The Dialectic Today: Critically Interrogating the Socratic Method for Contemporary Use

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Spring 2002

Introduction

If you ask people who are familiar with Plato about his philosophy, one of the first words out of their mouth will most likely be “dialectic.”[1] This should not be surprising considering that the concept is a cornerstone of that philosophy. Since the dialectic is such an important component in Plato’s (and Socrates’) philosophy, an examination of its relevance today is the focus of this paper. In particular, this paper is interested in how the dialectic can further the development of democratic society and culture today.

To begin, it is important to distinguish between two uses of the dialectic in Plato’s work. In one understanding of the concept, Plato, particularly in his middle and late dialogues, uses it to describe “the total process of enlightenment, whereby the philosopher is educated so as to achieve knowledge of the supreme good, the Form of the Good” (Blackburn 1996, 104). The focus of this paper, however, requires that the dialectic be used in a different sense. The more Socratic notion is the point for examination here. Philosopher Simon Blackburn describes the Socratic dialectic as “the process of eliciting the truth by means of questions aimed at opening out what is already
implicitly known, or at exposing the contradictions and muddles of an opponent’s position” (p. 104). This is a good account of the concept, but to better understand the dialectic, this paper analyzes four separate aspects of the dialectic as found in Plato’s *The Republic*.

Generally, the dialectical method requires the following: 1) Participation and the appearance of equal status among those involved, 2) Starting the dialogue with commonly held views and ideas, 3) Dialogue that leads to critical reflection amongst the participants, and 4) Connection of ideas brought up in discussion. After a discussion of each of these points, this paper then explores Plato’s use of the dialectic in *The Republic* to locate both inconsistency and consistency in his use of it. Concluding remarks will use this analysis to determine how the dialectic can be revived as a practical concept for today.

The Dialectic: In Four Parts

The first feature identified in the dialectic is the *active participation* and *equal status* of those involved in the investigation. This is important to point out because it is in stark contrast with traditional views on education. Traditional approaches to education involve what Paulo Freire calls the “banking method” of education (to be discussed below), but long before Freire explained that such education is oppressive, Socrates had a few words regarding such a method. In his comparison of the Sun in the visible world to the Good in the intelligible world, Socrates asserted:

>Certain professors of education must be wrong when they say that they can put a knowledge into the soul which was not there before, like sight into blind eyes...

>Whereas, our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already.\(^2\) (Plato 1991, 258)

The fundamental difference then, is that knowledge already exists in the student. If this is accurate, then trying to “deposit” knowledge into a student’s brain is off the mark. Rather, the teacher should work with the student to turn that student’s eye to the knowledge. A teacher’s determination alone will not suffice. Accordingly, critical reflection and transformation is achieved through a student’s active participation in her own learning.

The *appearance of equal status* in the experience is important for the dialectic. This helps to discourage the student or teacher from falling into the traditional banking method.\(^3\) Rather than telling the student something, the teacher poses questions or encourages the student to question the teacher’s statements. Plato portrays the ideal teacher, Socrates, as having “no claim to know anything; indeed, he is conscious of all that he does not know and, consequently, is always searching for knowledge” (Hummel 1992, 335). Whether Socrates truly believed that he knew nothing is outside the scope of this paper; however, what is relevant for this paper is that the effect
of claiming ignorance is equalizing. From a student’s perspective, this can allow her to join a discussion, because she can be unafraid of not knowing. To dispel false statements and challenge the deep convictions of an individual (or society), it is important for the dialectic to have such a leveling effect. Whether this teacher/student equality is real or imagined, what matters is that the student—at the very least—has a perception of being on equal ground with the teacher. Although it goes unstated in The Republic, this component of the dialectic is part of the process of establishing transference in the student/teacher relationship. This concept (and its implications for the dialectic) is important for the concluding discussion and will be elaborated upon later.

The second aspect of dialectic requires that any inquiry begin with commonly held opinions on the issue. In his interpretive essay on The Republic, Allan Bloom explains the importance of this aspect of the dialectic. He writes:

Dialectic, beginning from the commonly held opinions, will lead to an ultimate agreement. It is this activity which can guide us to the discovery of the natural objects, and it implies that we begin from the phenomena as we see them, taking them seriously in an effort to clarify them. It is only by way of our imprisonment that a liberation can be effected. (Bloom 1968, 406-07)

His insight suggests that by not examining commonly held truths and opinions, people are like prisoners trying to escape a prison without consideration for the steel bars and barbed-wire fences that hinder their liberation. As Plato makes clear in the image of the cave, the purpose of the dialectic is to be free from the chains and ascend to the light. If the dialectic is to have an emancipatory effect on our minds, then dominant ideas that oppress people must be the starting point for liberation.

