

General Introduction

Inside the City of Reason

Plato was an Athenian designer of labyrinths who lived in the fifth century before the common era. The labyrinths he built, he built from words, reflecting the ways language leads us into confusion. And the paths of escape he indicated, through a complex mixture of individual words and conversation—through *dialegethai*—have offered readers over the centuries the possibility of understanding the meanings that matter to them. Through the medium of the dialogue form, Plato drew on all his resources as a logician, rhetorician, and dialectician, valuing each of these as integral parts of his project. How they manifest themselves and operate together in Plato's work is the subject of this book.

While it is clear that on many points we think like Plato, negotiating the footnotes of our tradition, or at least owe the contours of our thinking to his insights, it is far less clear that he thought like us. This makes the task of clarifying his ideas on logic, rhetoric, and dialectic that much more challenging. On the one hand, Plato's thought is so inflected with the conditions that produced it that it can never be totally "freed" from itself and cast into contemporary meaning. On the other hand, he is so encased in our own traditions of thought that unbroken threads of meaning across the centuries are assumed and sometimes asserted. Why we would be interested in illuminating Plato's conceptions of logic, rhetoric, and dialectic is simply because these three tools or methods, or however we conceive them, represent important perspectives of contemporary argumentation theory. Insofar as a history of this interdisciplinary field is to be gathered, Plato's place in it has yet to be established. To contribute to such a history is another goal of this book.

For most scholars working in the late twentieth century and early twenty-first century, the roots of argumentation theory can be traced to Aristotle and the attention he gives to three types of argument: the logical, the dialectical, and the rhetorical (Wenzel 2006). While Aristotle treats dialectic and rhetoric as complementary (*antistrophic: Rhet.* 1345a), each of the two is conceptually distinct, as is his treatment of logic. While there is recognition of an interest in argumentation in earlier thinkers, the orthodoxy of an Aristotelian origin has remained largely uncontested. Several features of the current study will correct, or at least challenge, that narrative. Pre-Aristotelian investigations bring to light an implicit set of ideas in Plato that indicate a rich engagement with argumentation in its logical, rhetorical, and dialectical aspects. This is not to propose that we would find a fully-formed logic in Plato similar to that which appears in Aristotle, nor that Plato understands rhetoric and dialectic in ways with which Aristotle would fully agree. It is to suggest that Aristotle's treatments do not arise in a vacuum but emerge instead from activities in the Academy with which he would have been fully acquainted. On these terms, the logic that appears is distinct from the abstract logic of the tradition, even as Plato's later dialectic lays its foundation. Instead, we find promoted in the early and middle dialogues logical relations that concern the contexts of argumentative situations and the agents operating in those contexts. In similar ways, the rhetoric that Plato comes to endorse and rely upon values the communicative power of argumentation and the central role that audiences play in its progress. Related to this, the evolving dialectic, transformed from earlier Socratic practice, depends for its expression and application on an array of strategies and methods related to different dialogic goals. All of these points will be familiar to contemporary theorists who have worked on Aristotle's argumentation theory.

In questioning the Aristotelian orthodoxy, discussions will arise in response to several important questions. Can we say, for example, that Socratic argument consists of no more than the *elenchus*? That Plato's attitude toward rhetoric was one of general dismissal such that it has no role to play in the development of his thought? That Plato's dialectic is the same method that we see Socrates using in the early dialogues? I have already suggested negative responses to these questions, and on a certain level I think that is appreciated, and yet ideas persist that suggest otherwise. That resistance to revision is a further point to consider in the pages ahead.

Each section of this work has its own introduction wherein I situate the discussions of those chapters in the context of the tradition and the principal

ideas that tend to dominate the discussions of the concept involved, whether it be logic, rhetoric, or dialectic. In this general introduction I propose to explain the project as a whole and set it into a slightly different context.

Plato's Logic

Much of the now standard story on Plato's logic involves modern and contemporary logicians assuming that what they find in Plato is evidence of abstract logical thought. Just as much of the standard story on Socratic argument limits us to the *elenchus*. The grounds for both of these claims are explored and found wanting in the chapters of part I.

