

DANIEL A. DOMBROWSKI, Nebraska U.S.A.

RORTY ON PLATO AS AN EDIFIER

1. Introduction

One of the most important works written by an American philosopher in recent years has been *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* by Richard Rorty¹. It is a complex work that criticizes most of Western philosophy from the time of Plato to the twentieth century, most notably because of the correspondence theory of truth which dominated, whether explicitly or implicitly, this long period. Dewey, Wittgenstein and Heidegger emerge as the heroes of the book because of their edifying reactions against the mirror imagery of the philosophic tradition. Curiously enough, however, although «Plato», «Platonism», «Platonic» and the «Platonic urge» are constantly used by Rorty as catchwords for what is to be denigrated in philosophy, it is by no means clear in his book what sort of philosopher Plato himself really was. Paradoxically, Plato may end up being one of the heroes of the book, or at least should be one of the heroes of the book, which is what I will try to show in this article.

I will first examine Rorty's distaste for Plato's philosophy; then I will isolate those passages in Rorty which perhaps indicate Rorty's admiration for Plato as an edifying philosopher; and I will interpret Plato's *Sophist* in a Rorty-like way, for it is in this dialogue that Rorty implies we might see Plato as an edifier. Finally, I will try to put Rorty's view of Plato in a larger perspective.

2. Rorty's Criticisms of Plato

Not everything Rorty has to say about Plato is unique. One of his

1. Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). Numbers in parentheses refer to page numbers in this text. I have used the Burnet edition of Plato, and the translation of the *Sophist* by Cornford, which relies on Jowett, in Hamilton and Cairns, *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973).

major criticisms of Plato has been made many times before, i.e., Plato's attempt to talk about adjectives as if they were nouns is muddled (33). He offers this description of how a Platonic Form is constructed:

«...we simply lift off a single property from something (the property of being red, or painful, or good) and then treat it as if it itself were a subject of predication, and perhaps also a locus of causal efficacy. A Platonic Form is merely a property considered in isolation and considered as capable of sustaining causal relations (32)».

Also, because of the inadequacy of Plato's assimilation of *ousia* to *idea* (73), there are few believers in Platonic Forms today (43)².

For Rorty, Plato did not discover the distinction between two kinds of entities, inner and outer. Rather, Rorty claims, relying on George Pitcher, Plato was the first to articulate the «Platonic Principle» that «differences in certainty must correspond to differences in the objects known» (156). This principle is a natural consequence, Rorty thinks, of the attempt to model knowledge on perception; if it is assumed that we need distinct faculties to «grasp» bricks *and* numbers, then the discovery of geometry will seem to be the discovery of a new faculty called *nous*³. Although Plato toyed with «inner space» metaphors (e.g., as Rorty notes, the aviary image of the *Theaetetus* — 242-243), his thought was «essentially 'realistic'» rather than introspective:

«The Platonic distinction to which mathematical truth gave rise was metaphysical rather than epistemological — a distinction between the worlds of Being and Becoming. What corresponds to the metaphysical distinctions on the 'divided line' of *Republic IV* are distinctions not between kinds of nonpropositional inner representations, but between grades of certainty attaching to propositions.

2. Rorty may be a bit too hasty here. Contemporary philosophy has shown a surprising vitality regarding Plato's Forms, or something like them. Although Whitehead's eternal objects immediately come to mind, we should not forget that Husserl, Frege, and Russell went through periods where they talked about non-material, non-subjective, universal objects of thought (see, e.g., Russell's *The Problems of Philosophy*). The later thought of Popper has emphasized world 3, which has a Platonic character; and recently Jerrold Katz has defended a Platonic theory in the philosophy of language in *Language and Other Abstract Objects* (Totowa, N.J.: Rowman and Littlefield, 1981); et al.

3. See Katz, p. 201, where it is held that «Platonism» does not, of necessity, entail «perceptually inspired accounts of intuition. I think that the traditional claim that knowledge of abstract objects is knowledge by acquaintance cannot be reconciled with the nature of these objects... being aspatial and atemporal, they cannot act on a knower through a causal process to produce a representation of themselves in the manner of sense perception».

Plato did not focus on the idea of nonpropositional inner entities, but rather on that of the various parts of the soul and of the body being compelled in their respective ways by their respective objects» (158).