The third dimension of the dialectic is the need for discussion to reach a point of critical reflection in the participants. For the purposes of this paper, critical reflection refers to the ability to consider, fairly equally, challenges or questions raised regarding a particular issue in order to arrive at a better understanding. In discussing the education of the Guardians, Socrates explains the importance of reflection to Glaucon. Stating that the mind processes in two different manners, Socrates argues that some objects “do not invite thought because the sense is an adequate judge of them; while in the case of other objects sense is so untrustworthy that further enquiry is imperatively demanded” (Plato 1991, 265). When the mind receives contradictory ideas “the thinking mind, intending to light up the chaos... [is] compelled to reverse the process” and arrive at an opinion that is satisfactory to the “thinking mind” (p. 265). For Socrates, then, the “thinking mind” is one that works to resolve contradictory ideas. Thus, a teacher must suggest notions that are contrary to “common sense.” If critical reflection takes place, then better understanding should result.
The final dimension of the dialectic calls for the *connection of ideas* in order to articulate an informed representation of reality. Talking with Glaucon about the necessity of this aspect Socrates explains:

[T]he sciences which they [students] learned without any order in their early education will now be brought together, and they will be able to see the natural relationship of them to one another and to true being...the capacity of such knowledge is the great criterion of dialectical talent: the comprehensive mind is always the dialectical. (Plato 1991, 285)

To draw an analogy as to the importance of connecting ideas for better understanding, consider photomosaic technology. Photomosaic technology takes many different pictures of a particular image to create a larger representation of that image. The photomosaic of the deceased reggae singer Bob Marley helps illustrate this point. When observing the image from close-up rather than from a distance, all of the small pictures of Bob Marley seem very separate and distinct. Only after stepping back from those individual pictures can one see the larger image formed through their interconnectedness. Similarly, Plato argues that it is only by observing ideas in their connection to one another that we can gain an image or semblance of the Good. For a more contemporary perspective on this point, Paulo Freire, educational theorist from Latin America, explains in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

When people lack a critical understanding of their reality, apprehending it in fragments which they do not perceive as interacting constituent elements of the whole, they cannot truly know that reality. To truly know it... they would need to have a total vision of the context in order... [to] achieve a clearer perception of the whole. (Freire 2001, 104)

**Plato’s use of the Dialectic in The Republic**

Now that the theoretical elements of the dialectical method have been outlined, a more practical side will be considered. This section examines the level of consistency between the allegory of the cave and the discussion of justice in Book I of The Republic. This investigation will help determine the value of the dialectic in today’s world.

**Allegory of the Cave**

In explaining to his partner in inquiry, Glaucon, the state of human knowledge, Socrates tells the story of the cave. Scholar Eric Voegelin describes the allegory of the cave in four parts. The first three parts are relevant for this paper. In the beginning of the story Socrates explains that
humans are imprisoned in a cave. There is a bright light outside of the cave that produces shadows on the walls. The prisoners interpret the shadows as their reality. The second part of the allegory tells of one prisoner being unchained. Being released from the chains, the prisoner is forced to turn toward the light. Not accustomed to the light, the prisoner’s eyes hurt, and he perceives the true reality as false and the shadows as true. The third aspect of the story describes the prisoner being carried out of the cave and into the world of light. The former prisoner gains greater understanding and can now discern shadow from reality, and ultimately, he perceives the source of the light (Voegelin 2000, 114).

Since the allegory of the cave is the central metaphor for human transformation in *The Republic*, it is important to carefully consider this story in relation to the dialectic. Examining the story against the dialectic (as outlined above) reveals problems of consistency. This inconsistency reveals possible shortcomings of Plato’s development of the dialectic. The extent of these shortcomings will be elaborated on in the conclusion.

