

Socrates demands a good deal of his dialectical partners. First and foremost, he expects them to live up to a set of ideals that regulate and animate having beliefs, making statements, and engaging in critical discussion. The interlocutors, however, usually fail to embody these ideals, and a variety of consequences follow. Socrates clearly has in mind a set of expectations and requirements, but he is often oblique as to what they are. Our plan here is to focus on three exchanges in *Republic I* where the Socratic requirements are in stark relief.

In making explicit Socrates' dialectical expectations, we intend to sketch a Socratic theory of argumentation. We will show, first, that Socrates takes critical discussion to be a central feature of our lives—it is not a special enterprise cordoned off for exceptional occasions, but is something we ought to and do engage in regularly. This position is different in emphasis from many theories that take argument and criticism to be of peripheral concern. Second, Socrates requires his interlocutors to cultivate a certain character, not just perform the right kinds of speech acts. Contemporary argumentation theory has focused almost exclusively upon the norms constituting the exchange of commissives, declaratives, directives and so on that constitute critical discussions. This neglects a wider analysis of what is required of the speakers themselves. Dialectical norms are not limited to assertions; they extend to a speaker's character as a believer, assertor, and inquirer. Socratic dialectic does more than make our beliefs better; it strives to make us better as well. Moreover, the benefit of dialectic is not limited to the overt discursive participants; it extends to the auditors of the discussion. Having an audience matters, for however minimal their contribution to the development of the argument, they may very well be directly interested in its conclusion.

Socrates' first partner in the central conversation of the *Republic* is Cephalus, father of his second dialectical partner, Polemarchus. When the dialogue begins the two men, who know and seem genuinely to respect one another, have not been together for some time. When Cephalus descants upon the benefits of old age with respect to channeling one's desires from the pleasures of the body to the pleasures of *logos* and an orderly character, Socrates approves. He “wonders at” Cephalus' words. Wanting to hear more, he provokes the old man with a challenge:

Cephalus, I think that the many, when you say these things, do not accept them, but judge that you bear old age easily not because of your character but because you possess much wealth...(329e)

Socrates' provocation is gentle and indirect: he attributes the objection not to himself but to “the many.” After a brief exchange in which Cephalus defends the importance of character against the claims of wealth, Socrates ask the old man what he thinks to be the greatest good he has received from all his possessions. Cephalus responds that his wealth enables him to atone for past injustices against gods or men. Material prosperity obviates the need to deceive or lie to others, and it gives one the resources to return what one has borrowed.

From Cephalus' remarks concerning the benefits of wealth Socrates derives a definition of justice, which he then proceeds to call into question. The nature of justice was not the main theme of Cephalus' discourse. He did mention *injustice*. He cited Pindar's remarks concerning a man who has lived justly and piously. Yet he made no attempt to define justice per se. Nevertheless, after praising Cephalus' words, Socrates challenges the conception of justice at work in his account. He offers a counterexample to show where Cephalus has gone wrong—namely that there are times when it is not just to return what one has received.

In his encounter with Cephalus we see Socrates interact with someone who makes no claims to philosophical expertise. There is no reason to believe him particularly interested in the subject beyond his expressed desire for good conversation (328d). The definition to which Socrates objects is of his own invention. Cephalus may well have answered differently had Socrates asked directly for a definition of justice. When Socrates explains his objection, Cephalus does not argue; he agrees that Socrates has spoken correctly. But even if Cephalus is not overtly committed to the project of definition in his discussion of wealth, he does lay claim to the truth of something—namely that wealth contributes to a person's just actions. Socrates hears this claim, and despite the amicable tone of the conversation, he challenges the conception of justice implicit in Cephalus' assertion. Cephalus, if he is sincere in his claim, should be able and willing to defend it, even if he was not originally speaking in a context where he would expect a challenge. The questions Socrates puts to Cephalus, though phrased ever so gently, make it clear that he expects Cephalus to be able to support his assertions rationally.

Contrast Socrates' attitude that there is room for a critical discussion anywhere assertions are made with the conception that critical discussions are to be modeled on legal exchanges (Toulmin 1958), overtly persuasive dialogue (Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969), and methodological resolutions of overt disagreement (van Eemeren and Grootendorst 2004).<sup>11</sup> The default attitude of most theorists in critical reasoning and informal logic is that disputative contexts are the contexts where argumentative norms are in their starkest relief. As a consequence, the norms that receive the most critical attention are those governing antagonistic exchanges. But arguments are part of a larger cooperative enterprise of our discursive lives—we often dispute, but we just as often agree, discuss, and inform. When we challenge each other in these contexts, we adopt adversarial roles only so we can cooperate in achieving our goal of improving our cognitive grasp of our shared topic. If we focus merely on the argumentative norms of dispute, we obscure the norms of cooperative exchange.