These objects provided Plato with his «foundations of knowledge». Rorty's anti-foundationalism notices that even non-Platonists have traditionally fallen victim to the Platonic Principle by trying to ground knowledge claims on some incorrigible base like clear and distinct ideas, sense perceptions, a logical use of language, etc. This is the danger that Plato poses, for if we think of knowledge in this way:

«...we will want to get behind reasons to causes, beyond argument to compulsion from the object known, to a situation in which argument would be not just silly but impossible, for anyone gripped by the object in the required way will be *unable* to doubt or to see an alternative... For Plato, that point was reached by escaping from the senses and opening up the faculty of reason—the Eye of the Soul—to the World of Being (159)... The urge to say that assertions and actions must not only cohere with other assertions and actions but 'correspond' to something apart from what people are saying and doing has some claim to be called *the* philosophical urge. It is the urge which drove Plato to say that Socrates' words and deeds, failing as they did to cohere with current theory and practice, nonetheless corresponded to something which the Athenians could barely glimpse» (179).

There is little epistemology in Plato's thought (222) because, although he was one of the inventors of «idealism» (307), he had a fetish for correspondence. For Rorty (and Kuhn), however, «objective» means «characterizing the view which would be agreed upon as a result of argument undeflected by irrelevant considerations». We have Plato to «thank» for an alternative meaning: «representing things as they really are», and for the concomitant question: «In just what sense is Goodness out there waiting to be represented accurately as a result of rational argument on moral questions?» (333-334). For Rorty, in no sense whatsoever.

The philosophic tradition since Plato, for Rorty, has assumed that the algorithm - no algorithm distinction runs together with the reason - passion distinction (339), such that, at least for Plato, the only way to be «edified» is «to know what is out there». For Rorty, however, the quest for truth is just «one among many ways in which we might be edified» (360). Perhaps because Plato thought otherwise, he defined the philosopher in opposition to the poet

(370). Rorty's final judgement *seems*, therefore, given the aforementioned evidence, to be that «the Platonic notion of Truth itself is absurd» (377) since it condemns philosophers to a Sisyphean task:

«The dilemma created by this Platonic hypostatization is that, on the one hand, the philosopher must attempt to find criteria for picking out these unique referents, whereas, on the other hand, the only hints he has about what these criteria could be are provided by current practice (by, e.g., the best moral and scientific thought of the day). Philosophers thus condemn themselves to a Sisyphean task» (374).

3. Edifying Versus Systematic Philosophy

Rorty's attitude toward Plato is by no means clear, however. Consider the following quotation, which opposes the hermeneutical philosopher as conversationalist (Socrates) with the epistemological (or better, in the case of Plato, metaphysical) philosopher as king of culture:

«I think that the view that epistemology, or some suitable successor - discipline, is necessary to culture confuses two roles which the philosopher might play. The first is that of the informal dilettante, the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary between various discourses. In his salon, so to speak, hermetic thinkers are charmed out of their self-enclosed practices. Disagreements between disciplines and discourses are compromised or transcended in the course of the conversation. The second role is that of the cultural overseer who knows everyone's common ground — the Platonic philosopher-king who knows what everybody else is really doing whether *they* know it or not, because he knows about the ultimate context (the Forms, the Mind, the Language) within which they are doing it. The first role is appropriate to hermeneutics, the second to epistemology» (317-318).

This is the distinction between the edifying and the systematic philosopher, respectively⁴. Since it is the first sort of philosopher that Rorty defends, it would seem that Socrates receives a reprieve that is denied Plato. Rorty thus

4. By systematic philosophy Rorty means knowledge of «ultimate context», etc., not a logical fabric of ideas laid out in one cloth, as in Spinoza's *Ethics*. Plato could obviously not be a systematic philosopher in this latter sense.



assumes a solution to the «Socratic problem» both above and in the following passage:

«It is so much a part of 'thinking philosophically' to be impressed with the special character of mathematical truth that it is hard to shake off the grip of the Platonic Principle. If, however, we think of 'rational certainty' as a matter of victory in argument rather than of relation to an object known, we shall look toward our interlocutors rather than to our faculties for the explanation of the phenomenon» (156-157).

The latter sort of rational certainty seems to apply to Socrates and the sophists who do not see a difference in kind, for Rorty, between «necessary» and «contingent» truths; at most they (along with Rorty) see differences in degree of ease in objecting to our beliefs (157).

Since Plato is our major source of information on Socrates' thought, he might receive a vicarious reprieve as well. But the matter is more complicated than this. In the following remark Rorty reveals an aperture that would grant Plato himself, not just Socrates, the status of an edifying philosopher:

«The permanent fascination of the man who dreamed up the whole idea of Western philosophy —Plato— is that we still do not know which sort of philosopher he was. Even if the *Seventh Letter* is set aside as spurious, the fact that after millennia of commentary nobody knows which passages in the dialogues are jokes keeps the puzzle fresh» (369 n.).

