierkegaard sees irony as a standpoint in Socrates. It is his attitude toward reality and he continued it persistently through his life. Kierkegaard stresses that irony is a "position" for Socrates:

> the whole substantial life of Greek culture had lost its validity for him, which means that to him the established

> actuality was unactual, not in this of that particular aspect but in its totality as such; that with regard to this invalid actuality he let the established order of things appear to remain established and thereby brought about its downfall; that in the process Socrates became lighter, more and more negatively free; consequently, that we do indeed perceive that according to what is set forth here Socrates' position was as infinite absolute negativity, irony. (*ibid.* 271).

3.3.3 Vlastos

Vlastos specifies three reasons for the need to employ irony; the first two are "humour" and "mockery" (Vlastos (2), 21). The third use, he says, is barely noticed and has no name. In this case the ironist implies something but does not reveal his real intention. It is the other interlocutor's duty to solve the riddle (*ibid.* 22). He maintains that this last use of irony as "riddle" runs the risk of being missed; if the interlocutor of ironist could not get any hidden meaning a deception might be said to have occurred, however this is against the ironist's intention (*ibid.*). In this kind of use, Vlastos reminds one of the possibility that the same phrases can be uttered when one's intention is to deceive another or to employ irony. The intention of the speaker defines the difference. We do not call the utterance in the former case an irony: "Can I interest you in a diamond ring?", however the same question counts for being ironic when posed for another aim, for instance, "for testing … intelligence and good sense", e.g., when you say this to your "ten-year-old daughter" who is "old enough to know that if that trinket were a diamond ring it would be worth thousands and her father would not let it out of his sight" (*ibid.* 23).

Vlastos then goes back to the Ancient Greek use of irony, *eirōneia*, *eirōn*, *eirōneuomai*, as a means of deception, unlike its modern sense. The term is first seen in Aristophanes "in the surviving corpus of Attic texts":

> In *Wasps* 174, ⊃ω ε⇒ρϖνικ∩ω refers to Philocleon's lying to get his donkey out of the family out of the compound to make a dicast out of him. In *Birds* 1211, it is applied to Iris for lying her way into the city of birds. In *Clouds* 449,

> ε◊ρϖν, sandwiched in between two words for "slippery," figures in "catalogue of abusive terms against a man who is a tricky opponent in a lawsuit." We meet more of the same in fourth-century usage. Demosthenes (*I Phil. 7*) uses it of citizens who prevaricate to evade irksome civic duty. Plato uses it in the *Laws* (*90IE)* when prescribing penalties for heretics. The hypocritical ones he calls the *eir>nikon* species of the class: for them he legislates death or worse; those equally wrong-headed but honestly outspoken are let off with confinement and admonition. In the *Sophist*, pronouncing Socrates' dialectic a superior form of *sophistik0*, Plato contrasts it with the run-of-the-mill *sophistik0* practiced by ordinary sophists: these are the people he puts into the *eir>nikon* species of the art. Not Socrates but his arc-rivals, whom Plato thinks imposters, are the ones he calls *eir>nes* (*268A-B*). (*ibid.*).

Vlastos argues that such frequent use of irony to denote deceit in ancient literature does not mean that it is "always" so used of Socrates by Plato (*ibid.* 25). For him this would be "jumping" to an "easy conclusion" (ibid.). He adds that this was the common presumption of many Hellenists including Burnet, Wilamowitz, and Guthrie (*ibid.*).

He provides examples from these "Attic texts" which do not contain "irony" in its usual aspect of deceit. His first example is from the *Gorgias*:

> T2 *G.* 489D-E: [a] Socrates: "Since by 'better' you don't mean 'stranger,' tell me again what you mean. And teach me more gently, admirable man, so that I won't run away from your school." Callicles: "You are mocking me (ε⇒ρϖνε(|)."
> [b] Socrates: "No, by Zethus, whom you used earlier to do a lot of mocking (πολλ□ ε⇒ρϖνε(ου) of me." (*ibid.* 25).

Vlastos maintains that in [a] the word "ε⇒ρϖνε(|", rendered as "mocking" by Croiset&Bodin, 1955, conveys the "protesting " of Callicles. He calls this a "transparent irony" arguing that "Callicles no doubt feels that, on the contrary, it is Socrates who has been playing the schoolmaster right along" (*ibid.* 26). In part [b]

“ε⇒ρϖνε⎛ου”, as Vlastos asserts, is used in a similar sense of mockery by Socrates in his retort implying that “Callicles had used the figure of Zethus to mock him earlier on, associating him with the latter’s brother, the pathetic Amphion, who despite a noble nature, puts on the semblance of a silly juvenile (485E-486A)” (*ibid.*). Vlastos thus concludes that in this example the meaning of irony does not contain any traditional sign of deceiving. He states that “in neither case there is any question of shamming, slyness, or evasiveness –no more so than if they had resorted to crude abuse, like calling each other ‘pig’ or ‘jack-ass’” (*ibid.*). Vlastos finds further proof for his argument that irony also includes a meaning of “mockery without the least intention of deceit” (*ibid*. 27) in *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, ca. fourth century, in which *eir>neia* is defined as *a.* a pretention, and *b.* “calling things by contrary names”, anticipating Quintilian. (*ibid. 26*).

