

# UC Santa Barbara

## UC Santa Barbara Electronic Theses and Dissertations

### Title

The “Socratic Fallacy” and the Priority of Controversy

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/9td583ds>

### Author

Green, Evan J. P.

### Publication Date

2023

Peer reviewed|Thesis/dissertation

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA

Santa Barbara

The “Socratic Fallacy” and the Priority of Controversy

A Thesis submitted in partial satisfaction of the  
requirements for the degree Master of Arts  
in Philosophy

by

Evan John Parker Green

Committee in charge:

Professor Voula Tsouna, Chair

Professor Richard McKirahan

Professor Patricio Fernandez

September 2023

The dissertation of Evan J. P. Green is approved.

---

Patricio Fernandez

---

Richard McKirahan

---

Voula Tsouna, Committee Chair

August 2023

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The completion of this thesis would not have been possible without the insight and feedback of my advisory committee, as well as Jordan Neidlinger, Kerong Gao, Salvador Escalante Díaz Barreiro, and R. Wolfe Randall.

This work is dedicated to all those executed unjustly.

## ABSTRACT

### The “Socratic Fallacy” and the Priority of Controversy

by

Evan John Parker Green

I lay out the charge of the “Socratic fallacy” as originally presented in Peter Geach’s 1966 paper, and discuss more recent presentations of the challenge in the form of the “Priority of Definition” principle. I advance the thesis that Plato’s Socrates is primarily committed to a methodological principle (not an epistemological one), the Principle of Controversy.

Further, I identify two attendant assumptions (M and E) that are background commitments for Plato’s Socrates. Together these explain some of the inconsistencies or tensions some commentators have suggested in early platonic epistemology, and encapsulate the method and interests of the Socrates we see in the definitional dialogues.

## The “Socratic Fallacy” and the Priority of Controversy

### Introduction

In this paper, I will first lay out the charge of the “Socratic fallacy” as originally presented in Peter Geach’s 1966 paper, and discuss more recent presentations of the challenge. Second, I will analyze the relevant passages in the Platonic dialogues (*Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Theaetetus*, *Charmides*, *Laches*, *Lysis*, *Meno*, and *Greater Hippias*) that have been offered as evidence of a “Socratic fallacy” to show a lack of textual support for Geach’s thesis and other interpretations. Finally, I will offer my own interpretation.

I advance the thesis that Plato’s Socrates is primarily committed to a methodological principle (not an epistemological one), the *Principle of Controversy*. Further, I identify two attendant assumptions (**M** and **E**) that are background commitments for Plato’s Socrates. Together these explain some of the inconsistencies or tensions some commentators have suggested in early platonic epistemology, and encapsulate the method and interests of the Socrates we see in the definitional dialogues.

### A Preliminary Point about Socrates

A unique challenge of critically interpreting Platonic philosophy is to make it clear *who* exactly is the target of critical interpretation. There is a separation between Socrates, the historical philosopher and teacher of Plato; *Socrates*, the character as presented in the Platonic dialogues; and Plato, the historical philosopher and author of everything said by

*Socrates*. In the literature, there is a standard accepted division of Plato's dialogues into early, middle, and late periods.<sup>1</sup> There is also a widely accepted (although not uncontroversial) thesis that the early dialogues more accurately reflect the method and beliefs of the historical Socrates.<sup>2</sup>

In this paper, I attempt to show that Plato never makes the *Socrates* of the early-middle dialogues articulate anything explicitly like the Socratic fallacy, or say anything that commits him to the assumptions required to generate it. Thus, larger issues surrounding Socratic vs Platonic identity are not relevant to my defense. Additionally, I acknowledge the disputed authorship of the Greater Hippias; it does not make a critical difference in my argument if one rejects it.<sup>3</sup> My concern here is to show a pattern of argument in the definitional dialogues.

### **Geach's "Socratic Fallacy"**

According to Peter Geach, in the *Euthyphro* there is some kind of "Socratic fallacy" generated by Socrates' (alleged) assumptions:

- (A) That if you know you are correctly predicating a given term 'T' you must 'know what it is to be T,' in the sense of being able to give a general criterion for a thing's being T;
- (B) That it is no use to try and arrive at the meaning of 'T' by giving examples of things that are T.<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Santas 1979

<sup>2</sup> See Vlastos, Gregory (1983). The Socratic Elenchus. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1:27-58 for full discussion; Burnyeat claims "That Socrates had an identifiable method, the method we see exhibited in Plato's early dialogues...is relatively uncontroversial." Burnyeat, M F. 1977. "Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore." *Philosophy* 52 (202): 381

<sup>3</sup> (Plato, Cooper, and Hutchinson 1997), 899.

<sup>4</sup> Geach, P. T. (1966). Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary. *The Monist*, 50(3), 371.

By analogy, imagine we are blind from birth and are trying to figure out what “redness” is.<sup>5</sup> We might say “here is a red apple,” “here is a red fire extinguisher,” etc., on the grounds that we have been told that these things are red. But if we don’t have the faintest idea of what “red” is to start with, then we can’t say with any confidence that our examples of red things are truly red. And it will be no help to try and figure out what red in general on the basis of our “known examples” because we have no way to know if our examples of redness *are actually red*.

Geach argues that (B) follows from (A) on the grounds that you don’t need to use examples in order to find a general criterion if you already have the general criterion you’re looking for (quite obvious). Further, if you lack any general criteria of ‘T’-ness, then from (A) you’re unable to use examples in order to develop a criterion. You wouldn’t be able to know if the examples correctly predicate ‘T’ in a given instance, and so you wouldn’t be able to use them as example cases of “T” to develop a definition from.

Geach claims that the Socratic fallacy is the mistake of thinking that unless we can give a “rigorous definition” of something, we cannot talk about it. After all, formal definition is only one way in which we come to understand a term or demonstrate our understanding of it. Often, providing a set of examples can be more useful.<sup>6</sup> In the case of elementary geometry, for example, it’s possible that showing someone examples of quadrilaterals, squares, and rectangles to demonstrate the difference between them would be as useful as

---

<sup>5</sup> Of course, even if we were sighted the ultimate nature of color is a difficult and onerous question. For the sake of this hypothetical, the answer we are looking for is just being able to visualize and identify the color red and identify red things correctly by virtue of knowing their color directly.