The dialectic, then, is at great odds with the allegory of the cave—when the story is taken literally. First, there is no partnership forged in turning the prisoner toward the light: another person releases the prisoner from the chains. The absence of participation stands in contrast to the need for participation in the dialectic. Furthermore, there is no appearance of equality in this context because a hierarchy exists between the prisoner and the non-prisoner. Second, since any type of dialogue looks to be absent from the story, questioning the truthfulness of common opinion does not occur. Third, critical reflection is not evident since the discussion of common views does not happen. Last, the connection of ideas by the prisoner seems unlikely since the other aspects of the dialectic are not met. In short, the allegory of the cave informs us that a prisoner is liberated by another person, forced to turn his body around, and dragged out of the cave to see the light. Once out of the cave, the prisoner perceives reality completely alone. Thus, the allegory is the opposite of dialectical; it reveals a coercive method in which reality and liberation are realized through physical force.

To understand this in more concrete terms, consider the reaction Karl Marx would have received from a worker had he followed the method described in the allegory of the cave. After dragging the worker out of the factory and into the visible structures of capitalism, the worker would be left to see the structures of capitalism by herself. To be sure, there is a slight chance that the worker would comprehend the structures of capitalism and how those structures work to oppress and dominate her. A more likely scenario is that the worker would not perceive capitalism’s underpinnings and the effect that the structures have on her. Indeed, the worker would rightly be upset at Marx’s presumptiveness in physically dragging her from the factory for the sake of human emancipation!

In Book VII of *The Republic*, Plato makes an explicit reference to the negative impact that coercion has on gaining knowledge. Socrates tells Glaucon that education “should be presented to
the mind in childhood; not, however, under any notion of forcing our system of education” (Plato 1991, 284).[4] Citing the lack of critical reflection produced, Socrates stresses, “knowledge which is acquired under compulsion obtains no hold on the mind” (p. 284).

The story of the cave, however, is not the only point in the book that appears to be in conflict with the dialectic. An exchange between Socrates and Glaucon demonstrates further inconsistency. In his dialogue with Glaucon on the usefulness of arithmetic, Socrates states to Glaucon:

I wish you would share this enquiry with me, and say ‘yes’ or ‘no’ when I attempt to distinguish in my own mind what branches of knowledge have this attracting power, in order that we may have clearer proof that arithmetic is, as I suspect, one of them. (Plato 1991, 265)

There are two aspects to this passage that highlight the dialectic. First, Socrates is asking Glaucon to be a partner with him in the “enquiry.” Second, the purpose of this partnership is to clarify the truthfulness of a hypothesis. Although initially it seems that Socrates wants a thinking partner in this discussion, it turns out that a lame partner is what he asks for. To simply reply “yes” or “no” to statements made by Socrates is not participating in the dialogue in any meaningful way. Though it can be inferred that if Glaucon were to disagree with any of Socrates’ statements, Socrates would then ask Glaucon to further explain his challenge, he specifically asks Glaucon to reply “yes” or “no” which restricts Glaucon’s full participation in the discussion. Considering that over the course of this particular discussion he responds affirmatively to Socrates’ statements twelve times with no questions asked, it appears that Glaucon took Socrates’ suggestion literally.

However, this is not the only problem with Socrates’ apparent use of the dialectic in this passage. In this exchange, Socrates wants to clarify in his “own mind... in order that we may have clearer proof.”[5] The question to be asked then is how do partners gain better understanding by virtue of one person gaining clarity? Perhaps Socrates wishes to transfer this knowledge to Glaucon? This cannot be the case because as Socrates makes clear, such diffusion of knowledge is not likely if the student is not participating. Remember, he ridicules those educators who “say that they can put knowledge into the soul which was not there before” (Plato 1991, 258). It appears that the purpose of this investigation is for Socrates to clarify something for himself and to have a “yes-man” by his side. Neither the story of the cave nor the above passage is indicative of the dialectic that was outlined earlier. These are not the only instances that find Plato’s use of the dialectic in The Republic lacking. As Plato scholar Jim Rice points out:

[1]It is impossible to characterize much of the Republic as a genuine debate in which speech is pitted against speech. In stretches of the text that go on for pages, the other participants’ contributions consist only of ‘Yes,’ ‘Certainly,’ ‘That’s right,’
‘We should agree to that,’ and so forth... Socrates becomes more of a teacher, if not a preacher, than an interlocutor on a par with the other characters [after Book I].
(Rice 1998, 27)

Again, this inconsistency with the dialectic has implications for those wishing to employ the dialectic. The conclusion of this paper will analyze those implications. Having pointed to some inconsistencies in Plato’s ideas about the dialectic and his actual use of it, an examination of passages from Book I will look at more consistent uses of the dialectic.