Vlastos holds that this second rendering of irony without any aspect of deceit, is an “understandable linguistic phenomenon today… if we remind ourselves of the parallel behavior of our word ‘pretending’” (*ibid.* 27). Accepting the primary use of the term as “pretending” in the sense “to allege falsely”, he maintains that there is also another usage which “by-passes false allegation” as in the example of “children ‘pretending’ that their colored chips are money… or that their dolls are sick or die or go to school” (*ibid*.). He thus argues that irony went through a process metamorphosis and evolved closest into its modern sense with Quintilian, two generations after Cicero (*ibid.*). “Eir>n”, with its “strongly “unfavorable connotations–…as a term of denigration or abuse–“ in the “last third of the fifth century at the latest”, becomes the ‘ironia’ of “urbane dissimulation” with Cicero in the first century B.C. and Quintilian fixes its meaning as the “speech used to express a meaning that runs contrary to what is said”, thus it becomes the irony of today as “the perfect medium for mockery innocent of deceit” (*ibid.*).

For Vlastos Socrates is the one who accompanied irony with those radical evocations. He asserts that Socrates did not deliberately do this by making it a subject of his cross-examinations : “in none of our sources does he ever make

eir>neia the *F* in his ‘What is the *F?* ’ question or bring it by some other means under his elenctic hammer” (*ibid.* 29). He argues that Socrates changes the meaning of the word “not by theorizing”, but he “creates” a new domain in the word:

> a new form of life realized in himself which was the every incarnation εἰρωνεία in that second of its contemporary uses, as innocent of intentional deceit as is a child’s feigning that the play chips are money, as free from shamming as are honest games, though, unlike games, serious in its mockery (*cum gravitate salsum*), dead earnest in its playfulness (*severe ludens*), a previously unknown, imagined type of personality, so arresting to his contemporaries and so memorable for ever after, that the time would come, centuries after his death, when educated people would hardly be able to think of *ironia* without its bringing Socrates into mind. (*ibid.* 29).

This, as Vlastos puts it, is an “unprecedented” form of in Greek literature, and not a dissembling of truth (*ibid.*). He describes it as an example of what he calls “complex irony”. It is a new mode of irony different from “simple irony” in that the latter denotes only a discrepancy between what is said and meant. However, for Vlastos, 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” (*ibid.* 31).

This kind of “complex irony” appears to Vlastos as a possibility of an answer to the grand challenge of Socratic paradoxes like “Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge and of teaching” (*ibid.* 32). He argues that “each of these is intelligible only as complex irony” (*ibid.*).

Socrates employs such an irony, Vlastos explains, by attributing two different meanings to the same word. We might see the “philosophical paradoxes” in the early dialogues this way. When Socrates disclaims knowledge and asserts that virtue is possible only through knowledge and he still leads a virtuous life, Vlastos takes the word “knowledge” in two distinct senses:

> He wants it to assure his hearers that in the moral domain there is not a single proposition he claims to know with certainty. But in another sense of 'knowledge,' where the word refers to justified true belief – justifiable through the peculiarly, Socratic Method of elenctic argument – there are many propositions he does claim to know. (*ibid.* 32).

3.3.4 Nehamas

Alexander Nehamas, in his *Art of Living*, argues that Vlastos is not quite right in claiming that Socrates never intends to feign the truth in his irony. He accepts that Socrates does not cheat but it does not have to mean, for Nehamas, Socrates reveals the truth. He takes the notion of pretension in a different way from Vlastos. Socratic irony is between deceit and sincerity, but neither of them (Nehamas, 54-7). He argues that Socrates does not always mean the opposite of what he says; he means something just different from what he says, in a way he conceals his meaning.

Nehamas argues against Vlastos' view of Socratic irony in that "irony does not consist in saying the contrary of, but only something different from, what one means" (*ibid,* 12). So irony "does not allow us to peer into the ironist's mind which remains concealed and inscrutable" (*ibid,* 12). For Nehamas such is the Socratic irony because Socrates does not indicate what he means; we are not even sure that his words reflect his intentions. Thus, for Nehamas, Socratic irony is a kind of silence.

Nehamas maintains that Socratic paradoxes remain unexplained since we cannot really know for sure why he proposed such a paradox in his life. It is his irony. He states that "irony creates an essential uncertainty. It makes it impossible to decide

whether ironists are or are not serious either about what they say or about what they mean. Sometimes it makes it impossible to know whether ironists even know who they really are" (*ibid,* 22).

Nehamas claims that Socratic irony is "more complex" than the "complex irony" of Vlastos. He maintains that irony creates a mask but it does not show what is behind the mask and it suggests depth and he states that the Socrates in Plato's early dialogues is almost impossible to understand. He is "an unexplained mystery and simply leads a philosophic life, stands at the beginning of a different philosophical tradition" (*ibid,* 69). He argues that in middle and later dialogues Plato attempts to solve this riddle of Socrates by attributing him different complex philosophical views.

Socratic irony is particularly significant for Nehamas' conception of the "art of living." He holds that Socrates' aim was mainly private; he was mainly concerned with the care of his own self and he urged his fellow citizens to undertake a similar private project for themselves (*ibid,* 14). Socrates becomes the model of philosophers like Montaigne, Nietzsche, and Foucault. It is by virtue of his irony, for Nehamas Socrates is capable of playing such a role. He keeps his silence about himself throughout the early dialogues (*ibid.* 10). We do not know how such a Socrates had been accomplished. He is presented us ready-made by Plato. His "leaving the process absolutely indeterminate" makes him a different model for each philosopher.

3.3.5 Rorty

Rather than the concept of irony, Rorty explicates who an ironist is in "Ironism and Theory, Private Irony and Liberal Hope" in his *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Everybody has a "vocabulary", the set of words that they use to tell the way they

are. It is a “final vocabulary” since in the end we become circular in our vocabulary; it is the linguistic terminal point we have reached.