In addition to having a sense of humor, what enables Plato to be possibly an edifying philosopher is the fact that he started philosophy's (written) conversation, which in a free and leisured way allows the sparks of (Kuhnian) abnormal discourse to fly upward (389):

«The fact that we can continue the conversation Plato began without discussing the topics Plato wanted discussed, illustrates the difference between treating philosophy as a voice in a conversation and treating it as a subject, a *Fach*, a field of professional inquiry. The conversation Plato began has been enlarged by more voices than Plato would have dreamed possible» (391).

What is unfortunate is that Rorty gives little indication of what possibly edifying passages in Plato he has in mind. The *Euthyphro*, he tells us, is a work of edifying pedagogy (307), but since this is generally seen as an early dialogue, the edification contained in it might only be attributed to Socrates,

not Plato, especially given Rorty's apparent resolution of the Socratic problem. More helpful is Rorty's suggestion of a difference between the *Republic* and the *Sophist*: the former is epistemologically (again, metaphysically) oriented while the latter is concerned with «pure» philosophy of language, without relevance to the traditional concerns of philosophy; nor, presumably, with the major concerns of the *Republic* (257). It is Rorty's tantalizing mention of the *Sophist* which inspires the next section of this article, in which I try to find out what sense it makes, if any, to see Plato as an edifier.

4. Edification in the *Sophist*

The beginning of this dialogue finds Socrates and Theodorus agreeing that there is something significant in philosophical discourse; it needs not be mere verbal dispute (216 b). No doubt Rorty would agree. His suggestion that this dialogue develops a different conception of the philosopher from that found in the *Republic* receives initial support when the philosopher is distinguished not only from the sophist, but from the statesman as well (217 a), an un-*Republic*-like distinction. And the *Sophist* is indeed a dialogue (despite the fact that Socrates fades out of the picture early on) in that the major figure, the Eleatic Stranger, prefers dialectical exchanges to long discourses (217 c-e).

Most of the dialogue concerns a hunt for the sophist, but *not* because of his inaccurate imitation (or mirroring) of nature, as one might expect. Only the end of the dialogue (266 a-268 c) is primarily concerned with the art of imitation (*mimetike* — 219 b), or, if you will, the mirror of nature. The rest of the piece deals with acquisitive arts, where one gains advantage over others, particularly through words (219 c). The sophist is a hunter (or fisher) of men who takes money for his supposed ability to educate (223 b); he is a trader in virtue (224 c). But it is the *way* the sophist trades words that is bothersome to the Stranger and his interlocutor, the young Theaetetus, not the fact *that* he is a conversationalist.

The sophist fosters stupidity (*amathia*), which consists in supposing that one knows when one does not (229 c). The instruction needed to get rid of this stupidity is called education (*paideia* — 229 d), which is roughly synonymous with what Rorty means by «edification», since Rorty's use of this term is related to «education» or Gadamer's *Bildung* (358-360). The Stranger's education is not rough or dogmatic, but contains gentle advice (*malthakoteros paramythoumenoi* — 229 e-230 a). If one's interlocutor is conceited, he must be cross-examined through dialectic; from refutation one learns modesty (230 b-

c). Since this dialogue is placed after Socrates' encounter with the older and wiser Parmenides (217 c) in the *Parmenides*, one suspects that it is Plato's own new found modesty that is alluded to here, as Rorty suggests.

The philosopher's refusal to engage in rough or dogmatic education differentiates him from the philosopher of the *Republic*, yet this raises a problem. The persuasive devices which a philosopher now has to rely on make him resemble a sophist, as a dog resembles a wolf (231 a). The questions that must be answered are: how does the sophist foster stupidity, and how does the philosopher educate? To answer the first question one must at least partially rely on the sophist's inability (or refusal) to create a proper likeness (*eikon*); instead he makes an inadequate semblance (*phantasma*—236 b). But more importantly, the sophist professes to know nothing of eye-sight, image-making, or mirrors (!) at all, as he confines himself to what can be gathered from *discourse* (240 a). At this point the Stranger's attempt to catch the sophist also seems to be an attempt to catch Rorty. By denying mirror imagery the sophist and Rorty must rely primarily, perhaps exclusively, on discourse. But Plato's own attempt to find out how one can speak falsely, or educate properly, hardly returns unquestioningly to the mirror imagery of the *Republic*.

It is not just the sophist who bothers Plato; the Stranger makes it clear that he is also irked by those who talk about the way things «really are» (*hos estin* — 243 b). What does the word «reality» mean? Theaetetus asks (243 d). Neither the Stranger nor Theaetetus show dogmatic confidence concerning the foundations of knowledge (244 a). And Theaetetus quite openly confesses that he is in a wilderness of doubt with respect to theories that claim to give an exact account (*diakribologoumenous*) of what is real or unreal (245 e).

