



DIALECTIC AND EARLY GREEK THOUGHT: AN INQUIRY INTO THE ORIGINS  
OF THE CONCEPT 'DIALECTIC' AND ITS INCORPORATION WITHIN THE  
PHILOSOPHICAL FORM OF DISCOURSE IN ANCIENT GREECE.

by

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A thesis presented in fulfilment of the  
requirements for the Degree of Master of  
Arts at the University of Adelaide.

Politics Department

March 1985

*Awarded 14-1-86*

Dialectic and Early Greek Thought: An Inquiry into the Origins  
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## Abstract

This thesis offers an explanation for the emergence of 'dialectic' as a concept within philosophical discourse based on an analysis of the historical and intellectual conditions underlying this development. It is argued that Plato was the first to articulate and explore such a concept as part of his reappraisal of both the form and content of Greek knowledge and values. However, this is only part of the explanation.

The approach adopted in this thesis has been to examine critically the form of discourse in which such a concept arose because it was the very nature of philosophical discourse that Plato questioned and attempted to come to terms with. An understanding of how this form of discourse emerged and developed is crucial for an understanding of the specific issues addressed by Plato.

Of central importance for the development of philosophy was the availability of the technology of a writing system, namely the Greek alphabet. It is argued that for several centuries the Greeks did not have a system of writing. During this period knowledge and values were articulated and preserved orally in what is described in the thesis as the oral mode of discourse. With the advent of an alphabetic system of writing a new mode of discourse began to be established. This is described as the literate mode of discourse.

Within this mode of discourse, new forms of discourse became possible including the particular form that the Greeks themselves termed 'philosophy'. The tensions and contradictions produced by the transition from an oral to a predominantly literate mode of discourse are examined so that the particular effects that this had on Greek knowledge and values can be established. It is argued that these changes, when considered in the context of the political and social upheavals within the Greek world, especially at Athens, resulted in much uncertainty with respect to knowledge and values and the related problem of

appropriate human conduct.

It is argued that Plato regarded this situation as a crisis and devoted his intellectual energy to resolving it. His solution was to reorganise philosophical discourse so that it could provide knowledge and values that were certain and unchanging, and hence provided a proper basis for human conduct. As part of this reappraisal of philosophical discourse Plato was led to develop the notion of dialectic. Oral discourse was integral to Plato's conception of philosophy and the concept 'dialectic'. The winged words of orally based discourse provide the key to understanding how and why dialectic emerged when and where it did.

This thesis does not contain any material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any University and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

I consent to the thesis being made available for photocopying and loan.

Jim Jose

Winged words do not merely fly between persons, they penetrate the indifference of men and make it impossible to be inattentive to the meaning. Wings take dead words and make them live, by transporting them to the responsive soul of the hearer, the part of man closest to the divine.

John Fisher (1966).

## Introduction



The aim of this study is to provide an explanation of the origins of the concept 'dialectic' and its incorporation within the philosophical form of discourse. What were the particular historical circumstances that enabled this concept to be articulated and established? The answer that will emerge in what follows is twofold: first, that Plato (c. 427-348 B.C.) was responsible for the notion 'dialectic' and second, that this was a central part of his project of reconceptualising and redefining philosophical discourse. Implicit in this view is the further view that there was a specific historical relationship between the concept and the form of discourse that gave rise to it. This approach is the key to understanding how and why dialectic emerged when and where it did.

Richard Robinson has argued that Plato invented the concept.<sup>1</sup> A review of his analysis is given later in this thesis.<sup>2</sup> The important question, however, does not turn so much on who invented the concept but rather with what prior and contemporary conditions were presupposed by such a development. It will be argued that these conditions were central to Plato's perception of the standing of philosophy at the beginning of the fourth century B.C.. This approach raises a number of complexities which will be examined in due course. Foremost among them, is the issue of philosophy itself.