Rorty defines an “ironist” on three conditions:

> i) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered;
> ii) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts;
> iii) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself. (Rorty, 73)

For an ironist no final vocabulary can be the ultimate choice as a “universal meta vocabulary”. What an ironist does is rather “playing the new off against the old”: she contrasts two vocabularies on account of irony. Ironists are, with Sartre’s definition, in a “meta-stable” position: they do not look for some criteria to choose a final vocabulary among others and they have realized that everything can be redescribed and re-valued this way (*ibid.* 73). They are also aware that their own vocabulary is no “final” than others.

Rorty takes common sense as the opposite of irony. Those who appeal to common sense are habituated to a certain final vocabulary and they “unselfconsciously” employ that vocabulary to describe life. They assume that their particular vocabulary is competent to express everything. However, for Rorty, nothing can be described once and for all; all are platitudes of some sort. So when common sense is challenged and if none of those bromides can answer an argumentative challenge, there arises the need to go beyond platitudes. This is the point, for Rorty, where the Socratic conversation may begin. The paradigm cases of what an *x* is do not suffice for an answer and here a definition about the essence of *x* might be demanded (*ibid.* 74-8).

For Rorty, making such a Socratic demand does not suffice to make one an ironist. It is rather to become, in the Heideggerian sense, a "metaphysician". A metaphysician interrogates about the essence of concepts. For a metaphysician if there is a word for something, in his vocabulary, there is a reality behind that corresponds to the word. Nevertheless it is only a platitude that he does not question, saying "there is a single permanent reality to be found behind the many temporary appearances" (*ibid.* 79). A metaphysician appeals to common sense since he never questions such trite phrases "which encapsulate the use of a given final vocabulary". He does not redescribe anything but what he does is, for Rorty, is to analyze "old descriptions with the help of other old descriptions". An ironist, on the other hand, does not think there is an intrinsic nature of anything. So, a Socratic inquiry does not lead one to the real essence of a term; it is only one language game among others.

Rorty states that an ironist is continually worried about "that she has been taught to play the wrong language game", however she cannot define what is wrong, and "the more she is driven to articulate her situation in philosophical terms, the more she reminds herself of her rootlessness by constantly using terms like 'Weltanschauung,' 'perspective,' 'dialectic,' 'conceptual framework,' 'historical epoch,' 'language game,' 'redescription,' 'vocabulary,' and 'irony'" (*ibid.* 75).

Rorty defines philosophy from a metaphysician's point of view as, "referring to the canonical Plato-Kant sequence, an attempt to know about certain things- quite general and important things." For the ironist this is trying to "apply and develop a particular antecedently chosen final vocabulary – one which revolves around the appearance-reality distinction" (*ibid.* 76). For Rorty, the metaphysician agrees with the Platonic Theory of Recollection, in the form in which this theory was restated by Kierkegaard, namely, that we have the truth within us, that we have built-in criteria which enable us to recognize the right final vocabulary when we hear it" (*ibid.*).

Rorty's ironist does not believe in a universally final vocabulary. All metaphysical assertions are platitudes which are used "to inculcate the local final vocabulary, the common sense of the West". An ironist vocabulary does not utter such notions like "All men by nature desire to know," or "Truth is independent of the human mind" (*ibid.* 77). The ironist looks for a better language than the current one, she takes her endeavour as a making of the truth rather than finding it. Her findings, as Rorty puts it, "are poetic achievements rather than the results of prior criteria" (*ibid.* 80).

CHAPTER 4

IRONY AS A PHILOSOPHICAL CONCEPT

Perhaps, what causes Socrates to sound so paradoxical and ironic is for the most part his disavowal of knowledge. It in fact opens up his way to philosophy, ramifying his successors' interpretations of him into a wide-ranging plurality, and still keeps us at a distance from him. It would actually put him in a queer position if he were to argue the other way, claiming to "know" some stuff. A Socrates who declares he knows, say, what virtue is would be less and less philosophically intriguing, personally captivating and stylistically dramatic. Furthermore, through such a disclaim he also renders himself refutation-proof. To assert "to know nothing" is not to argue anything: it is a non-argument, actually not anything at all. It is at the same, be that as it may, a breakthrough in the perception of philosophy of his time. This "simple" paradox of "knowing that he does not know" sets irony to philosophy.

Socratic irony makes this chapter necessary regarding the relation of irony with philosophy since Socrates with all his "paradoxes" and the ironic stance he undertakes behind brings about a need to review what philosophy is. Socrates' philosophy as a way of life or his life as a way of philosophy reminds some to stop and think over what sort of moral and intellectual attitudes one is to take on in life and ask again what philosophy really means to them.

4.1 A Summary of the Etymology and History of Irony

The word "irony" is derived from the ancient Greek *eirōneia*. J. A. Dane states that *eirōneia* is first seen in Plato's dialogues. In 1862, in Firmin-Didot's *complément* for the 1835 Academy dictionary, irony is defined as originally having the meaning, at its root "interrogation" (Vlastos (2), 35). In its ancient use *eirōneia* almost always denotes "dissimulation". In Aristophanes ironic acts refer to "lying", and in *Clouds*, it is meant to abuse a "tricky opponent" in cases of the court (*ibid.* 23). Demosthenes also takes *eirōneia* as deceiving, to describe the citizens who escape from their civic duties by trickery (*ibid.*). For Theophrastus, an *eirōn* is one of the worst type of character traits and he puts it as the first example in his *Characters*, ca. 319. He defines *eirōneia* as "dissembling [which] would seem to be a false denigration of one's actions and words" (Theophrastus, 53), and takes the *eirōn* as the "dissembler", who, for Vlastos, "is flayed mercilessly, portrayed as systematically deceitful, venomously double-faced, adept at self-serving camouflage" (Vlastos (2), 24). Theophrastus depicts an *eirōn* as the sort of person who

> goes up to his enemies and is willing to chat with them. He praises to their faces those whom he has attacked in secret, and commiserates with people he is suing if they lose their case. He is forgiving to those who slander him, and laughs at anything said against him… He admits to nothing that he is actually doing, but says he is thinking it over, and pretends that he just arrived, and behaves like a coward… And in general he is apt to employ phrases like this: "I don't believe it." "I don't think so." "I'm astonished." … "The business is a mystery to me." (*ibid.*).