The naive foundationalism that the Stranger and Theaetetus oppose is exhibited in a battle between the giants and the gods (246 a-249 d). The former are the materialists who try to drag everything down from heaven to earth; they affirm that real existence belongs only to that which can be handled; reality is the same thing as body. Rorty's claim that foundationalism aims to get beyond argument to compulsion, to a situation where argument is not just silly but impossible (159) is anticipated in the Stranger's description of these materialists: as soon as one of their opponents asserts that anything that is not a body is real, they are utterly contemptuous and will not listen to another word (246 b). It should be noted that for Rorty, too, empiricism can be a type of foundationalism.

The «gods» defend their position somewhere in the heights of the unseen; for them true reality consists in intelligible and bodiless forms; the materialists only defend the moving process of becoming (246 b-c). This view is none other than that defended in the *Republic*, which, although a view held by those who

are more civilized (*hemeroterōi*) than the giants, needs to be challenged as well (246 c). Truth (or perhaps still, for Plato, *the* truth) lies outside these two views (246 d).

Plato's solution seems to be in the following statement by the Stranger:

«I suggest that anything has real being that is so constituted as to possess any sort of power either to affect anything else or to be affected, in however small a degree, by the most insignificant agent, though it be only once. I am proposing as a mark to distinguish real things that they are nothing but power» (*dynamis* — 247 e).

The battle (*mache*) between the giants and gods causes ennui; Plato now seems content to say that *anything* which affects, or is affected by, another is real. Like a child begging for both, the philosopher must declare that reality is both at once: all that is unchangeable and all that is in change (249 c-d).

No doubt the giants and gods, and foundationalists in general, will find Plato's «solution» baffling, indeed the Stranger himself still admits that he is «wholly in the dark» about reality. Yet nonetheless he fancies that he is talking (*legein*) good sense (249 d-e; also 250 e). It is no mere coincidence that the analogy the Stranger uses to determine if, and how, reality combines with other reality is grammar (253 a). To say that there is *no* combination at all is self-defeating, for to use the words «being», «apart», or «by itself» implies some sort of connection among things; without such a background of combination these words would not make sense (252 b-c). To say that *all* things combine with all would also be self-defeating, since then one could say *anything*, even that motion is rest, etc. (252 d). The only tenable position is that some things blend, some do not (252 e).

In the hunt for the sophist, Plato has stumbled on the job of the philosopher, perhaps indicating what Plato's missing (or never written) dialogue the *Philosopher*, which was to constitute a trilogy with the *Sophist* and *Statesman*, was to be about (217 a, 253 b-d). The philosopher still retains mirror imaging tasks, like dividing according to natural kinds (253 c, 254 a), but more importantly, he is supposed to act as a guide on the voyage of discourse, pointing out similarities in different positions, and alerting participants in dialectical dispute of inconsistencies that creep into their arguments (253 b). This is how he educates.

To illustrate this less exalted function for the philosopher, the Stranger chooses to analyze some of the most, if not *the* most, important Forms (254 c). Since we can affect the contents of our thoughts, and since they can affect us, Forms are real on the criteria of the *Sophist* (248 d-249 a). The Forms analyzed are *not*, surprisingly, those of the Good, Beautiful, or the like. Rather,

attention is paid to Motion, Rest, Existence, Sameness, Difference. The technical details of this dialectical analysis by the Stranger and Theaetetus are not my concern. It should be noted, however, that if anyone mistrusts the Stranger's analysis he is encouraged to produce some better explanation (*lekton* — 259 b); little attention is paid to what Rorty would call man's glassy, mirroring essence. In fact, the Stranger suggests that inadequate criticism usually comes from those who have «a too recent contact with reality» (259 d).

Since the isolation of everything from everything else would mean the abolition of all discourse, hence the abolition of philosophy, the philosopher must learn how to weave these five central Forms together. The Stranger is quite emphatic that to rob us of discourse is to rob us of philosophy (260 a). One of the great achievements of this dialogue is that inadequate discourse is traced not just to imperfect mirroring, to use Rorty's term, but more importantly to the use (or lack thereof) of the Form of Difference or Otherness. The use of this Form not only allows us to talk about non-being (i.e., that relative non-being that things possess with respect to other things), but also about falsity. As long as the sophist can deny any sort of existence for non-being, he can deny that he can ever say falsehoods, since falsity consists in saying what is not is, or vice versa (260 c-d). In this manner he fosters stupidity. When the sophist is shown that one *can* talk about non-being, without thereby committing parricide on father Parmenides (241d), one is in a position to *begin* an investigation of the nature of discourse (260 e-261 b); this being claimed by the Stranger late in the dialogue, *after* the criticisms made against the giants and gods.