While there is indeed a sense of abstractness to the logic we associate with Plato's later dialectic, there is something far more interesting happening in the earlier stages of his work. Abstractness, Richard Robinson ([1941] 1953) insists, is something that contemporary logicians read into Plato's dialogues, falling victim to the common ailment of finding what one had set out to look for in the first place. The arguments of Robinson and others that counter this perspective are detailed in the early chapters, but we might anticipate them here by considering just how unavoidable it is for translations to follow the general interpretations of the translators.¹ As my bibliography makes clear, when it comes to editions of Plato's works, I have availed myself of a number of translations, from different generations of translators, and often used multiple translations of a single dialogue. In this way, I have drawn on different readings of the underlying ideas and monitored some of the debates that emerge over choices of translation. In addition, I have offered modifications of my own where I deemed it appropriate. Translating Plato or deciding on the "best" translation of a dialogue is not a straightforward matter.

Each translator strives for accuracy on her or his own terms. There are exceptions to this rule, of course. Alain Badiou's (2012) "hyper-translation" of the *Republic* tells us more about how Badiou might have written the work

1. A case in point that concerns Aristotle rather than Plato is the appearance in 2018 of three new translations of the *Rhetoric*, one by a political theorist (Aristotle 2019—it appeared in 2018), another by a philosopher (Aristotle 2018a), and a third by a classicist (Aristotle 2018b). Unsurprisingly, significant choices of words and phrases reflect the disciplinary perspectives of the translators and the ways in which they interpret discussions according to the larger background understanding of what they judge to be important.

himself than it expresses any real concern to capture Plato's intentions. So, he provides additions and corrections to the political philosophy, along with some interpretative interventions (Badiou challenges the received view of Plato's dualism, for example—362n3), and there is a marked anti-rhetorical thrust to the translation that characterizes Badiou's work in general. On a different track is I. A. Richards's (1942) insightful but notably sparse "literal" translation of the *Republic* that reflects Richards's decades-long work in what he called Basic English and his efforts to promote it.² Badiou and Richards reflect some of the different ways a translator might approach Plato and the kinds of license they feel authorized to adopt.

Within such larger decisions are the "smaller" worries over the correct way of rendering a term in English—decisions that turn out to have considerable bearing on larger questions of Plato's meaning. With regard to his status as a logician recognizable to contemporary readers, for example, is the reading of *sumphonein* in the *Phaedo*. In chapter 11, I will review some of the different possible translations attached to this term and the very different conceptions of Plato's view of hypothesis that follow from the various choices. Such variety in translation encourages interpretations ranging from a strong entailment (as in "following logically from") to a weaker agreement (as in "in harmony with"). At stake is the kind of dialectician (and logician) we judge Plato to have been.³

If this book fits with any earlier effort, it would be that of Richard Robinson and his *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, first published in 1941, and in my view a seminal text for the subjects addressed. The initial edition was widely reviewed and many of those reviews challenged some of Robinson's translation choices. The unavailability of the first edition after the war created an opportunity for Robinson to publish a revision, one that allowed him to make corrections where he thought they were warranted and respond to criticisms where he thought such a response was also warranted. The principal focus of his defense concerns what he calls evolutionist and creationist views. Robinson promotes the first, which holds that human thinking has evolved with specific elements emerging at various points in our history. This includes the development of logical thought. The oppos-

2. By any standard that measures reception, this translation should be judged a success. The US government printed two million copies for its overseas armed forces.

3. In a similar vein, *dialegesthai* invites a comparable range of choices across an array of dialogues as its meaning seems to vary from the casual conversation to the focused scrutiny of a company investigating a term's definition (Timmerman and Schiappa 2010).

ing—creationist—view holds that principles of logic are self-evident and have been present in human thought since the outset, always available to the right kind of mind. Hence, they judge the logic of Plato against modern insights. Paul Friedländer's (1945) ambivalent review is a case in point. Although generally sympathetic to Robinson's promotion of Plato's "loose way" of expressing himself logically, he questions several of his translations as misleading (when Friedländer believes Plato is pursuing a strictly defined logical process, for example).