It is generally accepted by most historians of ideas that philosophy constitutes a particular *form* of discourse in its own right. This is undoubtedly correct. Yet precisely because philosophy is accepted as a form of discourse it is then automatically

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1. Richard Robinson, *Plato's Earlier Dialectic*, 2nd ed., (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1953). pp. 88-92.

2. See below, Ch. 8.

assumed that it is the pre-eminent arena for the articulation, investigation, and evaluation of issues relating to knowledge and values. Yet in the specific context of the ancient Greek world, such an assumption about the status of philosophy would be misplaced. This is because philosophy was then only one of a number of forms of discourse in which the problems of knowledge and values were addressed. Therefore the particular status of philosophy cannot be taken for granted.

Prior to the fourth century B.C., poetry, drama, history, and philosophy were all forms of discourse that, each in their own way, embraced issues relating to knowledge and values. Poetry and drama held pride of place as the appropriate arenas for preserving and extending knowledge. In many respects, the Greeks tended to regard poetry and drama as virtually synonymous. It was only after the emergence of written discourse that distinctions between the two came to be made in any meaningful way. But even then, poetry and drama remained very closely interwoven. Poetry was the central organisational feature of the educational practices of the ancient Greeks.<sup>3</sup>

Philosophy only became a part of the education process in the latter part of the fifth century B.C., but even then it was more as a supplement to the more formal education provided by the poets. It was generally only undertaken by a few Greeks after their other education had been completed.<sup>4</sup> For the most part, practitioners of philosophy enjoyed an uneasy and varied reputation ranging from praise

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3. H. I. Marrou, *A History of Education in Antiquity*, trans. by G. Lamb, (Sheedy & Ward, London, 1977). See also C. M. Bowra, *The Greek Experience*, (Cardinal Books, London, 1973). p. 188.

4. Marrou, (1977), pp. 36-45.



to scepticism and, on occasion, outright derision.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the activities of the sophists in the late fifth century only exacerbated this situation. Indeed, as far as Plato was concerned, many of the sophists had only given substance to some of the negative views put forth by some of the critics of philosophy.

Each of poetry, drama, history, and philosophy, as distinct forms of discourse, had its own particular way or ways of ordering and articulating knowledge. As such they provided the Greeks with a number of diverse means for conceptualising themselves and their world. For most of its early development, philosophy remained very much the poor relation despite (and at times because of) the efforts of its practitioners to establish the legitimacy of philosophical knowledge in the eyes of the Greek community in general. It was this situation which confronted Plato and within which his efforts must be placed. He could not take the status of philosophy for granted but had to establish and consolidate its legitimacy as the primary arena for the articulation of knowledge and values.

It will be helpful to make explicit the way in which the term 'philosophy' is understood in this study. While a fuller elaboration of the sense of this term is given below,<sup>6</sup> what needs to be acknowledged here is the scope of the term as used in this study. In this respect, 'philosophy' refers to a particular form of discourse that began to emerge around the beginning of the sixth century B.C.. The character of its emergence was sufficiently different to warrant it being demarc-

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5. Aristophanes (c. 444-380 B.C.), for example, was one such critic of the role played by philosophy in diverting people's attention away from the values displayed within poetry and drama. His play *Clouds*, with its character 'Socrates' as the paradigm philosopher and its often biting commentary on the values espoused by such people, is especially relevant. See K. J. Dover, *Aristophanes: Clouds*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968); also his *Aristophanic Comedy*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1972) p. 44; V. Ehrenberg, *The People of Aristophanes: A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy*, (Schocken Books, New York, 1962).