The fact that Plato sometimes reverts back to the correspondence theory of truth (263 b) would perhaps bother Rorty, but he would have to be encouraged by Plato's attempt to explore the elementary conditions of philosophical discourse. The results at first seem rather simple: a statement never consists solely of names —lion stag horse— nor solely of verbs —walks runs sleeps (262 a-b); there could not be a statement about (absolutely) nothing (263 c); and the meaning of «it appears» would include a blend of perception and judgment (264 b). But these small steps add up, and only after one is well versed in what discussion itself is all about can one escape from simplemindedness (268 a).

5. Some Preliminary Conclusions

Rorty is on weak ground at some points. For example: (a) when he says (242-243) that Plato only toys around with inner space metaphors (see

263e); and (b) when he implies that for Plato and other foundationalists, if we are without algorithms we are only left with passion (339) — but Plato's writings, even in the *Republic*, hardly ever exhibit algorithms, rather heuristic devices like dialogues and myths.

From the above evidence in the *Sophist*, however, it can be seen that most of Rorty's suggestions about Plato are useful ones indeed. That is, since edifying philosophy is necessarily reactive (378), depending on systematic philosophy for material to criticize, Plato's status as an edifying philosopher depends on his foundationalism in the *Republic* and else-where. Whereas Dewey, Wittgenstein, and Heidegger primarily reacted against the foundational philosophy of others, Plato had the harder task of reacting against his own foundationalism. This is perhaps why the correspondence theory of truth appears every once in a while even in the *Sophist*.

One project remains. Rorty's notion of foundationalism encompasses various positions which claim to have knowledge of «the ultimate context», whether that be the Forms, the mind, sense perception, or language (317-318). What is needed is an explanation of why Plato adopted the particular foundationalism that he did, so as to better understand his edifying reaction.

6. O r a l i t y t o V i s i o n t o D i s c o u r s e

Greek philosophy grew out of an oral-aural culture in which the medium of speech-hearing dominated the other senses. In pre-literate society truth was found in the word, i.e., the spoken word of myth. Cultural memory was preserved in the mnemonic devices incorporated into epic poetry. These mnemonic devices made it possible for the Homeric bards to have «memorized» all of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. These bards were not just poets or performers, but also encyclopaedists preserving expertise in ruling, sailing, religion, war, agriculture, morality, etc., as Plato's *Ion* indicates. The hypnotic effect of the bard's medium led to an approach to knowledge based on formulae that precluded rational analysis. Just as we know the length of the months through the saying «Thirty days hath September...» the pre-literate Greek preserved all of his knowledge about the world in this fashion.

After hundreds, perhaps thousands, of years of prehistoric, oral-aural culture, a significant shift in the organization of the sensorium, or the sensory apparatus of human beings, occurred. The written word gave prominence to vision in that the word was no longer primarily spoken-heard, but seen on a

page. Literacy was not just an aid in the recording of information. It also caused a revolutionary shift in the sensorium. The key figures in this transition from orality to vision were Homer and Plato. Although Homer's myths were written down, it is surprising how few people ever read them⁵. It was the bard who kept these stories alive for so many centuries.

Plato's critique of Homer should be seen in this light, which Rorty, unfortunately, fails to do. Plato's Forms were polar opposites to the oral-aural life-world. Spoken words are events in time; specifically, present time. Their transitoriness contrasts with Plato's Forms, which are outside of time; not heard, but «seen» by the mind's eye. The Greek word *idea* itself means the look of a thing; «phenomenon» also has a visual root. It was only an escape from the constant oral recitation of the mythic stories that allowed science and philosophy to be born in the light of a new day⁶. The separation from the source of oral spontaneity makes possible the life giving properties of alienation. Reading and writing allow one to keep life at arm's length. Integral to oral culture is the live interaction between speaker and audience. But reading and writing are usually done (and best done) in the absence of others. Without direct audience pressure it is possible for logic to flourish, as in Plato's visually oriented method of collection and division in the *Sophist*.

This shift to a visual domination of the sensorium was connected with, perhaps accidentally, the notion that science, art, and philosophy should offer what Rorty would call mirror imagery. When Rorty criticizes mirror imagery, he should explore the extent to which the dominance of the visual is necessary for there to be philosophy at all. Rorty does rightly indicate but through a glass darkly, that the transition from orality to literacy was not complete in Plato. His teacher, Socrates, left nothing of his philosophy in writing (although he must have *read* Homer). This is difficult to understand from the perspective of a more literate culture, but which makes sense against the oral background of ancient Greece⁷. Plato did write, but calculatingly in

5. On the relationship between orality and literacy in ancient Greece see M.I. Finley, *The Ancient Greeks: An Introduction to Their Life and Thought* (N.Y.: Viking Press, 1963), p. 76. Jack Goody and Ian Watt, «The Consequences of Literacy», in *Literacy in Traditional Societies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968), p. 42. Alfred Burns, «Athenian Literacy in the Fifth Century, B.C.», *Journal of the History of Ideas* 42 (1981): 371-387. Especially see the best work, Eric Havelock, *Preface to Plato* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1963).