<sup>6</sup> Geach, P.T. (1966), 371.

providing the definitions of each. The failure supposedly exemplified by the Socratic fallacy is the failure to accept examples as knowledge and prefer a formal definition.

As articulated by Geach, the two assumptions of the Socratic fallacy are general epistemological principles that apply to all knowledge, not just ethical or metaphysical disputes. The language “a given term ‘T’” gives no distinction or limit to the domain of applicable terms. Further, Geach gives an illustrative (and supposedly real) example of a non-Socratic application of the *fallacy*: a philosopher who refuses to accept that “a proper name is a word in a sentence unless [a] rigorous definition [of word] could be produced.”<sup>7</sup> In short, Geach’s charge comes from 1) an assumption that Socrates is committed to some principle that definition of a kind is prior to the ability to recognize examples of that kind, and 2) the fact that in the dialogues Socrates frequently provides examples or instances that he recognizes of one kind without first establishing a definition.<sup>8</sup>

Since 1966, there have been a number of different attempts to reformulate Geach’s (A) (and sometimes (B) as well).<sup>9</sup> Geach himself was not the first person to articulate something like (A).<sup>10</sup> One issue with Geach’s (A) is that it is a principle about the correct predication of terms to objects and properly informed *usage of words*, when Socrates’

---

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Or clearly not of that kind- i.e. at *Laches* 192c Laches defines courage as endurance of the soul, and Socrates responds with the general example of someone who endures foolishly. This is taken by all involved as a clear counterexample to Laches’ definition.

<sup>9</sup> Sometimes as the principles (A1) and (A2) Beversluis (1987), 211-12; “K” or “E,” Futter (2019) 1075; or as the principles (P), (D), and a combination principle (PD) Benson (1990), 19 (and others I will discuss). It would of little reward to catalog the proliferation of near-identical principles suggested by a variety of authors, so I offer here only the original version by Geach and the first formulation of PD in the literature.

<sup>10</sup> In his 1941 book, Richard Robinson declares that “the impression vaguely given by the early dialogues as a whole is that there is no truth whatever about [F] that can be known before we know what [F] is.” 53 See Beversluis (1987) for further discussion of the Socratic fallacy pre-Geach.

inquiries are about things in themselves.<sup>11</sup> I interpret the critical commitment that generates a Socratic fallacy of some kind to be the idea that Socrates believes “no truth [whatsoever] about [F-ness] can be known without a definition.”<sup>12</sup> This principle has been named “the priority of definition,” and in its original form it is:

PD If A fails to know what F-ness is, then A fails to know anything about F-ness.<sup>13</sup>

Though I argue that Socrates is never committed to the Priority of Definition as the specific principle (PD) just articulated, in this paper I will use the term “priority of definition” in context to refer to times when Socrates holds definition of something prior to some purpose. This distinction should be fairly clear and uncontroversial. For example, one could personally reject PD as a philosophical principle and still hold the priority of definition to the task of writing a dictionary.

### **Locating the “Socratic Fallacy”**

If Socrates really does commit the Socratic fallacy, then we should be able to find him articulating a commitment to PD or something like Geach’s (A) somewhere in the Platonic dialogues. According to Geach (B) follows from (A)<sup>14</sup>, so we might not see a direct articulation of (B), but if this is a mistaken pattern of thinking that Socrates frequently falls into we should expect to see something like it said at some point. At the very least, we should see throughout the Platonic dialogues a failure on the part of Socrates to accept examples as a

---

<sup>11</sup> Prior (1998); Wolfsdorf (2004), 36; Futter (2019), 1073. See also my later comments analyzing the *Euthyphro*.

<sup>12</sup> Beversluis (1987), 211.

<sup>13</sup> Benson (1990), 19. Nehamas (1986) is the first to speak of a “priority of definition” principle, but he does not explicitly formulate PD

One might note that Geach’s (A) and (B) speak of “T” while (PD) uses “F.” There are different conventions in the literature, but I will use “F” and “F-ness” etc. from this point on.

<sup>14</sup> Geach 1966, 173. It doesn’t actually seem to be the case that (B) necessarily follows from (A) like Geach claims.

proper route to knowledge, and emphasize instead the importance and priority of definition. I will argue that we find none of these.

What textual evidence is there to support PD? Geach cites *Euthyphro* 5d and 6d as evidence of the *Socratic fallacy* in the Socratic dialogues.<sup>15</sup> But what exactly do these passages say? *Euthyphro* 5c 5-5e (tl Grube) reads:

SOCRATES: So tell me now, by Zeus, what you just now maintained you clearly knew: what kinds of thing do you say that godliness and ungodliness are, both as regards murder and other things; or is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious and like itself, and everything that is to be impious presents us with one form or appearance in so far as it is impious?

EUTHYPHRO: Most certainly, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Tell me then, what is the pious, and what the impious, do you say?

EUTHYPHRO: I say that the pious is to do what I am doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it about murder or temple robbery or anything else, whether the wrongdoer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious.

At the start of this passage, it may look a bit like Socrates is endorsing PD with his request that Euthyphro tell him what it is that all impious things have in common (in the language of the passage: “the one form or appearance that everything that is impious presents us with in so far as they are impious”). But it’s pretty clear that Socrates is trying to hold

---

<sup>15</sup> Geach, P.T. (1996), 371.

Euthyphro to a claim about knowledge of piety and impiety that Euthyphro himself, not Socrates, has made. What exactly is this claim? At 4e Euthyphro states “[My father and other relatives say] it is impious for a son to prosecute his father for murder. But their ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong, Socrates.” Socrates replies quite pointedly, “Whereas, by Zeus, Euthyphro, you think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that, when those things happened as you say, you have no fear of having acted impiously in bringing your father to trial?” Socrates is being sarcastic here, highlighting how *controversial* Euthyphro’s position is.<sup>16</sup> As one of Socrates’ less sophisticated interlocutors, Euthyphro misses the veiled jab and firmly replies in the affirmative, that he has “accurate knowledge of all such things.”<sup>17</sup>

What’s important is to see how Socrates’ demand for an account of piety in this passage has developed. We start with Euthyphro’s assertion that his knowledge of piety and impiety is sufficient enough to judge his own controversial decision as sufficiently pious in the face of public objection, and then at Socrates’ egging on Euthyphro declares himself “superior to the majority of men” in his accurate knowledge of piety and impiety. Socrates is the one who makes the specific request to define impiety by what all impious things share, but this request is only made in response to these very strong assertions. Socrates is not challenging Euthyphro to a do-or-die test of “give a clear definition of impiety right now or you know nothing.” Neither is he asserting that a definitional account of anything is foundational to an understanding of that thing. He is responding to the very strong claim “I

---

<sup>16</sup> As Nehamas (1986) points out, the controversial nature of this action is emphasized at multiple points- 4a11, b4-6, e4-9. For what it’s worth, I view the debate in the *Euthyphro* as a discussion between someone deciding to make an unorthodox and unpopular moral stand, and someone who *has* spent their life taking unpopular moral stances and is now facing the social consequences for such actions. Socrates’s biting sarcasm is preparing Euthyphro for much more punishment—even death.