6. See below Chapter 4.

ated from other forms such as poetry. The word itself stemmed from the compounding of the two Greek words *philos* (lover) and *sophia* (wisdom). The credit for the first use of this word in the ancient Greek world is usually given to Pythagoras of Samos (c. 530 B.C.) who described himself as one who loved wisdom, a philosopher.<sup>7</sup> It was this sense of the word that Plato adopted in the *Apology* thereby, as Guthrie noted, giving some indication of his Pythagorean heritage.<sup>8</sup>

However, the important point is that 'philosophy' was the word that came to be used by the Greeks themselves to describe this new form of discourse. As such it was historically specific to a particular time and place. How widespread the term was in the wider Greek community is impossible to be sure of, but in so far as it was used by the practitioners to describe their special area to others, at least some degree of currency can be attributed to it. The apparently acceptable and generally understood referent for the term 'philosophy' was a particular form of discourse which, as will be argued below in more detail, was a specifically Greek phenomenon. It is true that 'philosophy' has since come to be used in a more general way to describe bodies or systems of thought quite removed from the Greek world (such as Chinese or Indian thought). These may well warrant being classified generically as 'philosophy'. The subsequent extension of the Greek term to encompass other systems or domains of thought is an important issue that cannot be debated here.<sup>9</sup> What is at issue in this study are the precise circumstances

7. Diogenes Laertius, Book VIII, Ch. 1, ll. 7-10.

8. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume IV*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975). p. 35.

9. On the problems involved in the use of 'philosophy' as a generic term to classify culturally specific systems of thought and the attendant problems of comparative analysis see Ben-Ami Scharfstein et al, *Philosophy East/ Philosophy West: A Critical Comparison of Indian, Chinese, Islamic, and European Philosophy*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1978) especially Part I Chapter 1 to 4. See also G. E. R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason And Experience*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979) pp. 59-61.

of the historical formulation of the Greek term, and the discourse to which it referred. Thus the claims and arguments presented here relate specifically to that form of discourse that the Greeks themselves termed 'philosophy'.

As forms of discourse, poetry, drama, history, and philosophy all shared at least one common denominator. They were all, or at least came to be written. Each of these forms of discourse presupposed the technology of writing as a basic means of composition. An immediate objection to this view arises with respect to poetry in that it might suggested that poetry does not presuppose the use of such a technology because the existence of poetry has been attested prior to the time when the Greeks developed their alphabetic system of writing in the eighth century B.C..<sup>10</sup>

However, a distinction needs to be made between verse and poetry in so far as each is understood as forms of discourse. Verse was certainly in existence prior to the introduction of writing into the Greek world, but it will be argued that verse composed without the aid of writing differed significantly from that composed with the aid of writing in relation to what could be expressed in each. While it may be plausibly maintained that the earliest Greek poetry was simply a writing down of oral verse (Homer's epics for example), it can be shown that poetry very quickly developed along distinctly different lines, even in the case of the epic recensions. In this study, in order to distinguish between the two, verse which employed writing for its formulation or recording has been designated as poetry. Such a distinction may at first appear a trifle rash, but its utility will become apparent as the discussion unfolds.

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10. The issue of writing in the ancient Greek world is addressed below in Ch. 1. For present purposes, the conclusions reached there are here assumed.

A further point about poetry, drama, history, and philosophy is that although they may have all presupposed the technology of writing in their composition, it remained the case that all such works were disseminated vocally. That is, they were generally read, recited, or sung out loud before an audience. The words were preserved in a written form and could be transmitted from one generation to the next in that fashion, but the general means of making such works widely known or public remained a largely oral process. This was partly because writers of such works lacked a reading audience. The widespread ability to read or decipher the written word was not achieved effectively until very late in the fifth century B.C..<sup>11</sup> Moreover, manuscripts or books involved a high degree of inconvenience because of their physical nature combined with a lack of punctuation, paragraphing, and so on.<sup>12</sup> The problems associated with deciphering another person's written words would have meant that, at least in the writer's lifetime, the best way to "read" such works would be by listening to the author (or perhaps someone with a copy of the manuscript) present them in person. Oral dissemination before an audience thus remained important for writers despite the existence of writing.