Ariston of Keos (III-II B.C.) describes an *eirōn*, dissembler or ironic man, as

> for the most part a type of fraud… he intends… but rather the opposite, so that he praises a man he finds fault with, but belittles and faults himself and those…With some people he remains silent, even though he has spent a long time with them. If one praises him or bids him speak or people say that he will be remembered, he responds: "What am I supposed to know, except that I know nothing?"… He doesn't call people merely by their names, but "fair Phaedrus," or "wise Lysias," or uses ironic words: "good," "sweet," "simple," "noble," "brave." He shows off thoughts he thinks wise, but

> attributes them to others as Socrates does with Aspasia and Isomachus. (ibid. 193)

Eirōneia keeps the sense of "dissembling" in both Theophrastus and Ariston of Keos since Aristophanes. Nevertheless, there is a change in tone for the mild especially in the latter example. Ariston seems to describe Socrates as a role model for his *eirōn*. Socrates might have highly influenced the definition of "irony" from the beginning. Vlastos criticizes Friedl™nder for arguing that Theophrastus "portrays but 'does not evaluate'" the ε◊ρων (Vlastos (2), 24). Vlastos maintains that "by leaving Socrates out of it, Theophrastus feels free to vent on the ε◊ρων the scorn he deserves in the common view" (*ibid.*). Friedl™nder does not have to be found so "astonishing", as Vlastos does, for his evaluation. Theophrastus keeps this peculiar sound of throughout the book in the descriptions of his "characters". His style in a way reminds us that of Aristophanes in his *Clouds*. They both maintain a similar fashion of a combination of sarcasm, mockery, ridicule and sometimes contempt for the subject matter they hold; Aristophanes in his description of Socrates as a role model for a philosopher and Theophrastus in that of his ε◊ρων and other traits. It is obvious that theirs is not an approval of those qualities but their aim does not seem likely to be a mere disparagement either.

Dane states that Aristotle uses the word *eirōn* in different contexts in *Nicomachean "Ethics* and *Rhetoric*. For Aristotle one of our most dangerous enemies is the dissembling, the *eirōnes*, who hide "their evil intent under a cool exterior" (*ibid.*). In *Rhetoric*, *eirōneia* is a "disdainful trait" (*ibid.*). In *Nicomachean Ethics,* Aristotle describes Socrates as an *eirōn*, however not in the derogatory sense he used elsewhere. He contrasts the *eirōn* with the braggart. Despite the boastful, an ironist "understates things, seem more attractive in character, for they are thought to speak not for gain but to avoid parade; and here too it is qualities which bring reputation that they disclaim, as Socrates used to do" (Nehamas, 50).

In the classical texts such as those of Plato, Aristophanes, Aristotle, Quintilian and Cicero the word "irony" is attached to Socrates as a chief characteristic of his way of philosophizing. The same tendency goes also in the French and English lexicons (Dane, 32-40). Socrates is also present in discussions of irony in romanticism and post-romanticism. Dane argues that the nature of Socratic figure is shaped by these romantic and post-romantic views of Socrates. Here Dane admits that the word "irony" has been "conditioned by unchecked speculation on its supposed philosophical origins as is a history of those origins by the constraints of language" (*ibid*. 16).

For Quintilian irony is a form of trope or figure of speech employed in rhetoric, a species of "allegory". "The speaker disguises his entire meaning" by using irony. It is a "device of saying the opposite of what we desire to imply" (Quintilian, IX.II. 44-7). He refers to Socrates when he says "ironia may characterize a man's whole life" (Vlastos (2), 29).

In *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum*, which was first attributed to Aristotle and then to Anaximenes, "*eirōneia* is to say something while pretending not to say it or to propose some action in the opposite words". Dane argues that with this work the "rhetorical formulae of irony begin to be fixed" (Dane, 47).

It was Cicero who produced the Latin word *ironia* transliterating the Greek *eirōneia* (Vlastos (2), 28). He discusses irony in *De Officiis* and *De Oratore*. In *De Oratore*, he endows the term with praise, unlike his Greek predecessors. He describes *ironia* as an "urbane dissimulation" you employ when "what you want to say is quite other than what you understand" (*ibid.*). Being "urbane" *ironia* gives away its denotation of "deceit" or "trickery" and gains a new aura of elegance and sophistication with Cicero. His example practitioner of such *ironia* is Socrates: "In this irony and dissimulation Socrates, in my opinion, far excelled all others in charm and humanity." (*ibid.*).

As an example of medieval interpretation we may take Isidore of Seville's, c570-636, description of irony. In his encyclopedic work *Etymologiae*, he discusses irony under the title *De Tropis*, considering it as a figure of speech (Dane, 52). As in Quintilian, irony is again taken as a subcategory of allegory, which was defined as "other-speech" (*alieniloquium*), in which "one thing is said, another is meant" (*ibid.* 54). Irony is "when the speaker, through simulation, wishes something diverse from what is said to be understood" (*ibid.*).