Search for Justice (Book I)

Though the allegory of the cave does not appear to represent the dialectic as it has been identified in this paper, the discussion of justice in Book I seems more attuned to it. This exchange includes his interlocutors asking questions, making assertions, answering his questions with more than simple “yes” and “no” responses, and offering a variety of opinions. This stands in contrast to the analysis in the previous section. The differences between Book I and other sections in The Republic have not gone unnoticed by scholars. Some believe that this difference can be attributed to Plato writing the first book earlier in his life and then adding it to The Republic, which is considered as part of his middle works. Others, however, suggest that “Plato’s shift after Book I represents a criticism of the historical Socrates” (Rice 1998, 28). This could stem from “Plato’s criticism of Socrates’ method of philosophizing” which runs the risk of bearing little or no fruit in the pursuit of truth (Rice 1998, 29). This opinion sees the culmination of this critique of Socrates in his own assertion that he is no closer to a definition of justice than when the enquiry began (p. 29). Whatever the reason for the difference, such a discussion falls outside the focus of this paper. What is relevant, however, is the difference in dialogical methods, because it provides an opportunity to analyze two different styles—one more in line with the dialectic, the other not—within The Republic. The discussion of justice that unfolds in Book I reveals several instances of the dialectical method at work. Reflecting on these instances will help to identify certain strengths of the dialectic.

The discussion begins with Socrates questioning Cephalus on justice. He asks, is justice simply “to speak the truth and to pay your debts—no more than this” (Plato 1991, 19)? Socrates counters by offering a possible exception to this definition of justice. Cephalus agrees that this is an inconsistency that spoils his definition. At this point Cephalus, the elder of the group, exits the conversation.

Although a short section, this initial conversation contains features of the dialectic. First, it begins with a common opinion of justice. With this step underway, Socrates is able to question the accuracy of the opinion. With this question, he elicits critical reflection amongst the discussants, who agree that such an opinion is not in all cases correct. Additionally, this discussion includes
active participants, since someone other than Socrates has made the initial statement on justice. Already, three of the four dimensions of the dialectic are at work. Furthermore, the exit of Cephalus is telling. Since he is “so entrenched in conventional views,” it is possible that Cephalus is weary of the transformative method that Socrates is employing and decides it is best not to be unsettled at such a late stage of life (Rice 1998, 29). Finally, it is telling that Socrates does not force or compel Cephalus to remain in the discussion. This is a marked difference from the allegory of the cave’s description of a person being physically forced to “see the light.”

The introduction of Thrasyphas into the discussion and his participation in it offers a second point of analysis. Thrasyphas bursts into the dialogue complaining of the muddled nature of the discussion. He demands that the discussants “not only ask but answer” questions of justice (Plato 1991, 17). Socrates responds that they are genuinely pursuing the meaning of justice, but that they are encountering difficulties. Socrates then tells Thrasyphas, who is criticizing Socrates for not asserting his own definition of justice, that he cannot possibly define the meaning of justice. Socrates states, “[w]hy, my good friend… how can any one answer who knows... just nothing... The natural thing is, that the speaker should be some one like yourself who professes to know and can tell what he knows” (Plato 1991, 19).

This passage highlights three parts of the dialectic. First, Socrates invites Thrasyphas into the discussion to pursue the nature of justice. This is telling due to the hostile manner with which Thrasyphas enters into the discussion. The dialectic seems to actually gain strength when an antagonistic element is introduced. Second, Socrates equalizes himself by claiming to know nothing. Third, Socrates asks Thrasyphas to provide his definition of justice. Again, three of the four parts to the dialectic are at play here. Socrates asks Thrasyphas to be an active participant in the conversation; he put himself on at least an even par with Thrasyphas, if not a lesser par; and he asks for a common opinion of justice so that the group could critically reflect on the opinion together.