Subsequently, the thrust of some of the reviews of the second edition of Robinson's study still focus mainly, or even solely (Kerferd 1955), on the disputed details of the logic. Robinson's interpretations of Plato's understanding of the early *elenchus* and of hypotheses are both challenged. With respect to the *elenchus*, he holds that Plato believed an interlocutor was refuted by his own argument without any additional premises. He allows that there are places where additional premises are used, but he judges that Plato was simply unaware of this. Robinson's position on Plato's early logic is thus largely unchanged between the two editions (while his position on hypotheses was revised in light of earlier criticisms). Plato's status as a logician and the kind of logic he endorsed remain matters of contention. While this book has no ambitions toward resolving these matters, I hope to advance a coherent picture of Plato as logician that shows a progressive treatment from the early Socratic dialogues through to the later engagement with a developed sense of dialectic.

Then there are the matters of how we should view Socratic argument itself and whether it should be restricted to what we understand as the *elenchus*. I would note here that whether argument types attributed to Socrates in Plato's dialogues were employed by the historical figure is largely beside the point. I am principally interested in Plato's engagement with argument and the way he negotiates the use of the different types that are employed. But this said, some distinction between Plato's ideas and the practices of the historical Socrates are relevant to my study. In pursuing the emergence of Platonic dialectical argumentation from its Socratic predecessor, I adopt the distinction Gregory Vlastos (1994) makes between Socrates_E, the historical figure, and Socrates_M, the Platonic invention. But whether the distinction comes down solely to Plato's creative imagination is again beyond our ability to decide. Still, I think there are more reasons to be confident about our knowledge of the historical Socrates than commentators like Robin Waterfield (2009) suggest. Waterfield finds the evidence for what Socrates actually did and believed to rely too heavily on Plato's account and so he looks outside

the dialogues for further evidence with which to compile an image of an anti-democratic provocateur (Waterfield 2009, 29). But we know more than this. Insofar, I will argue, as these Greeks were committed to a strong relationship between identity and action, we can construct an interesting image of the *philosophy* of the historical Socrates by focusing on practices that are distinct from Plato's own philosophical practices. Yes, they were both ethical thinkers who focused on the virtues. But on the negative side, unlike Plato, Socrates did not write, teach, or actively engage in politics. They present quite contrasting views of philosophy in action, and therefore of philosophy itself. Along these lines, any tendency to equate Socratic argument with the *elenchus* alone may come down to a failure to appreciate the distinctions at work in the arguments Plato had Socrates advance.

In part I, I explore a wider sense of Socratic dialectic that includes at least three separate types of argument, each with a different goal. While the *elenchus* aims at refutation of those who claim to know (largely more established figures of Athenian society), the hortatory (protreptic) argument and the maieutic argument both exhibit different goals and engage a different, younger audience. The hortatory argument presents reasons for why someone should turn to a specific action, principally to take up philosophy, while the maieutic arguments draw ideas from the interlocutors in a way that advances the understanding of a concept for all concerned (something missing from the results of the *elenchus*). It is the last of these, the maieutic, that finds its place in the later dialectic of Plato and so will be revisited in part III. But each of these three types of argument indicates an engaged logic that we can describe as ethotic.

Plato's *Dialogues* conjures an atmosphere of intimacy that belies any insistence that the logic that drives his discussions, especially in the early drama-infused texts of the Socratic period, is in any way abstract. Indeed, we can, at our convenience and to the degree that we are so disposed, extract arguments from the dialectic and treat them to the kind of scrutiny that characterizes the contemporary logic classroom, just as we can do this with any discourses from any period of our history, whether or not such analyses were intended by the producers of those discourses or are even an appropriate way to approach them. Without question, Plato's sense of logic becomes more complex in the later dialogues, but it still retains its roots in the lives of those engaged in any inquiry; it still retains the character of an ethotic logic.

By an ethotic logic I mean one personalized and rooted in human character, or what will come to be called *ethos*. Contemporary readers may

be perplexed at Aristotle's admission in his *Rhetoric* that audiences are often not persuaded by good arguments. Additional "proofs" are required, and one of those lies with the character of the arguer. "Persuasion is through character," insists Aristotle, "whenever the speech is stated so that it makes the speaker worthy of trust" (*Rhet.* 1356a4–5). He then goes on to add the surprising observation that *ethos* "is pretty much (one might almost say) the most controlling factor in persuasion" (Aristotle 2018b).