The Socratic norm is that *there is room for critical exchange even outside of a dispute*. That is, Socrates considers it permissible to request a retraction or restatement of a claim or an argument, even if there is no quarrel concerning it. Discussants, even if they

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<sup>1</sup> One possible exception is Walton (1989), who allows for argumentative dialogue beyond the adversarial parameters of critical discussion. But Walton, too, takes persuasive dialogue to be paradigmatic of argumentative contexts.

are not challenging a position, always have the right to ask for a reason or clarification, and assertors have a correlate obligation to clarify, argue or amend their assertions when prompted. Further, it is acceptable to challenge our friends. In fact, there are ways to do this without compromising the friendship. We see this clearly in Socrates' strategy of framing his initial objections in the voice of the many.

The Socratic view of proper exchange is that we interpret each other in a *maximally argumentative fashion*. We speak in order to communicate the truth. We must, therefore, be maximally open to opportunities for clarification and argument. Since clarifications and arguments generate understanding, they must not be restricted to the courtroom or formal debate; they should operate whenever we intend to communicate in good faith. Whenever we assert something, we do so according to an implicit agreement that if we know what we are talking about, we can, if requested, help our interlocutor arrive at a more thorough understanding of our position.

We might formulate this point by saying that in Socratic conversation idle talk is forbidden. We must not say things just to say them; we must not make assertions simply to make ourselves look good. When we engage in dialectic we must aim only at securing the truth. This is not a norm for a special set of speech acts or a certain kind of project. It should be our default attitude toward our exchanges generally. One may take the requirement to be a corollary of the Socratic dictum that the unexamined life is not worth living—namely, that uncritical conversations are not worth having.

Polemarchus interrupts Socrates' exchange with Cephalus in order to defend his father's position. Socrates accepts this change of interlocutors, making no objection when Cephalus withdraws to attend to the sacrifices. And though he draws Polemarchus deeper into the conversation, he treats him with the same gentleness he displayed toward Cephalus. Indeed, even when he refutes Polemarchus all the indications are that he does so with the intention of assisting and educating him. Socrates' primary aim in this encounter is to help Polemarchus clarify his views about justice and to disabuse him of mistaken ideas.

Throughout the exchange a distance is maintained between Polemarchus and the argument. The young man inherits the definition of justice from his father, and is thus not immediately responsible for it. Moreover, from the beginning Polemarchus associates the definition with Simonides. Socrates follows Polemarchus' lead by referring to Polemarchus as the heir of the argument, thereby acknowledging and preserving the distance. Similarly, he constantly makes mention of the fact that they are discussing Simonides' definition; later he even attributes Polemarchus' position to Homer. This is not to deny that Polemarchus and his beliefs are here under consideration. Even if Polemarchus is merely protecting his father, he has chosen to do so and must be held intellectually responsible for his choice. Similarly, though he dare no more than to defend a particular interpretation of Simonides, it is *his* interpretation in the end. This is all true, of course. It is no less true, however, that Socrates goes out of his way to soften what might otherwise appear an assault on Polemarchus by laying some of the responsibility

for his mistakes at the feet of other men. If he is misinterpreting Simonides, for example, it may be because he has been misled by Homer (334b). Indeed, in the end Socrates enlists Polemarchus as an ally against those who would attribute a flawed definition of justice to Simonides or any other wise or blessed man (335e). In this way, to be sure, Socrates has converted Polemarchus into an ally against the young man's own former position. Nevertheless, the progression of the argument is that of a gradual conversion rather than the ruthless generation of a contradiction. Polemarchus has been educated and, in the process, the definition of justice has been improved. With Socrates' assistance, Polemarchus has increased the intellectual inheritance he received from his father, just as Cephalus had increased the property he inherited from his father.