<sup>17</sup> *Euthyphro*, 5a.

am superior in my knowledge of piety and impiety to the majority of men," with the difficult challenge of "give a full definitional account of piety and impiety." Of course, Euthyphro proves to not be up to this challenge.<sup>18</sup>

So, we don't actually see Socrates providing a blanket endorsement for PD<sup>19</sup> in this section of the *Euthyphro*- his request for a general definitional account of piety (and later rejection of accounts that fail to provide this right kind of definition) is made in response to a controversial claim about knowledge of piety. Geach's reading is to say that Socrates demands a strict definition from Euthyphro in order to begin any discussion of piety at all, and then to claim that Socrates moves on to fallaciously argue from examples of piety/impiety without having set the required criterion to even discriminate among those examples. On this reading, Socrates asks too much (because clearly we can talk about things without a perfect definition of them) and is unable to get it. But, as we've seen, this is not what happens in the dialogue. Socrates makes his demand specifically in response to Euthyphro's assertion of specialist knowledge on a controversial topic, and he's not making this demand lightly.

It could be argued that while this passage is certainly no explicit endorsement of PD, the fact that Socrates interprets Euthyphro's general claim to superior knowledge of piety and impiety as a specific claim that he knows what all impious things have in common implicitly endorses PD as the standard of knowledge.<sup>20</sup> If there is independent support for believing that Socrates holds this view—that is to say, evidence from other dialogues that is favorable to

---

<sup>18</sup> And thus, Socrates's claim to being the wisest on the grounds that he at least he is aware of his ignorance is again vindicated.

<sup>19</sup> Or Geach's (A).

<sup>20</sup> And thus commits the "Socratic fallacy" through the contradictory commitment to PD and argument by example

this interpretation—then this passage can be interpreted in support of PD. Hugh Benson (1990) argues along those lines that Socrates should be interpreted as having a commitment to PD because it is in fact the best explanation for why Socrates seems to accept principles that are similar to and weaker than PD. But it's not obvious that a commitment to PD *is* the best explanation for that—it seems more straightforward that Socrates merely accepts similar and weaker principles. In any case, it is clear that passage alone cannot serve as a textbook example of the Socratic fallacy.

If not alone, what about with the context of the next passage cited by Geach?<sup>21</sup>

*Euthyphro* 6c 9- 6e reads:

[SOCRATES:] For now, try to tell me more clearly what I was asking just now, for, my friend, you did not teach me adequately when I asked you what the pious was, but you told me that what you are doing now, in prosecuting your father for murder, is pious.

EUTHYPHRO: And I told the truth, Socrates.

SOCRATES: Perhaps. You agree, however, that there are many other pious actions.

EUTHYPHRO: There are.

SOCRATES: Bear in mind then that I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form itself that makes all pious actions pious, for you agreed that all impious actions are impious and all pious actions pious through one form, or don't you remember?

---

<sup>21</sup> Geach (1966), 371.

Here we see Socrates rejecting Euthyphro's account of piety as "what I am doing now" on the grounds that Socrates was looking for an explanation of what makes all pious things pious (the form of piety).

But this isn't any more evidence of a commitment to the priority of definition more than the previous passage was.<sup>22</sup> Socrates is merely pushing Euthyphro towards providing a causal account of piety like he implied that he possessed with his claim to "superior knowledge" of the pious and impious. Euthyphro's response to "what is pious" with "what I am doing now" is not rejected on the grounds that "what he is doing now" isn't pious, nor is it rejected on the grounds that knowledge of what is pious is impossible without a definition of piety. It is rejected on the grounds that it was not the type of answer that Socrates is looking for- he asked what all pious things have in common, and further what thing it is that *makes* all pious things pious. To reuse the analogy of elementary geometry, Euthyphro has answered the questions "What do all quadrilaterals have in common? What makes some shape a quadrilateral?" by replying with "This square is a quadrilateral." And again, Socrates' focus on definition in this context of Euthyphro's asserted knowledge is an implicit endorsement of PD only if there are other reasons to believe Plato is committed to PD. As is, a principle as weak as "anyone who claims to have confident knowledge of piety is able to articulate a general account of piety," or a more general principle "having confident knowledge of F implies being able to give an account of F" are sufficient.

Further, though very little is said about the exact nature of what kind of account Socrates is looking for, what is said is very significant. Socrates is looking for a *causal*

---

<sup>22</sup> Again, or Geach's (A).

*account* of what makes all pious things pious. This passage implies a metaphysical commitment to the existence of something (a form<sup>23</sup>) that is held in common (in some way) by all pious things and is the cause (in some way) of their pious status. If such universals do exist (both Socrates and Euthyphro agree they do), and they play a role in determining the nature of a thing, it would plausibly be prudent to focus our investigations on these universals. Socrates' emphasis is on what is metaphysically prior, not epistemologically prior. In any case, the two passages that Geach offers as evidence of Socrates committing the Socratic fallacy don't actually seem to show a commitment to (A), or even to PD. If there is a Socratic endorsement of PD to be found in the *Euthyphro*, then it seems like it perhaps could be at 6e,<sup>24</sup> when Socrates says:

Tell me then what this form [of piety] itself is, so that I may look upon it and, using it as a model, say that any action of yours or another's that is of that kind is pious, and if it is not that it is not.

Here we do actually see something almost like (A) or PD: Socrates requests an account of piety for the purpose of discriminating between pious and impious actions. But this is a request for a general account of piety that can be used to discriminate "any action of yours or another's that is *of that kind*," namely "prosecuting one's father." And this is a highly controversial act! Socrates is not endorsing a general principle here that "if one knows that something is pious, then one must know what piety is, in the sense of being able to give a

---

<sup>23</sup> I don't mean to imply that a fully-developed Platonic "Theory of the Forms" (simple, prior, and separate fundamental metaphysical entities by virtue of which all things are what they are, and whatever derived implications such as the immortality of the soul or primacy of The Good) can be found in this single section of the *Euthyphro*-merely what is written: that there is some thing that exists, a form, that makes all pious things pious.