D. C. Muecke considers 1755, the date of Dr Johnson's dictionary, a turning point in the interpretation of "irony". He maintains that until 1755 the meaning of irony remained roughly the same; a figure of speech in which what is said is not what is meant. Dr Johnson describes irony as "a mode of speech in which the meaning is contrary to words" (Vlastos (2), 21). Muecke argues that Dr Johnson actually defined only one kind of irony in his dictionary and after 1755 the word began to gain some different and new meanings (Muecke, 8).

The 18th century marks the difference in the history of this concept. Wayne Booth states that before this time irony was not paid much attention, it was in fact "one rhetorical device among many, the least important of the rhetorical troops" (Booth, ix). With Romanticism it becomes a "grand Hegelian concept … a synonym for romanticism… or even an essential attribute of God (*ibid*).

German Romanticism seems to have carried irony into a new domain where it has become, with Karl Solger's words, "the very principle of art". Dane asserts that romantic irony defined "the most crucial area" in the history of the term because it enabled modern critics to interpret irony independently from its Socratic or rhetorical types and it has "influenced our basic critical vocabulary" (Dane, 73). Kierkegaard argues that

> Irony is a disciplinarian feared only by those who do not know it, but cherished by those who do. He who does not understand irony and has no ears for its whispering lacks of what might be called the absolute beginning of the personal life. He lacks what at moments is indispensable for the personal life, lacks the regeneration and rejuvenation, the cleaning baptism of irony that redeems the soul from having its life in finitude though living boldly and energetically in finitude. (*ibid.*)

For Kierkegaard romantic irony is synonymous to irony (*ibid.*). Some examples among the romantic views of irony are:

> the self-conscious attitude of the artist toward the artistic work, a dialectical process involving the artist or the artistic work, the destroying of illusion in the artistic work, the endpoint of all art, pure artistic subjectivity (or objectivity), that indeterminacy congenial to deconstruction, romanticism itself. (*ibid.*)

4.2 Attempts for a Definition for Irony

In his *The Compass of Irony* Muecke's first concern is the "nebulous" character of the concept of irony and he admits the difficulty of giving a general definition of irony which pertains to all its forms. He brings up three kinds of challenges as such:

i. there are several forms of irony which can be approached and defined from different angles,
ii. there is a feeling that irony should mean "good irony", that irony ought to be qualitatively defined, and these thoughts bring the same sort of difficulties in defining "art" or "pure poetry",
iii. The concept of irony is still in the process of being developed so that almost everyone may be dismayed by the narrowness of some definitions and outraged by the looseness of others. (Muecke, 4)

One probable reason for this “infinitely” divided irony would be that the concept is too elusive to be defined under one general title of “irony”. The field of observation in irony is too large and this makes it almost impossible to give a full definition of the concept. There are various names given to “kinds” of irony: “tragic irony, comic irony, irony of manner, irony of situation, philosophical irony, practical irony, dramatic irony, verbal irony, ingénu irony, double irony, rhetorical irony, self irony, Socratic irony, Romantic irony, cosmic irony, sentimental irony, irony of fate, irony of chance, or irony of character” etc. Some of these are named from the effect, some from the medium, technique, function, object, practitioner, tone, or the attitude (*ibid.*). So, there is no one simple definition of irony that includes all its forms. Distinctions form one angle may not be the same from another and, moreover, theoretically distinguishable kinds might lose their character in practice. There is also a personal quality of irony independent from its function, medium, or object. We talk not just about irony but “the irony of Ariosto and Molière, Hardy and Proust” (*ibid*.). This “personal quality of irony” makes a general definition of the concept even more complicated.

The concept of irony is also obscured by its close connotations with allegory, metaphor, simile, satire, mockery, or hyperbole. Irony partly overlaps them but it cannot be described as clearly as them. Muecke argues that “as a subject for discussion irony is more than a set of conceptual and methodological problems” (*ibid*. 5). He rather takes irony as an art and trying to define it would be “weighing the imponderable and objectifying the subjective” (*ibid*.).

Considering the challenges against describing irony, Muecke finds it safe and simple to call it “the art of saying something without really saying it” (*ibid*.). He states that there are two necessary qualities of irony: subjective and aesthetic. It is subjective because, like beauty, irony is in the eye of its beholder. It is not inherent in remarks, situations or events. Even if we might define the formal requirements of an ironical remark or situation, we still need to ask of a remark “Was it meant ironically?” or of a situation “Do you see it as irony?” However in everyday conversations we seem to

forget this subjective quality of irony and speak, as we do of beauty, of it as though it is an objective matter for all. Secondly, it is an aesthetic concept since, like beauty again, an ironical remark, work, event, or situation must have beyond its formal requirements, certain minimal aesthetic qualities, lacking, which, it fails to affect us as irony (*ibid*. 15).

For Muecke there are three formal requirements of irony:

i. it is a double layered or a two-storey phenomenon,
ii. there is always some kind of an opposition between the two levels, that may take the form of contradiction, incongruity, or incompatibility,
iii. there is an element of "innocence" (*ibid*. 19-20).

At the lower level of an irony, there is the situation as it appears to the "victim" of irony; at the upper level, there is the situation as it is presented by the ironist or the observer this level need not be presented by the ironist; it only needs to be evoked by him or be present in the mind of the observer. It does not need more than a hint (*ibid*. 22). With respect to opposition, it is profitable to distinguish "simple irony" from "double irony". In the former case the opposition is solely between levels. In the latter there is also a more obvious opposition within the lower level. In terms of innocence either a victim is confidently unaware of the very possibility of there being an upper level of the point of view that invalidates his own, or an ironist pretends not to be aware of it (*ibid*. 24).