From where did such stress on the importance of character arise? In part, the answer lies in Greek society itself, but it would also have been reinforced by a particular reading of Plato's dialogues. Consider how the "logical" examination of Euthyphro that provides one illustration of the *elenchus* is a deep examination of Euthyphro's beliefs that has serious consequences for the rightness or wrongness of his actions. As explained early in that dialogue, Socrates is on his way to the court to defend himself against a charge of impiety, and it would be enormously valuable to him if Euthyphro could provide a definition of "piety" that Socrates could use in his defense. But it is just as important that Euthyphro should be able to give an account that justifies his actions in bringing charges against his own father because of that man's supposed wrongdoing. As Euthyphro first explains the concern, "it is impious, they say, for a son to prosecute his father for murder" (*Euth.* 4d–e); whereas Euthyphro is convinced it would be impious for him *not* to do so. There's no middle ground here, no room for inaction. So Euthyphro *must* have the knowledge that justifies his action and the ideas to which he is committed if he is to maintain his self-worth. The investigation is not into an abstract concept (piety), as some commentators would have it, but into the life of the interlocutor. Character is on display here and is found wanting by the logic of the *elenchus*, but this is an ethotic logic.

The ethotic character is prevalent throughout extant texts that come down to us and reflects the important connection between action and argument. Consider what is conveyed by Antisthenes when he writes in the *Ajax*: "Do not examine words when you are judging virtue, but rather actions. For a battle too is decided not by word but by action" (Boys-Stones and Rowe 2013, 23). Virtue is to be discerned not in the words that people put forward but in the actions they perform. Another way of casting this is to consider the way actions can be used to justify positions and thus operate argumentatively. That is what we see clearly expressed by the Socrates of the *Apology*, who offers his judges "substantial evidence . . . not words but what [they] value more, deeds" (*Apol.* 32a). Like words, actions are public expressions of character, and perhaps the thinking here is that they are less

susceptible to misinterpretation. Whatever the explanation, a consequence of this position can be seen in attempts to draw character into the light of day through words that express it, and on this front the *elenchus* qualifies. That it can also be cast in terms of later logical systems is neither here nor there; its power lies in its ethotic probing and the consequences such exercises have for the lives of those involved.

Plato's Rhetoric

There is a tendency in the literature to place Plato at the head of a long history of negative reactions to rhetoric. But the reality is more ambiguous.⁴ Consider, for example, the very different reactions of two later writers, Aristides (c. 117–c. 177 AD) and Quintilian (c. 35–c. 100 AD). Aristides's (2017; 2021) orations include extensive replies to Plato challenging the negative view of rhetoric on display in his work, particularly the *Gorgias*, and finding in Plato's own accounts an appreciation of the "real form of oratory" (2017, 653). Aristides thus believes he is drawing from Plato what is present but unconscious. Quintilian (2015), by contrast, finds in Plato a champion of rhetoric. Of the *Gorgias*, he writes, "most writers, satisfied with reading a few passages from Plato's *Gorgias*, unskillfully extracted by their predecessors (for they neither consult the whole of that dialogue, nor any of the other writings of Plato), have fallen into a very grave error, supposing that the philosopher entertained such an opinion as to think that oratory was not an art" (Quintilian *Institutio Oratoria*, bk. 2, 15.24–5). Quintilian thus believes he is drawing from Plato what is consciously present.

Of all the ways in which Plato has been misjudged by the tradition, labeling him as a despiser of rhetoric is the most egregious. In the five chapters of part II, I work to reinforce Quintilian's observation and extend it far beyond the *Gorgias*. Not only did Plato recognize the need to harness the power of rhetoric for his own political goals, but he also stands out as an accomplished rhetor in his own right.