Though he does not always adhere to this practice, in the present context Socrates is more interested in refuting the assertion than in refuting the man. When engaged in a critical discussion, discussants may take on adversarial roles—one defending, the other assailing a position—but this does not mean that the two are adversaries themselves. The adversarial relationship is in fact a cooperative venture whereby the discussants work together to make explicit the relevant features of an issue. Socrates balances these cooperative and adversarial roles, testing and challenging the things Polemarchus says, but treats the theses in such a way as to reduce Polemarchus' personal responsibility for them. In this way Socrates creates a space in which he and his young interlocutor can assess the cases for and against the position without the risk of embarrassment if either party is shown to be wrong.

Thrasymachus enters the discussion like a beast. He had wanted to interrupt on several occasions, but the others had held him back. Now there is no restraining him. He raises his voice, hurling insults at Socrates and challenging him to provide his own definition of justice. Moreover, he ridicules the cooperative tone of the previous exchange—real adversaries do not politely give way to each other:

What base pettiness has you two in its grip, Socrates? And why do you play the simple-minded fools and yield way to one another? (336c)

One should not allow an adversary to score points by politely conceding this or acknowledging that. When someone questions you, that person is questioning *you*, and you must never let them take you down. Thrasymachus objects as much to the affability of the exchange as he does to the final agreement concerning the definition of justice.

Socrates cannot simply ignore Thrasymachus. But how should he deal with him? In his current state of agitation, he is unlikely to be a suitable partner in dialectical inquiry. He must be tamed. To accomplish this Socrates must formulate a response based upon a proper understanding of Thrasymachus' character and his current state of mind. In describing the scene Socrates compares Thrasymachus to a wild animal: he is attacking as if to tear them to pieces. He is frightening and savage, sardonic and mocking. Socrates attributes Thrasymachus' behavior to a love of honor and confidence in his own knowledge. He says that Thrasymachus judged himself to possess a thoroughly fine

answer and that he desired to speak in order to win a good reputation (338a). Socrates requests not only that Thrasymachus take up the project of definition but that he explain his objections to their dialectical procedures. They are doing their best by what they know, so if Thrasymachus can suggest a better method for pursuing the definition, he should take pity on them instead of being so difficult (336e).

Again, Socrates' default attitude is that his interlocutors are maximally argumentative—the reason why Thrasymachus is violent is because he has an argument that hasn't been heard. His violent outburst stands in the place of an objection to the procedure. The question, then, is what the objection is. In so doing, he requires that Thrasymachus no longer be violent but instead provide reasons.

Having drawn Thrasymachus into the dialectic, Socrates immediately disables him. Meeting hostility with irony, he simultaneously exposes Thrasymachus' inability to think on his feet, his inadequate rhetorical skills, and his philosophical superficiality. Moreover, he makes a point of doing this quickly and effortlessly. In short, Socrates confronts Thrasymachus as one must confront any raging brute, with a swift and overwhelming display of superior strength and command. Those attending to the discussion cannot help but notice.

Socrates' refutation of Thrasymachus' definition of justice exploits the orator's many weaknesses. "The just," Thrasymachus says, "is nothing other than the advantage of the stronger" (338c). Socrates first points out that the definition is ambiguous (338c-339a). He then notes (339a) that it employs a term, the advantageous, that Thrasymachus himself had forbidden as unclear, imprecise, and nonsense (336d). Nevertheless, Socrates accepts the definition and proposes that they weigh its merits. His approach, however, is directed less at the definition itself than at Thrasymachus' ability to understand and defend it. His argument against the definition—that if the rulers make mistakes about their own advantage when legislating, and if it is just for the ruled to obey the rulers, then it is just for the ruled to do what is disadvantageous for the rulers—exposes Thrasymachus' intellectual shortcomings. He is not sufficiently perceptive to foresee the trajectory of Socrates' reasoning; he fails to understand how his agreements about the rulers' mistakes depend on his definition, and must have this explained to him; and when he finally comprehends what has happened and suggests that he would never call men stronger when they are making mistakes, he reveals his disingenuousness. For Thrasymachus himself had identified the stronger with the rulers, and Socrates had explicitly asked him if the rulers make mistakes. Thrasymachus' affirmative response to this question committed him to the proposition that the stronger do indeed make mistakes. Socrates points this out when Thrasymachus suggests that he would never say such a thing (340c).