<sup>24</sup> As suggested by Nehamas 1975

definition.” He is making a “much weaker claim[:] that if Euthyphro is convinced that his highly controversial legal action against his father...is in fact pious, then he is bound to have an account of piety which justifies his confidence.”<sup>25</sup>

Further, what Socrates is asking for is the *form* of piety, not a mere account or definition. There’s no specifically causal language related to the forms in this passage, but as seen in the previously examined excerpt what Socrates is looking for in this part of the dialogue is the “that form itself that *makes* all pious actions pious.”<sup>26</sup>

Again, the fact that Socrates *does* insist on the priority of definition to discriminating among controversial cases of piety could suggest a commitment to a general principle of PD. But in many cases, Socrates is not afraid to use examples of things as *F* (or clearly not *F*) prior to ever developing a satisfactory account of *F*-ness.<sup>27</sup> So what other passages have been offered as evidence of Socrates’ commitment to PD?

Supposedly, the Socratic commitment to PD can also be seen in the *Theaetetus*.<sup>28</sup> Socrates asks his interlocutor Theaetetus what knowledge is, and he replies:

THEAETETUS: Then I think that the things Theodorus teaches are knowledge—I mean geometry and the subjects you enumerated just now. Then again there are the crafts such as cobbling, whether you take them together or separately. They must be knowledge, surely.

---

<sup>25</sup> Nehamas (1986), 278.

<sup>26</sup> *Euthyphro* 6e, tl Grube. Italics added for emphasis.

<sup>27</sup> See the preliminary discussion in the *Laches* in which Socrates refutes several attempted definitions of bravery by reference to hypothetical and historical counterexamples (191a-193c) such as the Scythians, the soldier certain of victory, the outmatched soldier, and the unskilled diver.

<sup>28</sup> Geach (1966), 372; Nehamas (1986) 277; Burnyeat (1977), 381

SOCRATES: That is certainly a frank and indeed a generous answer, my dear lad. I asked you for one thing and you have given me many; I wanted something simple, and I have got a variety.

THEAETETUS: And what does that mean, Socrates?

SOCRATES: Nothing, I dare say. But I'll tell you what I think. When you talk about cobbling, you mean just knowledge of the making of shoes...And when you talk about carpentering, you mean simply the knowledge of the making of wooden furniture?

THEAETETUS: Yes, that's all I mean [to both].

SOCRATES: And in both cases you are putting into your definition what the knowledge is of?

THEAETETUS: Yes.

SOCRATES: But that is not what you were asked, Theaetetus. You were not asked to say what one may have knowledge of, or how many branches of knowledge there are. It was not with any idea of counting these up that the question was asked; we wanted to know what knowledge itself is...Supposing we were asked about some commonplace, everyday thing; for example, what is clay? And supposing we were to answer, 'clay of the potters' and 'clay of the stovemakers' and 'clay of the brickmakers', wouldn't that be absurd of us?<sup>29</sup>

---

<sup>29</sup> *Theaetetus* 146d-147a tl. Levett rev. Burnyeat (with slight abridgement for length)

Geach argues that Socrates leads the young Theaetetus astray when he rejects this response. “[O]f course, any knowledge *is* knowledge of so-and-so; and a correct definition would have to run ‘Knowledge of so-and-so is...’ with the ‘so-and-so; occurring over again in the *definiens*.<sup>30</sup>”

It’s not clear that this particular rejection of Theaetetus’ answer is a commitment to PD. This is another case where Socrates specifically asks for a general account of something and is only given examples of that type of thing. The PD is a commitment to an account of *F*-ness prior to any discernment of particular cases of *F*. Certainly, examples of Socrates telling people that they fail to answer his question “what is *F*” on the grounds that they only have provided examples of things that are *F could* suggest a commitment to PD, and *could* be something that a Socrates committed to PD would say. But Socrates is not denying that Theaetetus knows what knowledge is at all here. After making an expert claim to knowledge (and invoking the expertise of Theodorus), Theaetetus is asked to explain what knowledge itself is. In response, he fails to clearly articulate something about the nature of knowledge itself. His answer is rejected, not because Socrates thinks one can’t know anything about knowledge if one fails to know what knowledge itself is—he affirms the example of cobbling as the “knowledge of making shoes”—but because Theaetetus “pointed out something that knowledge is of when this is not what the question was about.”<sup>31</sup> Once again, a request for an account of what all *F*s have in common is not in itself necessarily a commitment to PD.

---

<sup>30</sup> Geach (1966), 372

<sup>31</sup> *Theaetetus* 147c

Another passage cited in the literature as potential evidence for the PD in Plato is *Laches* 190b7-c2<sup>32</sup>. In it, Socrates says:

Then isn't it necessary for us to start out knowing what virtue is? Because if we are not absolutely certain what it is, how are we going to advise anyone as to the best method for obtaining it?

It's clear that Socrates is asserting a priority of definition here. But strictly speaking, this isn't *the* PD priority of definition as a general principle here. Rather, Socrates is saying having an account of virtue is prior to teaching someone the best method for obtaining virtue. He does not say that having an account of virtue is prior to having any knowledge of virtue at all. The task of advising someone on the best way to obtain virtue is a different task from saying anything truthful or useful about virtue at all.

A couple of Socrates' comments in the *Lysis* have also been cited in support of his commitment to PD.<sup>33</sup> At line 212a he claims "[H]ere I am, so far from having this possession [a true friend] that I don't even know how one person becomes the friend of another..." and at 223b he declares that he and his interlocutors have "made fools of ourselves"<sup>34</sup> because they were unable to find out what a friend is despite calling each other friend. At face value, neither of these statements imply any commitment to PD. The most the first quote commits him to is "someone who knows how people become friends is closer to possessing a true friend than someone who neither knows how one person becomes friends with another nor possess a true friend." I want to note that this principle isn't a logically necessary entailment

---

<sup>32</sup> Futter (2019), 1076; Beversluis (1987), 215; Benson (2013), 11; Irwin (1979), 294; Nehamas (1975), 287. Burnyeat (1977) cites 190e, but this reference is just Socrates reiterating the point he made slightly earlier.