6. In addition to Havelock, see Walter Ong, *The Presence of the Word* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967,) especially pp. 34-35.

7. See Ong, p. 55. Also Goody and Watt, pp. 51-53, where it is suggested that for Plato

the dialogue style to preserve the cast of true dialectic, which is basically an oral medium.

7. Conclusion

In short, one cannot react through edifying discourse (as an enlightened type of orality) to *mirror imaged*, foundational philosophy until philosophy itself escapes from primitive orality.

Plato's dialogues are not merely stylistic devices. The *Sophist*, in particular, shows that Plato noticed the excesses of the giants (who identify the real with what they see or, perhaps, feel) and the gods (who identify the real with what can be «seen» by the mind's eye). Through the Stranger's concern for discourse, and through his identification of the real with anything that has *dynamis*, Plato has suggested that discourse is a necessary condition for philosophy. The Stranger was quite clear about this: «to rob us of discourse would be to rob us of philosophy» (260a). Rorty's stronger claim seems to be that discourse is a sufficient condition for philosophy, without any recourse to mirror imagery at all. As he puts it:

«If we see knowing not as having an essence, to be described by scientists or philosophers, but rather as a right, by current standards, to believe, then we are well on the way to seeing *conversation* as the ultimate context within which knowledge is to be understood. Our focus shifts from the relation between human beings and the objects of their inquiry to the relation between alternative standards of justification, and from there to the actual changes in those standards which make up intellectual history» (389-390).

Of course we do not know what Plato would say about this position, but it might signify for him a return to the persuasive, mesmerizing influence of the bards, or at least to the persuasive relativism of the sophists.

words (spoken *or* written) seem inadequate to convey Forms. Although Plato criticizes the written word (e.g., *Phaedrus* 274 or *Seventh Letter* 344), he must succumb to it in order to criticize it. That is, there is a connection between writing, on the one hand, and *logic* and criticism, on the other. The silence ushered in with the triumph of literacy enhances precision. The oral performer fears having to pause while composing-reciting; the reader or writer need not have such a fear. His alienation from the text, as opposed to the social bond created in a mutually engaged in dialectic, allows him to attack his text, reread it, rewrite it, treat it as an object external to himself with formal logical characteristics.

ΚΡΙΤΙΚΗ ΤΟΥ RORTY ΓΙΑ ΤΟΝ ΠΛΑΤΩΝΑ ΩΣ ΠΑΙΔΑΓΩΓΟ

Περίληψη

Στο έργο του *Φιλοσοφία και ο καθρέφτης της φύσης* ο Rorty εξετάζει κριτικά μεγάλο μέρος της Δυτικής Φιλοσοφίας από την εποχή του Πλάτωνα μέχρι τον 20ο αιώνα με στόχο του τη θεωρία της αντιστοιχίας της αλήθειας.

Στο έργο του εξαίρει κυρίως τους Dewey, Wittgenstein και Heidegger για την παιδαγωγική τους αντίδραση ενάντια στη φιλοσοφική παράδοση του «κατοπτρισμού». Όσον αφορά στον Πλάτωνα, το πρόβλημα που προκύπτει είναι που ακριβώς τον κατατάσσει ο Rorty. Και αυτό γιατί από το ένα μέρος άσκει κριτική ενάντια σε όρισμένες θέσεις του, ενώ από το άλλο τον αναγνωρίζει ως παιδαγωγό - θεμελιωτή, πράγμα που φαίνεται κυρίως, κατά τον Rorty, από το διάλογο του Πλάτωνα *Σοφιστής*.

Η Κριτική του Rorty για τον Πλάτωνα στρέφεται καταρχήν ενάντια στη χρήση του επιθέτου ως ουσιαστικού, πράγμα που έχει ως συνέπεια να μεταχειρίζεται κανείς μια ιδιότητα ως υποκείμενο κατηγορήσεως, με αποτέλεσμα τη μετατροπή της ιδιότητας αυτής σε Ίδέα. Στη συνέχεια, η αδυναμία του Πλάτωνα να ταυτίσει την ουσία με την ιδέα παρέχει μια εξήγηση του γεγονότος γιατί υπάρχουν σήμερα λίγοι μόνο όπαδοι των Πλατωνικών Ίδεων.