The one aspect of the dialectic that has not been evident thus far in the conversation is the connection of ideas for greater understanding. After questions are posed to test the truthfulness of Thrasyphas’ definition(s) of justice, the group makes an effort to synthesize the ideas. The various responses to these probing questions are linked together by Socrates to show the inconsistency with Thrasyphas’ version of justice. Toward the end of Book I, Socrates reviews what has been gained thus far in the inquiry of Thrasyphas’ justice. He states:

[W]e have already shown that the just are clearly wiser and better and abler than the unjust, and that the unjust are incapable of common action... to speak as we did of men who are evil acting at any time vigorously together, is not strictly true, for if they had been perfectly evil, they would have laid hands upon one another; but it is evident that there must have been some remnant of justice in them, which enabled them to combine... (Plato 1991, 41)
Not only does he draw what they have discussed together in order to refute Thrasyilmachus’ definition of justice, but Socrates continues further to seek “whether the just have a better and happier life than the unjust” (p. 41). Not wishing to end the discussion yet, he states, “I should like to examine further, for no light matter is at stake, nothing less than the rule of human life” (p. 41). In the final exchange of Book I, however, Socrates concludes the discussion by claiming that they are no closer to the “nature of justice” than when they began the inquiry (Plato 1991, 44).

**Conclusion**

The purpose of explaining the dialectic and analyzing when Plato does and does not use it in *The Republic* is to gain a better understanding of an important philosophical and educational concept and to determine, on some level, what the dialectic can offer people now and in the future.

Before the more positive elements of the dialectic are considered, problems with the dialectic need to be addressed. It is important to note, however, that these critical comments come nearly 3000 years after Plato wrote his dialogues, and thus, this author has the benefit of an accumulation of knowledge that was not available to Plato. Therefore, these remarks clearly fall outside the realm of immanent critique. This is justified, though, because the discussion is shifting outside of Plato’s era to contemporary times. Caveats aside, one problem in particular needs to be addressed. Lacking in the conceptual framework of the Platonic or Socratic dialectic is the notion of transference. This is problematic for the theory of the dialectic. Before moving on, however, a brief explanation of transference is necessary.[6]

Though transference traditionally falls within the discourse of psychoanalysis, the term is relevant for this discussion. For the purposes of this paper, transference describes a relationship that sees Person X “taking to heart” what Person Y says, even if it represents a challenge to the thinking of Person X. Transference influences the relationship in such a manner because Person X thinks that Person Y has some knowledge, regardless of whether or not this is true, from which Person X can benefit. Therefore, statements made or questions posed by Person Y can pierce through the long-held beliefs and habits of Person X. Sigmund Freud, most famous for his thoughts on psychoanalysis, explained that an analyst’s “interpretation is often only accepted in so far as the transference… has conferred a special authority upon the analyst” (Laplanche and Pontalis 1973, 460). Without this “special authority,” the analyst has little chance of convincing a patient that the Oedipus complex, for example, is an important moment of human development.

The role of transference in relationships like those between teacher-student or political organizer-community member is of utmost importance here. Whether they realize it or not, any successful teacher or organizer must establish transference, on some level, with the people with
whom she works. Transference establishes a level of trust that underlies a willingness to listen to one another and learn. Transference impacts all four of the components comprising the dialectic. The establishment of transference, then, can determine whether or not the dialectic will work.

Why is transference crucial for the discussion of the dialectic that is drawn from *The Republic*? The absence of discussion about transference is what creates difficulties. If the existence of transference is primary to an effective pedagogical approach, then a discussion of how to gain transference is crucial. Although the dialectic, as described in *The Republic*, offers an element that works to establish transference (the part that encourages active participation and equal status in a discussion), it never addresses the issue of transference. For this reason, the theory of the dialectic is lacking.

If the dialectic is to be useful today, the issue of transference must be included in the discussion. Frustration for users of the dialectic could result if transference is not addressed. For instance, imagine that a teacher follows the Socratic dialectical method in a classroom. But to the teacher’s dismay, critical reflection on common assumptions does not take place amongst the students. If the notion of transference is not part of the teacher’s conceptual framework, he may blame the students or the method for the lack of results. In reality, the absence of transference is to blame for the dialectic not working. Transference provides the trust and rapport in the teacher-student relationship which allows the teacher and student to engage in critical reflection of societal conventions.

This frustration is understandable since Plato never suggests transference in Socrates’ relationship with his young interlocutors. But it is clear that Socrates has established transference with his partners in inquiry, for they clearly look to him for answers to their questions. How else could he not only challenge the conventions of the young elites in Athenian society but also “turn” them away from those very conventions? The transference that Socrates establishes with his students poses a grave threat to Athenian society and results in his trial and conviction for “corrupting the youth of Athens.”