<sup>33</sup> Irwin (1979), 294; Nehamas (1986) 288; Beversluis (1987), 215; Benson (2013), 9; Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 41.

<sup>34</sup> tl. Stanley Lombardo

of what he says (merely the most plausible interpretation), and that it's also not a commitment to the principle that someone who doesn't know what friendship is doesn't know if they have a friend or not. In the context of the dialogue and the two young friends Menexenus' and Lysis' repeated failures to explain how people become friends, we might read this as an expression of skepticism towards their claim to true friendship. But Socrates accepts the truth of their friendship explicitly,<sup>35</sup> and nothing he says commits him to the view that the two *cannot know they are* friends just because they don't know how they became friends, or because they don't know what exactly the true nature of friendship is. Not knowing *how* one person *becomes* the friend of another is not the same thing as not knowing *what* a friend is.

The second quote is yet another bit of Socratic self-deprecation, and to claim that one seems foolish because they call themselves something they can't explain is more of a rhetorical flourish than an expression of deep philosophical commitment. In any case, the view expressed here is not a commitment to the principle that we cannot know whether a relationship between two people is an instance of friendship without first knowing what friendship itself is.

Like the *Euthyphro* and the *Laches*, the *Meno* features Socrates express some formulation of what looks the PD:

I myself, Meno, am as poor as my fellow citizens in this matter, and I blame myself for my complete ignorance about virtue. *If I do not know what something is, how could I know what qualities it possesses?* Or do you think that someone who does not

---

<sup>35</sup> First at 207a and then again at 212a.

know *at all* who Meno is could know whether he is good-looking or rich or well-born, or the opposite of these?”<sup>36</sup>

This passage has been offered as the clearest evidence of a Socratic commitment to PD.<sup>37</sup> Yet once again, it seems as if Socrates’ statement does not actually commit him to PD! Here we see Socrates making a trademark claim of philosophical ignorance, and then make the fairly uncontroversial claim that ignorance of a thing implies ignorance of that thing’s qualities. Suppose I were to walk up to you while you’re reading this and ask you how much money Ramona is making. You could only be expected to give a correct answer if you already know who I am talking about; if you are totally ignorant of who Ramona is you’re totally ignorant of how much money she makes. You do not know if she makes a little money, or if she makes very much, or none at all.

Dominic Scott (2006) also argues that Socrates appeals to a version of PD at 79c8-e1, when he asks Meno, “Do you think someone knows what a part of virtue is when he doesn’t know what virtue itself is?”; and then warns him, “while you are still investigating what virtue as a whole is, don’t imagine that you will explain it to anyone by answering in terms of its parts or by saying anything else in the same way...”<sup>38</sup> It’s pretty clear from this passage

---

<sup>36</sup> *Meno*, 71b tl Grube. Emphasis mine.

<sup>37</sup> Nehamas (1975), 287; Burnyeat (1977), 381; Irwin (1979), 294; Beversluis (1987), 221; Benson (2013), 10; Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 62; Prior (1998), 101; Scott (2006) 22. Anderson (1969), 463 also cites *Meno* 72a, 74d, 79a-c as potential evidence that Socrates is committed to Geach’s (B).

Dominic Scott (2006) argues this passage should be interpreted as a commitment to “PDA,” the priority of definition over non-essential attributes. On this reading, the Socrates of the *Meno* is a proto-Aristotelian with similar “metaphysical and epistemological assumptions” to those of Aristotle’s *Posterior Analytics*; in particular to the distinction between the essence of a thing and its ‘necessary accidents.’ Scott (2006), 20-21, 86. Within the confines of this paper, I am unable to dispute the grounds for this proto-Aristotelian reading of the *Meno*. However, I hope one sympathetic to that reading on its other merits can still find my interpretation of the previous passage compelling, and coherent with other elements of their interpretation. Socrates can be a proto-Aristotelian that is making a point about general ignorance at *Meno* 71b.

<sup>38</sup> Scott (2006), 56.

that Socrates *is* committed to the principle that knowledge of virtue itself is prior to being able to distinguish its parts, and that answering with a part of virtue won't be of much help in figuring out what virtue itself is. So, we really do see something like PD (for virtue), and as close to Geach's A & B as we'll ever get. But the context we see this in is incredibly specific. Immediately prior to this quote, at 79b1-3<sup>39</sup>, Meno and Socrates establish a kind of unity of virtue: "to act in whatever you do with a part of virtue is virtue." Socrates then asks "what is virtue, if every action performed with a part of virtue is virtue?"<sup>40</sup> In this context, we should read Socrates as saying "Given that virtue is this thing that you have in full when you act with just a part of it, what is the thing itself (virtue) that you have in full (and in itself) when *you are* acting virtuously? And don't start by saying one of the parts of virtue again, because that's not what we're looking for." This does not require a commitment to the general principle "If A fails to know what F-ness is, then A fails to know anything about F-ness." This request for an account of all virtue and rejection of a definition by parts only comes after Socrates takes great effort to make it clear that virtue is exactly the kind of case that requires some priority of definition. If Socrates held PD as a general principle, there would be no need to make this argument from the unified nature of virtue. He could merely appeal to the principle that an account of anything is prior to knowing its parts.

The *Greater Hippias* has also been identified as the possible location of a commitment to PD:<sup>41</sup>

Certainly, Hippias, if all goes well. But now answer me a short question about that; it's a fine thing you reminded me. Just now someone got me badly stuck when I was

---

<sup>39</sup> And in all of *Meno* 72a-73d

<sup>40</sup> *Meno* 79c4

<sup>41</sup> Nehamas (1975), 287; Irwin (1979), 294; Benson (2013), 6; Futter (2019), 1085.

finding fault with parts of some speeches for being foul, and praising other parts as fine. He questioned me this way, really insultingly: “Socrates, how do *you* know what sorts of things are fine and foul? Look, would you be able to say what the fine is?” And I, I’m so worthless, I was stuck and I wasn’t able to answer him properly. As I left the gathering I was angry and blamed myself, and I made a threatening resolve, that whomever of you wise men I met *first*, I would listen and learn and study, then return to the questioner and fight the argument back. So, as I say, it’s a fine thing you came now. Teach me enough about what the fine is itself, and try to answer me with the greatest precision possible... Of course you know it clearly; it would be a pretty small bit of learning out of the many things *you* know.”<sup>42</sup>

Clearly, the meeting between Socrates and the “questioner” is a work of allegorical fiction within the fictional dialogue. The “questioner” is Socrates’ alter-ego, and the “Socrates” of the encounter is meant to be Hippias. The challenge: “how do you know what sorts of things are fine and foul... would you be able to say what the fine is?” is posed towards someone acting as a parody of the typical sophistic interlocutor seen in the dialogues. This “Socrates” critiques *speeches* as being fine or foul- not ideas or arguments. When pressed, he is totally unable to back up his judgements. It is his credibility as an *expert* that is first brought into question here, not his general capacity to distinguish the fine and the foul. Hippias is then identified as the expert of many things, fine and foul among them, and it is in this capacity that his ability to give an account of the fine is challenged.