In today's popular usage the term is employed in so wide-ranging situations that we thus qualify the situations from slightly incongruous to the most deeply tragic ones. Beethoven's loss of hearing, the fate of Oedipus, last words of J.F. Kennedy, Titanic's sinking on her maiden voyage or Village People's making *Y.M.C.A.* a classic gay anthem may all be called ironic. On the other hand, many would also react to the sentence "My ex-boyfriend is married to my sister" by uttering "How ironic!" Even if everyone would not agree with that, we nevertheless would not reject it as a "bizarre" way of description. Actually, there is no significant

controversy in a sister's marrying one's ex-boyfriend, yet it is not so "normal" regarding the "usual" history of married couples. Here one thinks the situation is ironic because one is unaccustomed to that. A simple "difference" or a slight "deviation" from the "routine" may also suffice to make a case to be called "ironic". Regarding such a large use of the term, today it is especially difficult to define the standards of calling a situation ironic.

However, the results of a usage panel of The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language (Fourth Edition, 2000) show that

> 78 percent of the Usage Panel rejects the usage of *ironically* in the sentence *In 1969 Susie moved from Ithaca to California where she met her husband-to-be, who, ironically, also came from upstate New York.* Some panelists noted that this particular usage might be acceptable if Susie had in fact moved to California in order to find a husband, in which case the story could be taken as exemplifying the folly of supposing that we can know what fate has in store for us. By contrast, 73 percent accepted the sentence *Ironically, even as the government was fulminating against American policy, American jeans and videocassettes were the hottest items in the stalls of the market*, where the incongruity can be seen as an example of human inconsistency. (The American Heritage Dictionary (2000)).

Alanis Morisette's popular 1995 song "Ironic" arises some discussions about the relevance of these lines to irony:

> It's a traffic jam / when you're already late
>
> He won the lottery / and died the next day (wikipedia)

Later she admits that her song has nothing to do with irony, yet she adds that it isironic that she wrote such a song under the name of irony.

As it is seen in the examples, despite the fact that irony is defined in terms of a "difference" between what is said and meant, it finds its fullest meaning as there is "contrariness" between the overt and the covert layers of the meaning. An extreme example of qualifying irony is an advertisement for a dentistry center in Los Angeles advertising its air as "ironically purified" (Miller, 2). This is a typographical error or it is so absurd – purifying air ironically– that we think it is a typographical error. We cannot really make sure what kind of an error that is, because "irony" has now become a brand that we every now and then easily stick to here and there. As Will Kaufman puts it, this is an "irony fatigue" world today (*ibid*.). This instance shows that the concept really proves to be an "umbrella" today which can consist of almost everything.

In "StoneCypher's" webpage there is an answer to this trend of calling "everything" irony. The argument is that we usually confuse irony with situations which are "coincidental, karmic, synchronous, biting, chiding, bittersweet, concurrent, foreshadowed, predictable, correspondent, cruel, telescoped and even occasionally educational", but not irony which is about "doubletalk, two-faced speech, sly underpinnings of sarcasm and trickery through misphrased honesty" (StoneHome, 2). Regarding "what irony isn't" the following situations are the examples in which we cannot talk about irony:

> If something happens to someone which would have been preventable had they not done some awful thing they did. Catching someone doing what they told others not to do. Something happening after someone suggested it wouldn't/couldn't. Someone aspiring to better someone else by improving one facet and ending up with an even lesser result.Trying to prevent something and thereby accelerating or worsening it. A situation being supported solely by the belief in a preconception about said situation. (*ibid. 3*).

The irony in "situations" is different from the irony in "text" mainly because the latter is "deliberate" and the former is random, an "accident", not deliberately constructed, or the irony of "God". However, to detect irony in a text, or whether a

text is ironical or not or where in the text irony is might usually be the point of a controversy among the readers. Booth offers four "marks" to detect irony:

i. irony is "intended"; it waits for the reader to be noticed,
ii. it is "covert, intended to be reconstructed with meanings different from those on the surface",
iii. it is "stable or fixed", once the reader reconstructs a meaning he cannot destroy it for a different one without falling into irrelevancy,
iv. It is "finite": the subject may be a broad one but the meaning remains "local" or "limited" to the scope of its discourse "in which we can say with great security certain things that are violated by the overt words". (Booth,5-6).

4.3 The Significance For Philosophy

As Muecke stated before, a proper description of irony is "saying something different from what one literally means". However there are quite a number of ways of doing this. Booth gives the examples of "metaphor and simile, allegory and apologue…metonymy, synecdoche, asteismus, micterismus, charientismus, preterition…banter, raillery, burlesque and paranomasia" (Booth, 7). Moreover, he states that I.A. Richards, Cleanth Brooks and Kenneth Burke suggest "every literary context is ironic because it provides a weighting or qualification on every word in it, thus requiring the reader to infer meanings which are in a sense not in the words themselves: all literary meanings in this view become a form of covert irony, whether intended or not" (*ibid.*).

This view brings up the question of whether a "complete" literal meaning is possible at all. From stories for children to more "mature" literature it seems not. One might think of bare "instructions" that can taken be as "really" literal. Statements like "Answer the questions below." Or "Do not smoke!" really mean what they immediately say. Yet, other than examples of this sort it is not easy to find "complete" literal genres. So what in fact seems to be difficult in a literary text is a

“pure” literal meaning; irony is everywhere. We construct a different level of meaning in a text and actually this is what makes it more literarily “valuable” or “deeper”. Given such a picture of irony in literature, one would expect to face it even more intensely in a philosophical work.