Γιατί ο Πλάτων, κατά τον Rorty, δεν έκανε διάκριση ανάμεσα σε δύο οντότητες, μια εξωτερική και μια εσωτερική, αλλά μάλλον υπήρξε ο πρώτος που διατύπωσε την «Πλατωνική Αρχή», δηλ. ότι «διαφορές ως προς τη βεβαιότητα (τους αναβαθμούς της γνώσης) αντιστοιχοῦν σε διαφορές μέσα στα ίδια τα αντικείμενα». Αυτό δεν είναι παρά συνέπεια της προσπάθειας να θεμελιωθεί η γνώση στην αντίληψη (perception). Γιατί παρά το γεγονός ότι ο Πλάτων χρησιμοποιεί «εσωτερικές μεταφορές» (π.χ. στο *Θεαίτητο*), η σκέψη του είναι βασικά ρεαλιστική παρά ένδοσκοπική.

Αυτό οδήγησε συχνά ακόμα και αντι-πλατωνικούς να επιχειρήσουν να θεμελιώσουν τη γνώση σε κάποια «αλάνθαστη βάση», όπως είναι οί «καθαρές και εύκρινεις ιδέες», οί «αίσθητηριακές αντιλήψεις», ή «λογική χρήση της γλώσσας» κλπ., πράγμα όμως που ενέχει τον κίνδυνο να μās οδηγήσει πέρα από κάθε επιχειρηματολογία, σε ένα χώρο όπου το επιχείρημα δεν θα ήταν μόνο ά-νόητο αλλά και αδύνατο, γιατί, «δεμένοι» από το αντικείμενο, δεν θα μπορούσαμε να αμφιβάλλουμε ή να δοῦμε μία εναλλακτική απάντηση.

Έτσι, ενώ ο Πλάτων ανήκει στους πρώτους ιδεαλιστές, ή έμμοσή του αυτή στην «αντιστοιχία» τον φέρνει σε αντίθεση με την άποψη που εκπροσωποῦν λ.χ. οί Rorty και Kuhn: δηλ., το «αντικειμενικό» χαρακτηρίζει την

ἄποψη για τὴν ὁποία ὑπάρχει συμφωνία. Μία συμφωνία ὅμως ποὺ ἔρχεται ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα ἐπιχειρηματολογίας.

Ἐκεῖνο ποὺ πραγματικὰ ὀφείλουμε στὸν Πλάτωνα, συνεχίζει ὁ Rorty, εἶναι κυρίως ἡ διατύπωση τῆς ἐρώτησης. Μὲ ποιά ἀκριβῶς ἔννοια λ.χ. τὸ Ἐκκεῖ Πέρα» πρόκειται νὰ ἀναπαρασταθεῖ ἀκριβῶς ὡς ἀποτέλεσμα λογικοῦ ἐπιχειρήματος πάνω σὲ ἠθικὰ ἐρωτήματα;

Γιὰ τὸν Rorty αὐτὸ δὲν ἔχει κανένα νόημα. Γι' αὐτόν, τὸ ἐρώτημα γιὰ τὴν ἀλήθεια εἶναι ἓνας μόνος ἀπὸ τοὺς πολλοὺς τρόπους μὲ τοὺς ὁποίους θὰ μπορούσαμε νὰ μάθουμε, ἐνῶ ἀντίθετα, τουλάχιστον γιὰ τὸν Πλάτωνα, ὁ μόνος τρόπος νὰ μάθουμε εἶναι νὰ γνωρίσουμε «τί εἶναι Ἐκκεῖ Πέρα».

Παρ' ὅλα αὐτὰ ἡ στάση τοῦ Rorty ὅσο ἀφορᾷ στὸν Πλάτωνα δὲν εἶναι ξεκάθαρη. Ὁ Rorty ὑποστηρίζει τὴν πλευρὰ τῆς μάθησης - συνομιλίας, ἐνῶ τὸν Πλάτωνα τὸν τοποθετεῖ στοὺς συστηματικοὺς φιλοσόφους —τὸ φιλόσοφο βασιλιά— ποὺ γνωρίζουν τὰ πάντα. Ἀντίθετα, ὁ Rorty φαίνεται νὰ τοποθετεῖ τὸ Σωκράτη στὴν πρώτη κατηγορία, ἐκείνων δηλ. ποὺ θεωροῦν τὴ «λογικὴ βεβαιότητα», ὅχι ζήτημα σχέσης μὲ τὸ «ἀντικείμενο», ἀλλὰ ζήτημα ἐπικράτησης κατὰ τὴ διαλεκτικὴ ἐπιχειρηματολογία.