### **The Priority of Controversy**

---

<sup>42</sup> 286c3–e4, tl.Woodruff

While it seems clear there is no reason to believe that Socrates is actually committed to PD, it is not immediately obvious what principle(s) Socrates is actually committed to in virtue of his claims about the insufficiency of examples. The question remains, “under what conditions does Socrates ask for an account of F-ness, and why do these conditions require an account when other situations don’t?”

The first thing to note is that Socrates only asks for an account of F-ness in very specific contexts. In its most general form, PD restricts our ability to speak of *any* general term from bravery to red to fine to smelly and so on. Socrates doesn’t stop to quibble over every single general term, only certain ones. To give one example, he straightforwardly says that horsemen and hoplites are both warriors at *Laches* 191d. Were he truly committed to PD in general, he wouldn’t be able to say that both are warriors (have warrior-ness) without first providing an account of what it means to be a warrior. One could argue that Socrates already has a satisfactory account of “warrior-ness” and would be able to easily provide one if needed (as he does shortly later with speed at *Laches* 192b), but doesn’t give one here for some reason.<sup>43</sup>

It stretches credibility, however, to assert that Plato’s Socrates (and Plato himself) is committed to a strict PD *as a fundamental philosophical principle* but for arbitrary reasons at arbitrary moments doesn’t hold himself or others to it.<sup>44</sup> What’s more plausible is that the specific situations (which we have seen) in which Socrates insists on the priority of definition *are the paradigmatic situations* in which the priority of definition is required.

---

<sup>43</sup> And there’s a distinction between having a general concept (e.g. warrior) that you can use in some ways to identify some cases, and being able to define what that concept is.

<sup>44</sup> Further, the “Socratic fallacy” might still be a problem in this case, as it is supposedly a general challenge to knowledge acquisition that arises if one accepts (A) or PD.

This point was first made by Albert Anderson (1969), and recent commentators on the Socratic fallacy have recognized the context specificity of PD<sup>45</sup>. Notable exceptions Gregory Vlastos (1985), Gail Fine (1992), and Hugh Benson (1990 and 2013) all argue that Socrates is committed to a general priority of definition principle. Vlastos and Fine argue Socrates is committed to “the sufficiency of true belief” (STB): the view that we don’t possess knowledge about whether or not certain things are *F* prior to knowledge of *F* itself, but that we can have true beliefs about *F* and *F*-ness; and that a true belief about *F* can be sufficient for inquiry.<sup>46</sup> I will argue in more detail against this view shortly. Benson argues that Socrates is sincerely committed to a disavowal of knowledge in the definitional dialogues, and is only ever claiming knowledge for the sake of testing the coherence of his interlocutor’s beliefs. This seems implausible on the grounds that many of the beliefs Socrates “tries on” to test are beliefs that he seems to be seriously committed to in later dialogues (most obvious being the commitment to “forms”).

Regardless of other objections, these views all fail to adequately address why Socrates only demands definitions in certain contexts.

And what situations are these? It has been argued that Socrates is committed to the priority of definition in cases regarding virtue or a part of virtue.<sup>47</sup> But the *Theaetetus* case concerns knowledge, and the section of the *Greater Hippias* in question concerns the fine and the foul. So Socrates’ principle concerns more than virtue. On the flip side, Socrates (unlike many contemporary philosophers) shows little interest in arguing about the definitions of ordinary things like chairs or holes. So, the context is “controversial topics,” in

---

<sup>45</sup> Wolfsdorf (2004), 36-37; Futter (2019) 1074;

<sup>46</sup> Vlastos (1985), 24.

<sup>47</sup>Futter (2019), 1074; Nehamas (1986), 290.

the sense of “what ultimately is, and how to live;” or in Socrates’ own words, “the subjects of difference about which, when we are unable to come to a satisfactory decision, you and I and other men become hostile to each other...”<sup>48</sup> To characterize by an example:

At *Laches* 191e Socrates asks for a definition of courage and cowardice. This task takes up the rest of the dialogue (until 201b), and is left unfinished. At *Laches* 192a Socrates asks for a definition of speed, and this task is completed by 192b.

Also, the request for these accounts frequently comes in response to a claim of expertise in the *F* at hand. Sometimes this is an explicit claim (*Euthyphro*) and other times it is in response to the claim of teachability, which Socrates thinks implicitly requires expertise (*Laches*). In the case of the *Lysis*, it is Socrates himself who moves the conversation towards the subject of expertise and education rather than his interlocutors, but the context is the same. However, this isn’t the primary feature these cases all have in common. What they do have in common is as subject matter is some widely disputed claim. I argue that Socrates is committed to a *Principle of Controversy*:

When it is controversial if something is *F*, or that *F*-ness has a certain property, in order to solve the dispute, one should provide an account of *F*-ness.

“Controversial” must be understood in the sense of “matters of disagreement” found in the *Euthyphro* 7d2-3, things that can’t obviously be settled by some objective measurement, and not in the strictest sense of “a matter of potential controversy between any two people.” It includes the topics discussed at lengths in the Platonic dialogues, and anything that could plausibly be a topic of such a dialogue (such as honesty or prudence).

---

<sup>48</sup>*Euthyphro* 7d2-3, tl. Grube

This is a methodological principle governing how philosophical inquiry should proceed, not an epistemological principle concerning how we are capable of knowing what we know. I am not the first to advance a “methodological solution” to the “Socratic fallacy.” Nehamas (1986) and Futter (2019) also argue that what motivates Socratic requests for an account of *F*-ness is a methodological concern rather than an epistemological one, but both of them think Socrates’ principle applies only to virtue.<sup>49</sup> I argue at least the case of friendship in the *Lysis* shows it’s broader than that, and if one accepts the *Greater Hippias* as an authentic platonic text so much the better for my argument.