I discuss exactly what it is about rhetoric that concerns Plato in the *Gorgias* (387–85), concluding that his target there is a political rhetoric that we might associate with Periclean Athens. This was a rhetoric that

4. While we might trace the current disdain toward rhetoric to the work of Ramus and his critiques of Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintilian, the ambivalences toward rhetoric were active long before the 1500s (see Ong 1958).

dominated the Athenian responses in the Melian debate reported by Thucydides and the subsequent subjugation of Melos. On this darkest moment in then-recent Athenian history, Plato, unlike almost every other writer of his period, appears strangely silent given his anti-democratic propensities. But allowing also that Plato will often use silence as a rhetorical strategy to draw attention to an idea, the absence of a direct reference to Melos no longer appears so unusual.

In rejecting the political rhetoric that had proved popular in the city in which he was raised, Plato advocates a rhetoric that must promote justice over injustice. This prefigures the argument of the *Phaedrus* (the events of which take place *outside* of the political sphere) for a true rhetoric that contrasts the *eikotic*. Here, the question of whether rhetoric is an art with a corresponding knowledge is settled in the affirmative, and the philosopher can now return to the polis better equipped to engage friend and foe while crafting an environment in which all can flourish.

In general, Plato is a rhetorical force. Rhetoricians theorize about rhetoric; rhetors produce and deliver it. Plato is both. Theorizing about rhetoric begins in the *Gorgias*, reaches a firm account in the *Phaedrus*, and receives supplementary details thereafter in dialogues as far ranging as the *Statesman* and *Philebus*. Plato's adoption of rhetorical strategies is clear throughout his work, and I explore several of them, like the silence alluded to above and the adoption of mythic discourse to address specific audiences. In many ways such strategies confirm the choice of the dialogue form to communicate ideas. This is a mode of discourse that most efficiently captures the range of Plato's stylistic achievements.

Nowhere is all this more apparent than in the *Republic*, where two important questions come to the fore: (1) What discourse best allows the promotion of justice in the state, which is to ask, How can the polis be rhetorically addressed in ways that promote the general interests? (2) How are novice philosophers addressed with protreptic arguments in their education? The use of rhetoric in the *Republic* and the centrality of its importance to the project that emerges there sets the groundwork for the promotion of rhetoric in subsequent dialogues. In later dialogues like the *Sophist*, the *Statesman*, and *Philebus*, rhetoric is far from absent, as the silence of the literature on Plato might suggest. In fact, its value as a necessary aid to dialectic is clarified.

This means that the presence of a positive conception of civic rhetoric in Aristotle is far from original, and the importance of rhetorical argumentation is not without precedence in Aristotle's immediate influences. With

more apparent organization, due to the different type of texts involved, Aristotle was able to build on the ideas that Plato had advanced, offering a model of rhetorical reason already suggested by his mentor.

Plato's Dialectic

In a number of respects, chapter 9 could find its place in either part II or III since in discussing the role of rhetoric in Plato's later works it is impossible to avoid detailed accounts of some of his dialectical tools and strategies. And as the forgoing will suggest, disentangling any of the three subjects of study from Plato's treatments can be challenging. In the later dialogues, the logic that had receded into the background is reasserted in the methods of dialectic, just as the value of rhetoric finds further emphasis. But by the time we emerge from the *Republic*, there is without doubt a dialectic in force that differs markedly from its Socratic predecessor.

As we turn to consider Plato's mature account of dialectic, there is a complexity that confounds us, especially if we take late dialogues like *Sophist* and *Statesman* to be genuine investigations of those concepts (the Sophist and the Statesman) intent on discovering the agreed definition in each case. Commentators are quick to point out that on this front the investigations fail and the use of dialectic is often confused. But on what terms might they be judged successful? What is actually going on in those illustrative cases of Platonic dialectic? Answers to these questions are offered in the chapters of part III.

Part of the story of dialectic as it appears and evolves across the works of Plato is the range accorded to the spectrum term *dialegethai* (Timmerman and Schiappa 2010). How this term is translated in various dialogues can be an eye-opener in part because of the ways by which Plato so often hides the serious idea in the casual remark. I made reference to this variety of meanings for *dialegethai* in note 3. Its possible senses accommodate the casual conversation as well as the cooperative investigation into a term's definition, something that occupies the dialecticians of Plato's late dialogues.