Βέβαια, ὅπως εἶπαμε καὶ προηγούμενα, δὲν λείπουν τὰ στοιχεῖα ἐκεῖνα ποὺ θὰ μπορούσαν νὰ χαρακτηρίσουν καὶ τὸν ἴδιο τὸν Πλάτωνα ὡς παιδαγωγὸ-ὁπαδὸ τῆς μάθησης. Καὶ πρῶτα-πρῶτα, τὸ γεγονὸς ὅτι αὐτὸς ἐγκαινίασε τὸ φιλοσοφικὸ διάλογο ποὺ ἐπιτρέπει στὸ λογισμὸ νὰ ἀκολουθήσει διάφορους δρόμους.

Ὅμως, ὅπως παρατηρεῖ ὁ Daniel A. Dombrowski, ὁ Rorty δὲν ἔδωσε μεγάλη σημασία στὰ «παιδαγωγικά» χωρία τοῦ Πλάτωνα. Ἔτσι λ.χ. ὁ *Εὐθύφρων*, ποὺ εἶναι καθαρὰ παιδαγωγικὸ ἔργο, ὅπως παραδέχεται ὁ ἴδιος ὁ Rorty, ἐπειδὴ κατατάσσεται στοὺς πρώιμους Διαλόγους ἀποδίδεται κυρίως στὸν Σωκράτη. Δὲν μπορούμε ὅμως, ἐπιμένει ὁ Dombrowski, νὰ ἀγνοήσουμε τὸν *Σοφιστὴν* ὡς καθαρὰ παιδαγωγικὸ ἔργο ἐπίσης, ἔργο γιὰ τὸ ὁποῖο ὁ Rorty ταλαντεύεται ἀρκετά.

Καὶ ἂν δεχθοῦμε ὅτι ἡ παιδαγωγικὴ φιλοσοφικὴ χαρακτηρίζεται ἀναγκαστικὰ ἀπὸ κριτικὴ διάθεση καὶ ἔχει ἀνάγκη τῆ συστηματικῆς φιλοσοφίας γιὰ ὑλικὸ ὥστε νὰ τὸ κρίνει, ἡ πλευρὰ ἐκείνη τοῦ Πλάτωνα ὡς παιδαγωγοῦ-φιλοσόφου, ἐξαρτᾶται ἀπὸ τὴ θεμελίωση ποὺ κάνει στὴν *Πολιτεία* καὶ ἄλλου. Ἔτσι, ἐνῶ οἱ Dewey, Wittgenstein καὶ Heidegger «ἀντέδρασαν» ἐνάντια στὴ θεμελιωτικὴ φιλοσοφία ἄλλων, ὁ Πλάτων ἦταν καταδικασμένος στὸ ἔργο τοῦ Σίσυφου. Γιατὶ ἀπὸ τὸ ἓνα μέρος ὀφείλε νὰ βρίσκει κριτήρια γιὰ νὰ ἀποκαλύπτει τὶς μοναδικὲς αὐτὲς ἀναφορές, ἐνῶ ἀπὸ τὸ ἄλλο μέρος ἡ μόνη θεμελίωση ποὺ εἶχε γιὰ τὰ κριτήρια αὐτὰ προερχόταν ἀπὸ τὴν τρέχουσα πρακτικὴ, λ.χ. τὴ σύγχρονή του ἠθικὴ ἢ ἐπιστημονικὴ σκέψη.

Ἄλλὰ ἓνα ἀπὸ τὰ πιὸ σοβαρὰ σημεῖα ὅπου ὀφείλεται κατὰ τὸν Dombrowski ἡ ἀμφιταλάντευση τοῦ Rorty σὲ ὅ,τι ἀφορᾷ τὸν Πλάτωνα, εἶναι ἡ ἀγνόηση ἀπὸ μέρους του τοῦ σχηματισμοῦ καὶ τῆς προέλευσης τῆς ἐλληνικῆς φιλοσοφίας ἀπὸ τὴν προφορικὴ παράδοση ποὺ διατηρήθηκε μέσα στὸν Πλάτωνα ὅχι ὡς ἀπλὸ «στυλιστικὸ εὔρημα». Ἀλλιῶς, αὐτὸ ποὺ μπορεῖ νὰ «ἰδωθεῖ» ταυτίζεται μὲ τὸ «πραγματικό». Ἄρα ὁ Πλάτων, καταλήγει περίπου ὁ Dombrowski, μακρὰ ἀπὸ τοῦ νὰ θεωρηθεῖ ὡς ὑποτιμητὴς τοῦ διαλόγου, λέει καθαρά μὲ τὴ φράση τοῦ Ξένου «τὸ νὰ στερηθοῦμε ἀπὸ τὸ διάλογο θὰ ἦταν σὰν νὰ στερούμασταν ἀπὸ (τὴν ἴδια) τὴ φιλοσοφία» (2601...).

Ἑλληνικὴ Περίληψη: Α. Ἀραβαντινοῦ