What makes “irony” a special case for philosophy is its characteristic of “exchange” between reader and writer. In a religious text there is not this kind of an exchange, it is a one-way articulation or roughly, an order. Even if one might discuss a certain topic in terms of allegory or metaphor, the end is pre-determined; it is discussed to be accepted. The exchange in irony is more dynamic and open-ended. In literature once the ironic meaning is detected it becomes constructed once and for all and not supposed to be altered afterwards. If we detect that a character in fact despises someone while pretending not to, the fact of “despise” is settled. We would not change it to something else after the meaning is reconstructed as such. The point of a discussion over such a text would be whether we like it or not; but not whether it is the truth.

In irony we meet the other's intended-yet-not-revealed meaning. Within the same language different levels of meaning are shared and translated into each other. In this way “knowledge” is opened into a new track of redefinition. Irony proves itself most productive in a philosophical text where the language of the ironist and the “iron⎡e” meet and challenge each other. It seems that the line between knowledge and belief – hunch or intuition – gets blurred in irony. Irony thus becomes more like an activity in a philosophical text. This pretty much seems what Socrates does in his ironic way of philosophizing. Regarding the kind of knowledge in irony Booth claims that it is “a form of interpretation that gives us knowledge of a firm (and neglected) kind, a kind quite unrelated both to ordinary empirical observation and to standard deductive or logical proofs” (Booth, 14).

As Friedrich Schlegel puts it, irony is the “tension of opposites” in which “both meanings [apparent and real] are simultaneously before the eye in a precarious balance”, however in irony this tension is resolved toward a “real meaning”; “nothing is absolute, everything is relative.” For Schlegel irony becomes

> An incessant… alternation of two contradictory thoughts… some ideal human value on the one hand, and on the other… a less ideal reality; the ‘subjective’ versus the ‘objective’ …the ironic author at first appears to engage himself with one meaning –and in part really does so; he then appears to destroy that meaning by revealing and attaching himself to a contradictory meaning; this, too, however, he also destroys, either by returning to the first or moving to a third, ad infinitum. (Knox (2002), 5).

For philosophy one aftereffect of this swing of pendulum in thought through irony would be, as A.W. Schlegel said “a defense against overcharged one-sidedness in matters of fancy and feeling” (*ibid.* 6). By this instance we may see irony as a defense against the irrational and submission to impositions. It is a way out to the freedom of one’s judgment against blind acceptance. This reminds us what Socrates advises Phaedo for thinking critically and giving a definition of philosophy:

> After repeated disappointments at the hands of the very people who might be supposed to be your nearest and most intimate friends, constant irritation ends by making you dislike everybody and suppose that there is no sincerity to be found anywhere. Have you never noticed this happening?
> Indeed I have.
> Don’t you feel that it is reprehensible? Isn’t it obvious that such a person is trying to form human relationships without any critical understanding of human nature? (89d-e).

The depiction of irony as the oscillation between opposing thoughts raises the question of relativism: where should we seek for the “final values”? For F. Schlegel they “reside in the comprehensiveness of the author’s activity: a perfected work might be limited at every point, but in its inclusion of all contradictions it would be without limitation and inexhaustible.” (*Knox,* 6).

Why one would prefers to express what s/he means ironically? The aim ironic articulation may differ according to the intention of the agent. It would be, as Vlastos puts it, for mere "humor" or "mockery" or "both" (Vlastos (2), 21). What Vlastos considers here is the present mode of the term. However, in its ancient Greek form, as Vlastos states, "deceiving" is part of the aim of *eirōneia*, *eirōn*, or *eirōneuomai* (ibid, 23). He cites Aristophanes' *Wasps* in which "⊃ς ε⇒ρωνικ∩ς refers to Prilockon's lying to get his donkey out of the family compound to make a dicast out of him"; and also in *Birds*, *Clouds*, Demosthenes and Plato's *Laws* the term is includes similar meanings (*ibid.*).

Irony also connotes the question of how to lead a life. For Goethe through irony we may go beyond "happiness or unhappiness, good or evil, death or life" (ibid, 4). Such a "free-doom" attained through irony is despised by Hegel. For him it is "negative",: "the Schlegelian ironist looked down his superior fashion on all other mortals; some of whom his ironic gravity actually deceived; he denied and destroyed all that was noble, great, and excellent in the interest of freedom for the self; yet, because his freedom prohibited positive action and led nowhere, he was beset by morbid feelings of emptiness and boredom. In fact, in opposing self-will to objective moral truth, this type of subjectivism… is evil through and through and universally." (*ibid.*).

With the 18th century irony as a concept comes to its peak and so do the criticisms against it. In the Romantic Movement irony in the end becomes the "life itself" (*ibid.* 5), but it was also seen as reduced to "nothing", in which "all human values are only illusions" (*ibid*.). So irony seems to have incited both the defense as a freedom attained by being able to see from the angle of relativism, and the worries of a lack of "standard" or "commitment" in one's thoughts. Irony becomes an "attitude toward life … both praised and attacked" (*ibid.*3). For F. Paulhan "all moral values are relative and only the ironic attitude can give proportional weight to the demands of both society and the ego." For Nietzsche it is a "sign of health." For R. Bourne it has the power to create an "intense feeling of aliveness and the broad

honest sympathy of democracy." He argues that: "…irony compares things not with an established standard but with each other... values slowly emerge from the process" (*ibid.*).On the other hand, Hegel's argument against is repeated: "there is no absolute commitment to anything." (*ibid*).