Two specific things come to the fore in part III. One is an emphasis on the late pedagogy captured in the dialogues, reflective of what happens in the Academy, and the second is the way (partly in the course of this pedagogy) "dialectic" becomes an umbrella term for a variety of methods matched to the minds that learn to employ them.

The dialogues reveal an evolution of Plato's methodology, abandoning the Socratic dialogue for the hypothetical method and then the hypothetical method for the method of Collection and Division. These best capture the dialogical nature of Plato's dialectic, but we also see at work the use of examples, images, and myth. Plato employs what works, and what works for him changes, just as the audiences he is addressing vary. One can imagine in the background the ways in which the curricula of the Academy would be modified to reflect the emerging methods of the day, particularly from the hypothetical method to the method of Collection and Division. There would have been a period, then, during which the students focused on developing a hypothesis to test ideas and develop definitions.⁵ In fact, this focus on definitions, a vestige of the Socratic practice, finds its apotheosis in the late dialogues. Whatever the provenance of the book *Definitions*, variously attributed to Speusippus and other members of the Academy, it certainly reflects an abiding interest of the scholars and students working there. In this sense, the pedagogical aspect of the dialectic is given prominence in the closing sections of the book.

Plato's co-constructing of knowledge through dialectic uses what in today's terms would be called an inquiry dialogue (Walton 2006a). Participants start with the need to acquire proof about some matter, conduct a search for evidence, and achieve the goal of proving (or disproving) a hypothesis (Walton 2006a, 183). That this process resonates with the activity of the science laboratory simply indicates the distance between early and contemporary instantiations of inquiry. I. A. Richards (1942) captured this well in his general advice on the subject of reading: "What should guide the reader's mind? Our answer was 'Our awareness of interdependence of how things hang together, which makes us able to give and audit an account of what may be meant in a discussion—that highest activity of REASON which Plato named Dialectic'" (240). Indeed, this highest achievement of a discussion (*dialegesthai* again) is the goal of the dialectic of the late dialogues, and the specter of the Academy in which such discussions were pursued haunts those works.

5. Such a stage may be reflected in some of Aristotle's works, if these illustrate the teaching he did at the Academy (see Kennedy's introduction in Aristotle 2007, 4–5). His "definition" of rhetoric, for example, is posed hypothetically as a working definition to be explored: "Let rhetoric be . . ." (*estō de*). Here, there is no commitment to a definition, just an interest in exploring the possibilities of a direction of inquiry (*Rhet.* 1355b25; Aristotle 2007).

So, a vestige (or development) of the maieutic argument that was a crucial part of the argumentative practice of Socrates is apparent in the pedagogical exercises of the later dialogues. The examining (and refuting) of experts has been left aside after the *Republic*. But the drawing of ideas out of the young, although modified in these late dialogues, has its roots in Socrates's midwifery. Socrates may have been moved to the sidelines of most late dialogues, or even dismissed, but the influence is ever-present, a lesson learned perhaps in Plato's youth and dwelt upon over a lifetime of thought and practice.

Philosophy is a dispositional discipline with a deeply constructive rhetorical nature. It modifies the mind, creating attitudes of critical attention and insight. The Platonic student leaves the lists better equipped to illuminate the shadows in which meanings and arguments vie for adherence, better equipped to sift through the complexity of ideas and so bring clarity and judgment to the issues that divide us, better equipped to escape the labyrinth of confused meanings in which the untrained mind becomes lost.

Anthropological considerations of how humans have used and developed argumentation push us back further into the shadows of a pre-Aristotelian moment, before the initiatives we associate with Aristotle begin to emerge. Outside of the Greek tradition, non-Aristotelian logics are promised by Indigenous knowledge systems, the *otherwise* to our own ways of knowing (Tindale 2021a). These systems were largely assimilated with or eliminated by Western colonial impulses. Like these others, Plato somehow occupies a place outside of the Aristotelian tradition, even as we identify him as a precursor to what develops. But is this a faithful lineage? In what ways does the argumentation Plato sees and employs approximate what we understand and see today? These are questions I leave the reader to ponder while considering the arguments of this book.