The use of this principle rests on two assumptions, both of which can be fairly ascribed to the Socrates of the dialogues. First, **(M)**: a metaphysical assumption that there is some form of *F*-ness that all *F*s have in common, and because of which they are all *F*. Second, **(E)**: an epistemological assumption that we (generally) have access to a large body of reliable and uncontroversial information.

The first assumption is generally taken to be a foundational principle of Platonic philosophy,<sup>50</sup> and is even supported by part of the *Euthyphro* examined previously.<sup>51</sup>

The second is clear from the way Socrates accepts some things as clear examples of a type without argument, and from the fact that he asserts all sorts of uncontroversial empirical claims about the world.<sup>52</sup> By “access to a large body of reliable and uncontroversial information” I mean to say Plato thinks we are always within our philosophical rights to

---

<sup>49</sup> Nehamas (1986), 290; Futter (2019), 1075-6.

<sup>50</sup> Although some (Vlastos,) have argued for an early Socrates that holds no such metaphysical commitments, this is not the majority view. See my earlier comment contra Benson.

<sup>51</sup> *Euthyphro* 6e

<sup>52</sup> By this I mean things like Socrates’ comments at *Theaetetus* 154e-155a “But, as it is, we are only plain men...we are not in any way pressed for time.”

assert things that we agree are obviously true, and that there are in fact many things that we agree are obviously true. This isn't the weaker principle that we are within our philosophical rights to assert things we stipulate to be true, because (as we've seen) Socrates utters matter-of-fact statements about the physical world (and in at least one case, concepts) without posing them hypothetically.

It is never a matter of controversy for Socrates whether or not the sun rises over the sea every morning, if the chill of a northern wind is cold, or if true bravery is to always abandon one's post and duties at the first sight of trouble. I deliberately leave the exact character of this "body of information" and our relationship to it ambiguous because I believe the text does not clearly support one consistent interpretation.<sup>53</sup> A supporter of the STB view might argue that this "body of information" is just their "true belief" by another name, but I am hesitant to fully endorse the view that there is a consistent Socratic commitment to the concept of "true belief" on the grounds that in most of these dialogues "Socrates does not explicitly distinguish knowledge from true belief."<sup>54</sup> We might just as well attribute to the Socrates of these dialogues some distinction between "ordinary/propositional knowledge<sup>55</sup>" and "moral wisdom<sup>56</sup>" like Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith,<sup>57</sup> or our own favorite theory(ies) of Socratic non-apodeictic knowledge.<sup>58</sup> All that can be confidently committed to is that there is some sense in which Socrates is aware of such matters as "Before

---

<sup>53</sup> I take the developmentalist view on this issue: that Plato's epistemological commitments change over the duration in which he wrote the dialogues, although I do not have a completely developed theory of how and where.

<sup>54</sup> Irwin 1979, (40). I quote Irwin in specific here because this very citation is offered by Vlastos in support of this view. He certainly does in the *Meno*, certainly not in the *Euthyphro*.

<sup>55</sup> The ordinary kinds of things we know from everyday experience (including crafts), Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 39.

<sup>56</sup> "knowledge that has consequences for how we should live," Ibid., 43.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 30-45.

<sup>58</sup> Such as Vlastos (1994), Woodruff (1987), Brickhouse and Smith (1994).

now...Thessalians had a high reputation among the Greeks and were admired for their horsemanship and wealth..." and "Gorgias is not here"<sup>59</sup> enough to uncontroversially report them.

What *are* matters of controversy for Socrates are things along the lines of "the truest nature of friendship in itself," and "what all brave things have in common that makes them brave." And perhaps something else worth noting: As we've established, some of the cases in which Socrates seems to be committed to PD are cases in which someone claims expert knowledge.<sup>60</sup> So, one might be inclined to suggest that there are two principles here: a principle that cases of controversy are best solved by an account of the disputed concept or feature, and a priority of definition to expertise.<sup>61</sup> Appeals to parsimony aside, it is easy enough to dismiss such a suggestion. It is clear from how Socrates characteristically reacts to the claim of expertise that he regards it *as* a controversial claim in itself.<sup>62</sup>

But this apparent redundancy raises the question of why *in fact* Socrates' interlocutors make expertise claims so often (in practice), if it would be (in principle) unnecessary for the purposes of the dialogue. In a strict sense, it's not required for the claim of expertise to ever be made in order for the *Principle of Controversy* to be invoked. For example, why exactly does Socrates push Euthyphro into declaring his knowledge of piety superior to other men if a lesser claim would have been enough to provoke the inquiry of the dialogue? If Euthyphro claimed not "superior knowledge" of piety but merely "some knowledge," the controversial

---

<sup>59</sup> *Meno* 70a-b, 71d

<sup>60</sup> *Euthyphro*, *Laches*, *Greater Hippias*.

<sup>61</sup> "If one has expert knowledge of *F*, then one must know what *F*-ness is, in the sense of being able to give a definition"

<sup>62</sup> E.g. Socrates' sarcastic remark at *Euthyphro* 5c that nobody speaks of Euthyphro's expert knowledge of piety because they are "pretending" not to notice his expertise, followed by a request to explain what Euthyphro "knows clearly" (the true nature of piety). See also Socrates' fruitless questioning of all kinds of experts in the *Apology* (21b-22e).

nature of his decision to prosecute his father in specific and of piety in general would still have been sufficient to produce a Socratic request for an account of piety according to the principle of controversy.<sup>63</sup> But there are clear dialectical and rhetorical reasons for Plato to position Socrates' interlocutors as self-proclaimed experts. Dialectically, it illuminates the difference between serious philosophy and sophistry, and between philosophical inquiry and the unreflexive inquiry of experts in various fields. Rhetorically, it's quite fun as a reader to see the high-and-mighty cut down a few pegs; and it makes the interlocutors more acceptable targets of Socrates' acerbic wit. Their self-deception and unwarranted epistemic arrogance is starkly contrasted by the claims of expert wisdom they make.