This exposure of his intellectual and rhetorical weaknesses enrages Thrasymachus. No doubt the fact that he has been embarrassed in front of several young men, who even discuss his missteps in the argument, enflames his anger all the more. He hurls fresh insults at Socrates. He insists that Socrates' refutation depends upon imprecision in

speech. Speaking precisely, the ruler does not make mistakes. If a man makes mistakes, he insists, then at that moment he should not be called a ruler. Socrates accepts Thrasymachus' demand that they speak with precision and uses this new condition to develop yet another refutation of his definition. Yet again, Thrasymachus fails to see the trend of Socrates' argument until it is too late. He tries to resist at the last moment but finally agrees to the inevitable conclusion. Still, he will acknowledge neither the inadequacy of his definition nor his own intellectual limitations. Instead, he resorts once again to insults and mockery.

Following his outpourings of abuse, Thrasymachus delivers a speech in which he both reasserts his definition of justice and introduces a new theme into the discussion. He insists that the life of the unjust man is stronger and more profitable than that of the just man. Socrates calls attention to the fact that in his speech Thrasymachus abandons precise speech and completely ignores the agreements they had just reached. But in this scene Thrasymachus demonstrates more than an indifference to intellectual or rhetorical consistency; *he displays a lack of good will for his interlocutors*. For upon concluding his speech he prepares to leave. He has no plans to defend or clarify his position further. He will have the last word. In the end, he remains only because the young men compel him to stay and present an argument in support of his position. However, he is unable to maintain his position against Socrates' objections. This clearly frustrates him. He continues to participate in the discussion through the end of the first book, yet he does so with a sullen ill temper.

In his exchange with Thrasymachus Socrates is concerned with the audience no less, and perhaps more, than with his interlocutor. Plato refers to the young men in attendance no fewer than eight times (338a, 340a, 343a, 344d, 345a, 347a, 348a, 352b). Socrates himself calls Thrasymachus' attention to their audience on two occasions (338a, 345b). Socrates no doubt intends to refute Thrasymachus' argument. More important, perhaps, is his intention to undermine his reputation with the young men in attendance. Conversational styles like his should be avoided, not emulated. The more effortlessly Socrates defeats Thrasymachus the less likely the young men will be to affect his contemptuous oratorical manner. Socrates easily demolishes the argument that justice is the advantage of the stronger. He uses Thrasymachus' agreement that people make mistakes to flip his argument on its head. Though Socrates had deployed this same strategy in his exchange with Polemarchus, Thrasymachus does not see what is coming. When Socrates states the inevitable conclusion, Thrasymachus doesn't understand; Socrates must spell it out for him. At this point two members of the audience analyze Thrasymachus' dialectical missteps. When Thrasymachus attempts to annul the refutation by revoking the agreement that undid him, Socrates allows him to do so and proceeds to refute him once again. This refutation is as swift as the first, and the audience again takes notice. This sort of thing happens again and again in his exchange with Thrasymachus. Socrates even takes time out to discuss Thrasymachus' argument with Polemarchus and Glaucon (340c and 348a). He goes so far as to ask the latter if they should persuade Thrasymachus that he is not speaking the truth. All of this strongly suggests that Socrates

is toying with Thrasymachus. It suggests also that he intends for the audience to notice this.

Here, the Socratic focus is again in contrast with contemporary argumentation theory, as Socrates' requirements range not just over what Thrasymachus says, but how he participates in the discussion. That is, certainly Thrasymachus's answer does not pass muster, so there is a norm regulating how the answer itself fails (perhaps it is internally inconsistent or it runs afoul of a commitment that neither Thrasymachus nor Socrates will revise), but Socrates is also correcting something about Thrasymachus himself. Contemporary theories of argumentation do not take the character of the discussants under their purview. This is a feature of the linguistification of the field, which is not entirely objectionable, as this has been fruitful in producing fine-grained analyses of a number of argumentation's norms. Unfortunately, this approach has neglected the speakers themselves who make arguments and participate in critical discussions. There is an internal connection between doing dialectic well and being a good person, and the Socratic norm here captures the thought that doing dialectic well requires more than giving good arguments. That is, we do not take it that the best debaters are the best people, so there must be some further requirement of dialectic beyond the ability to have one's speech acts arranged appropriately. For a critical discussion to be what it ought to be there not only needs to be the right kinds of arguments, there needs to be the right kind of people.

One question here is why the standard approaches of analyzing the arguments cannot address this requirement. Grootendorst and van Eemeren, for example, identify the norms of argumentation as the rules governing speech acts performed by either party in a difference of opinion in order to contribute to the disagreement's resolution. The argumentation theorist, then, proposes rules only on two fronts – first, that the rules are conducive to agreement, and second, that the discussants are prepared to play by the rules (2004, 187). That is, it must be shown that the rules reduce disagreement and that they are themselves agreed upon.