Irony has especially intertwined in the epistemological and ethical domains.[6] If we find the aforementioned critics' suggestion that every literary context might be taken ironically since we always have the chance to attribute a different meaning to the words outside their literal sense, a plausible one, we can go one step further and argue that no literal meaning is possible at all. In so thinking philosophy might of course be taken as ironical. However irony means more than this for philosophy.

First of all, philosophy itself is a controversial topic; other than the meaning of the word "philo-sophia" as the "love of wisdom" philosophy is a point of discussion as to what it stands for. In this respect to qualify philosophy as ironical renders it no clearer since it has no settled definition. On the other hand irony may also help us understand philosophy in different angles and thus lead to alternatives of its definition. It might seem that to qualify an obscure concept, philosophy, with an even more obscure one, irony, a rather futile attempt, but, on the contrary, this might also be what Socrates in fact tried to do after all.

"Definition" is one of the fundamental goals of philosophy, to fix the "exact" meaning of concepts. But does philosophy really clarifies or put the real thing, the truth, in place? The answer would be a plain "yes"; at least this is the aim. The way in philosophy to clarify a concept for better understanding calls for an ironic stance. It is only through philosophy that we could get over the "prescribed" meanings in concepts. This is a matter of ""notice", in fact someone's noticing the points in a concept that are "misunderstood" or "misused" so far; or noticing the points which are crucial to the meaning yet underestimated. It is a change in focus in order to be

[6] Ortega y Gasset analyzes irony in music and visual arts. (Knox (2002), 8).

able to “see” more clearly. Unfortunately there is not a ready made guide to follow to accomplish such a task; the task of “noticing” the points that are missed so far. Nevertheless, this rather looks like a matter of “attitude”, plus perhaps chance, which resembles quite like the one in irony. Philosophy is an ironic activity whether intended or not; its very aim of attending the “truth” require this. In other words, as Schlegel says, “”philosophy is the proper home of irony … which is the realm of reflective thinking (Miller, 3).

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

Martin Heidegger, in his *Zollikon Seminars,* relates an anecdote about Socrates:[7]

> A widely traveled sophist asks Socrates: "Are you still here and still saying the same thing? You are making light of the matter." Socrates answers: "No, you sophists are making light of it because you are always saying what's new and the very latest [news]. You always say something different. To say the same thing is the most difficult." (Heidegger, p.24).

The story is "strange" enough to be ascribed to Socrates; his peculiar ironic touch becomes a signature for his unwritten philosophy. "Making light of the matter" is the kind of an accusation that would construe some "hidden" accusations of the many; an man who looks and speaks outlandish, repeating some eccentric stuff without even deigning to write them. On the other hand to be able to "say the same thing" might touch one of a real deep philosophical cord : Heidegger, in his *What is a Thing*, mentioning the anecdote again, says,

> The most difficult learning is to come to know actually and to the very foundation what we already know. Such learning, with which we are here solely concerned, demands dwelling continually on what appears to nearest to us, for instance, on the question of what a thing is. We steadfastly ask the *same* question –which in terms of utility is obviously useless– of what a thing is, what tools are, what man is, what a work of art is, what the state and the world are. (*ibid.*).

[7] I am indebted to Dr. Ertuğrul R. Turan for his suggestion of the quotation.

Socrates is usually regarded as a turning point in philosophy. He is considered to be the founder of moral philosophy. With him philosophy has shifted its focus from natural phenomena to human conduct. Cicero says that Socrates called philosophy down from heaven. However, the same Socrates also incites bitter discussions about the way he takes philosophy to be. This is for the most part caused by his paradoxical remarks and his persistent "silence" in justifying his own philosophical convictions.

Socratic irony has a considerable significance in explicating those Socratic puzzles since the close connection between paradox and irony is worthy of notice. Nevertheless, irony poses its own problems in Socratic philosophy. The irony of Socrates has been open to sundry commentaries from antiquity until now.

The questions in chapter 1 are only some of the most "glaring" ones. Various interpretations bring out a different facet of Socratic philosophy to be discussed. Minor Socratic schools discuss him based on the questions such as: Is Socrates a Sceptic? Is he a Hedonist? Is he Stoic? G. Vlastos and T. Irwin pose the questions, Is Socratic ethics utilitarian? (Vlastos1991, p.27). Is it instrumental or identical with happiness? (*ibid.*) H. Benson and Vlastos discuss the question of whether he is an epistemologist (Benson, p.54). D. Morrison asks whether he is a psychological egoist (Morrison,110). Each answer to these questions would likely lead us to a different interpretation of Socratic philosophy and the problem is that they do not always constitute a coherent sum of Socratic picture. On the contrary they ramify the picture more and more. Regarding such a variety of interpretations I take irony as a wide angle to depict Socratic philosophy in a consistent whole.

In this thesis I tried to portray the possibility of understanding Socratic philosophy in terms of irony. I have made two –large– claims: the first is that Socratic

paradoxes are not independent contradictory arguments, they are rather an outcome of Socrates' ironic style and attitude. The other is perhaps still a "larger" one: that Socratic irony is also a guide to "do" philosophy and an answer to the question of what philosophy is. I attempted to show that irony is not a rhetorical device in Socrates used as a "trick" for dissimulating truth, but it is the philosophical stance of him. Considering the role of irony in Socratic philosophy, as I hold it to be, we may argue meta-philosophically that philosophy is an ironic activity both in its ironic and literal sense.

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