## Conclusion

As I noted at the start of this paper, and has been noted by others many times, the "Socrates" of Plato's dialogues is a literary invention. The "true purpose" of refuting the *Socratic fallacy* in Plato's dialogues is not to defend the philosopher Socrates from a charge of contradiction in his practice and beliefs, but to defend the philosopher and author Plato from the charge of being so intellectually careless as to construct an ostensibly wise and learned character that makes such a glaring error. To be clear, Plato's Socrates is no perfect genius. He frequently embarrasses himself in front of objects of his affection, self-deprecates constantly, and fails to reach a proper philosophical conclusion or hold the attention of his interlocutors in many cases. This might seem like a reason to believe Plato's Socrates *could* make such a mistake as the *Socratic fallacy*; but hopefully I have already given the reader

---

<sup>63</sup> Like in the *Lysis*

sufficient reason to believe the *Socratic fallacy*, as alleged by Geach, is an implausible interpretation.

What I have tried to demonstrate so far is that Geach's charge is wrong on the grounds that Socrates is in no way committed to a general PD that places too strict a requirement on all knowledge and leaves him (and us) with no viable method to meet that requirement. "We know heaps of things without being able to define the terms in which we express our knowledge,"<sup>64</sup> Geach says, supposedly in objection to Plato. But Plato agrees. It is never in question if the sky is blue, or that wine makes one drunk, or a host of other obvious things. Common sense can get us quite far. The need for an account comes in, and comes in so frequently, because these dialogues are philosophical dialogues about serious and controversial matters of philosophical inquiry.<sup>65</sup> So the "principle of controversy" comes into play time and time again: not because Socrates doubts that anything at all can be known prior to a definition, but because the very point of these dialogues is to examine and clarify controversial cases in which it does not seem that the matter at hand *is clearly knowable prior* to definition. Again and again, we are shown how little value the "human wisdom" of self-professed experts is worth on the matters of controversy men fight and die over.

---

<sup>64</sup> Geach (1966), 371

<sup>65</sup> Such as: whether or not the things we normally can know without question truly qualify as knowledge

## References

- Anderson, Albert. 1969. "Socratic Reasoning in the 'Euthyphro.'" *The Review of Metaphysics* 22 (3): 461–81.
- Benson, Hugh H. (1990). The Priority of Definition and the Socratic Elenchus. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 8:19.
- Benson, Hugh H. (2013). "The Priority of Definition." In *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*, edited by John Bussanich and Nicholas D. Smith. Continuum.
- Beverlysluis, John. (1974). Socratic Definition. *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 11(4), 331-336.
- Beverlysluis, John. (1987). Does Socrates Commit the Socratic Fallacy? *American Philosophical Quarterly*, 24(3), 211–223.
- Brickhouse, Thomas C., and Nicholas D. Smith. 1994. *Plato's Socrates*. Oxford University Press USA.
- Burnyeat, Miles F. (1977). "Examples in Epistemology: Socrates, Theaetetus and G. E. Moore." *Philosophy* 52 (202): 381-98
- Bussanich, John, and Nicholas D. Smith, eds. (2013). *The Bloomsbury Companion to Socrates*. Bloomsbury Companions. London ; New York: Continuum.
- Cohen, Maurice H. (1962). "The Aporias in Plato's Early Dialogues." *Journal of the History of Ideas* 23 (2): 163.
- Fine, Gail J. (1979). "Knowledge and Logos in the Theaetetus." *The Philosophical Review* 88 (3): 366.
- Fine, Gail. (1992). Inquiry in the *Meno*. In *The Cambridge Companion to Plato* (pp. 200–226). Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.
- Futter, Dylan B. (2019). "The Socratic Fallacy Undone." *British Journal for the History of Philosophy* 27 (6): 1071–91.
- Geach, Peter. T. (1966). Plato's *Euthyphro*: An Analysis and Commentary. *The Monist*, 50(3), 369–382. Retrieved from
- Gerson, Lloyd P. (2006). "DEFINITION AND ESSENCE IN THE PLATONIC DIALOGUES." *Méthexis* 19 (1): 21–39.

- Irwin, Terence. (1979). *Plato's Moral Theory: The Early and Middle Dialogues*. Pbk. ed. Oxford : Oxford : New York: Clarendon Press ; Oxford University Press.
- Nehamas, Alexander. 1975. "Confusing Universals and Particulars in Plato's Early Dialogues." *The Review of Metaphysics* 29 (2): 287–306
- Nehamas, Alexander. 1986. "Chapter Nine: Socratic Intellectualism." *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium of Ancient Philosophy* 2 (1): 275–316.
- Øyvind Rabbås. (2004). Definitions and Paradigms: Laches' First Definition. *Phronesis*, 49(2), 143-168.
- Plato. (1997). *Apology* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 17–36). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Euthyphro* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 1–16). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Greater Hippias* (Paul Woodruff, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 898–921). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Charmides* (R. K. Sprague, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 639–663). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Laches* (R. K. Sprague, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 664–686). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Lysis* (Stanly Lombardo, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 687–707). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Meno* (G. M. A. Grube, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 870–897). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Plato. (1997). *Theaetetus* (M. J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat, Trans.). In *Plato: Complete Works* (pp. 157–234). Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc.
- Prior, William. (1998). Plato and the "Socratic Fallacy". *Phronesis*, 43(2), 97-113.
- Robinson, Richard. 1941. *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*. Oxford University Press.
- Santas, Gerasimos Xenophon. (1972). "The Socratic Fallacy." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 10 (2): 127–41.

- Santas, Gerasimos Xenophon. (1979). *Socrates, Philosophy in Plato's Early Dialogues*. The Arguments of the Philosophers. London ; Boston: Routledge & K. Paul.
- Scott, Dominic. (2009). *Plato's Meno*. Cambridge Studies in the Dialogues of Plato. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press.
- Sharvy, Richard. (1972). Euthyphro 9d-11b: Analysis and Definition in Plato and Others. *Noûs*, 6(2), 119-137.
- Vlastos, Gregory (1983). The Socratic Elenchus. *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1:27-58.
- Vlastos, Gregory. 1985. "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge." *Philosophical Quarterly* 35 (138): 1-31.
- Wolfsdorf, David. (2003). Socrates' Pursuit of Definitions. *Phronesis*, 48(4), 271-312.
- Wolfsdorf, David. (2004). "The Socratic Fallacy and the Epistemological Priority of Definitional Knowledge." *Apeiron* 37 (1).
- Woodruff, Paul. (1978). "Socrates and Ontology: The Evidence of the Hippias Major." *Phronesis* 23 (2): 101-17.