But a problem arises here. Are these features of argumentative rules sufficient to justify them as such? Our primary concern is that the turn to the pragmatics of the speech acts of argument has obscured the semantic aim of the arguments – namely that of securing the truth. When there is a disagreement resolvable by argument, it is over the truth of some matter or other. Agreement, then, can be secured only under the conditions that what is agreed upon, at least between the disputants, is taken to be true. Further, agreements are criticizable on the related reason that though they were arrived at by the accepted means, their conclusions are nevertheless false. So there is an open question left by the pragmatic-dialectical requirements of argument, and that is whether or not these norms have anything directly to do with the truth of what is in dispute. The open question about truth generalizes. If some speaker follows the rules of argumentative exchange, it still is an open question whether this person is a genuine inquirer. Eliciting assent according to the rules of exchange may *lead to* a person's intellectual virtue, but it does not guarantee such a character. Often familiarity with the requirements of argument turns

people into debaters, not deliberators. One may identify and correct correlate intellectual vices in terms of the argumentative norms that are broken (as we have done here), but those vices are not reducible to those failings. For example, dogmatism is clearly manifested in failures to respond appropriately to objections and criticism, and such a vice is clearly criticizable and correctable in terms of these failings. But the vice, as a state of character, is not exhausted by them. Dogmatism is more than a set of dispositions – it is a state of mind constituted by a care for one’s own beliefs supplanting a care for the truth.

The Socratic norm, though, is to treat all of the interlocutors in a way that, on the one hand, reinforces the norms of exchange, and on the other hand, calls attention to the virtues that genuine discussants must have. Socrates, when he refutes Thrasymachus, does not proceed in order to apprise him of a point of order in their discussion or correct the details of his view of justice. He engages with Thrasymachus in order to publicly confront and rebuke an intellectual vice. And in so doing, he eliminates its influence on the young men in their company.

It is clear from Socrates’ exchanges in other dialogues that Socratic dialectic is constrained not only by the matter at issue, but also by the character of the interlocutor. For example, in the *Phaedrus* Socrates says that a writer of speeches must formulate his discourse according to the soul of his interlocutor (271d-272b). The function of *logos*, he explains, is to lead the soul. A successful writer, therefore, will know the different types of soul and the varieties of *logoi*. He will know also which *logos* is most persuasive to and transformative of each type of soul. Of course, he must be able to identify that a man of such and such a character is now before him and, moreover, that now is the time to speak rather than to refrain from speaking. He must, in short, possess theoretical knowledge of the tools of his trade, as it were, as well as practical experience of how and when to apply them. Such a man will compose according to *technê*. Further, in the *Gorgias* Socrates leads the souls of his interlocutors according to his knowledge of how they will behave before the witnesses to the conversation. His *logos* plays upon the shame Gorgias and Polus would feel at expressing opinions about justice and injustice customarily considered base or vicious. Polus objects when Socrates employs this tactic against Gorgias (461b-c), but later succumbs to it himself, as Callicles notes at 482c-e. Callicles is more resistant to this strategy, but is clearly shaken when Socrates remarks that his position entails that the catamite lives a happy life (494e). He asks whether Socrates is not ashamed at mentioning such things; but Socrates retorts that it is not him but Callicles’ own statements regarding pleasure that have led them into this territory. Shame, as Aristotle noted in his *Rhetoric*, may be felt at saying disgraceful things before people by whom one wants to be admired or whom one wants to have in one’s power. By extension, in the case of Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, Socrates not only intends to shame Thrasymachus for the things he says and how he performs in the exchange, he also is determined to have others feel ashamed for him.

We propose, then, that there are three norms of critical discussion in stark relief in *Republic I*. The first we see in the exchange with Cephalus—that we interpret each other

and contribute to discussions in a maximally argumentative fashion. The second we see in the exchange with Polemarchus – that in order to cooperate in dialectic, interlocutors must maintain a distance between themselves and the theses they espouse. This way they can subject the views to serious scrutiny without the risk of personal loss. Third, and finally, from Socrates' exchange with Thrasymachus, it is clear that uncooperative discussants must be handled in a fashion that reinforces the goals of dialectic. So Thrasymachus is refuted and silenced not just for the sake of correcting his definition of justice, but also for the sake of those listening.<sup>2</sup>

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