Additionally, as was pointed out previously, Socrates, as Plato portrays him, does not always follow the form of dialectical inquiry himself. Much of *The Republic* is a one-sided conversation starring Socrates. However, this does not necessarily imply that his students were not listening and critically reflecting on his ideas. Because transference was established, dialogue was not the only method available for Socrates to be effective. Believing that he had some knowledge that they needed (despite his claims of ignorance), students were willing to critically reflect on challenges to their thinking that Socrates presented. More recently, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was able to make millions of people critically reflect on common assumptions regarding race relations in the United States during the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. This was not accomplished through millions of dialogues that Dr. King had with people. Rather, he established transference
with people, and was therefore able to challenge long-held convictions about racial segregation and discrimination.

Given that the dialectic appears to be in need of a concept like transference, this is one of the more glaring weaknesses of the dialectical method today. The issue of transference must be a part of the discourse on the dialectical method. Those using the dialectical approach must consider how transference is established and how the dialectic can establish, maintain, and increase levels of transference. To be sure, the dialectical method is lacking in other areas as well. Power relations (based on gender, class, race, sexual orientation, and so forth) and student and citizen apathy are areas that need to be addressed if the dialectic is to be useful today. This analysis hopes to spark a dialogue on these and other problems with the dialectic.

Much more can be said on the matter of transference, but the scope of this discussion restricts us here. The utility of the dialectic for today must be considered. While the omission of transference is a difficulty in the theoretical framework, the dialectic still offers an important pedagogical approach in raising critical consciousness in people. The dialectic provides a model in which the “medium is the message.” Regardless of the content that a person is learning, how he learns that content is as important, if not more so, in determining what the person is going to learn (Postman and Weingartner 1969, 18-19). With the dialectic then, the form of learning includes questioning, critically reflecting on common opinions, and pulling ideas and thoughts together. Therefore, this is what people learn to do. This is in contrast to a lecturer telling people to do such things as ask questions, critically reflect, and connect ideas. Though lectures can be effective teaching tools when transference is there, in the end, it is the practice of the dialectic that develops critical thinking in people. For a democratic society, a fostering of such critical thought is of crucial importance. Without citizens capable of critical thinking, the practice of democracy is a hollow endeavor. Thus, the dialectical method, while not perfect, offers a way of furthering democratic culture and fulfilling the potential of democratic ideals.

By examining the discussion of justice in *The Republic*, this paper offers a glimpse of the value that the dialectic offers a democratic society. As the discussion with Thrasymachus demonstrates, the dialectic can handle—indeed it thrives on—the introduction of multiple, and contrary, points of view. An increased tolerance of ideas, a plurality of voices, and increased confidence in civic participation can result from engaging and employing the dialectical method. The discussion in Book I also points to a method that allows common opinions to be constantly evaluated for their accuracy, even when no one right answer can be found. This is imperative for a democratic society. As John Dewey pointed out in *The Public and Its Problems*:

[S]ince conditions of action and of inquiry and knowledge are always changing, the experiment must always be retried; the State must always be rediscovered… [P]olitical philosophy and science… [must] aid in [the] creation of methods such that experimentation may go on less blindly, less at the mercy of accident, more
intelligently, so that men may learn from their errors and profit by their successes.  
(Dewey 1954, 34)

The dialectical method helps realize Dewey’s vision. Though problems exist both theoretically and practically with the dialectic, it provides the potential to develop citizens who are able to constantly challenge the status quo and suggest new ideas based on those challenges.

Hopefully this discussion has shown that the dialectic remains a valuable pedagogical approach for furthering democratic ideals of active and critical participation in civic life. This author certainly feels that it is. However, the concept of transference must become part of contemporary considerations of the dialectic. The dialectic must be open to constant critique and suggestion. Ensuring that the dialectic can resist unequal power relations that exist in society and any further hindrances to open and free dialogue requires that the dialectic be open to such criticism.

References


[2] All quotes from The Republic are from the Vintage Classics Jowett translation unless otherwise noted.

[3] The banking method refers to a style of teaching where the teacher, who is full of the knowledge, gives knowledge to a student, who is an empty vessel. Educational theorist Paulo Freire described the concept in the following way: “In the banking concept of education, knowledge is a gift bestowed by those who consider themselves knowledgeable upon those whom they consider to know nothing” (72).


[6] The discussion of transference in this paper was influenced by the teachings of Dr. Julie Webber. Without her guidance, the notion of transference would not appear in this paper (or in my own thinking).