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11. While there is some dispute over the precise time at which widespread literacy was achieved there is more or less agreement that it was not achieved until the late fifth century B.C.. See J. A. Davison, "Literature and Literacy in Ancient Greece", *Phoenix*, Volume XVI, Nos. 3 & 4, 1962; F. D. Harvey, "Literacy in the Athenian Democracy", *Revue des Etudes Grecques*, Tome LXXIX, Juillet-Decembre, 1966; E. A. Havelock, "The Preliteracy of the Greeks", *New Literary History*, Volume VIII, No. 3, Spring 1977; E. A. Havelock, *Origins of Western Literacy*, (Monograph Series 14, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Ontario, 1976); L. D. Reynolds & N. G. Wilson, *Scribes and Scholars: A Guide to the Transmission of the Greek and Latin Literature*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968); E. C. Richardson, *Biblical Libraries: A Sketch of Library History from 3400 B.C. to A.D. 150*, (Archon Books/ Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1963); E. G. Turner, *Athenian Books in the Fifth and Fourth Centuries B.C.*, (H. K. Lewis & Co., London, 1952).

12. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 59.

These considerations are not so far removed from the problem of dialectic as it might at first seem. There is a direct connection between the creation of forms of discourse based on the technology of writing, the crisis that Plato saw within philosophy, his attempt to redefine philosophy, and his concomitant development of dialectic. The issue of orality and writing was important for Plato as will become evident when his views are reviewed in detail.

It is generally accepted that the English word 'dialectic' means "the art of discussion".<sup>13</sup> The etymology of the word stretches back to the Greek phrase *dialektike (technē)*, the art of dialectic. That phrase has as its cognates *dialektikos* (skilled in discourse or argument) and *dialektos* (discourse, conversation, or debate) both of which stemmed from the Greek verb *dialegesthai* (to converse, to talk, or to discourse).<sup>14</sup> Also worthy of note is the fact that the English word 'dialogue' is derived from the Greek noun *dialogos* (conversation or discussion) which also stemmed from the verb *dialegesthai* and was at one time the latter's corresponding noun.<sup>15</sup> The important word is *dialegesthai*. It clearly points to the general notion of communication, and more specifically, to the act of communication.

However, what concerns us here is not just any act of communication considered in the abstract, but the particular forms of discourse within which such acts are organised and given substance. Although discourse can be organised in diverse and often quite different ways, it can

13. *ibid.*, p. 57.

14. E. Partridge, *Origins: A Short Etymological Dictionary of Modern English*, rev. ed., (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1968) p. 347; J. L. McKecknie, (ed.), *Webster's New Twentieth Century Dictionary of the English Language: Unabridged*, sec. ed., (World Publishing Company, New York, 1970) p. 502; see also *A Lexicon: Abridged from Liddell and Scott's Greek-English Lexicon*, twenty-fifth ed., (Clarendon Press, London, 1892) p. 163.

15. E. Partridge, p. 347.

nevertheless be defined generically. Discourse

is a social organization of the elements  
— the signifiers — of language into<sup>16</sup>  
the relation of an order of meanings.

Hence discourse has to do with the social organisation of meanings that arise through the use of language. Different forms of discourse will exhibit specific orderings of meaning according to the range of linguistic means available to their particular practitioners. While it is possible (but perhaps not very fruitful) to classify various forms of discourse in an almost unlimited fashion, the forms of discourse to be considered in this study concern only those that served as the formal domain for the articulation, preservation, and transmission (communication in its broad sense) of the knowledge and values that were important for the Greeks in a given historical period.

In pre-Homeric times,<sup>17</sup> the formal domain of discourse was the preserve of the *aoidoi* (bards) whose task it was to order the socially important or relevant meanings within their songs. By Plato's time this domain had expanded to include the poetic, the dramatic, the historical, and the philosophical forms of discourse. The demarcation between the various practitioners of these later forms of discourse in the Greek world tended to be blurred and it was this situation that caused Plato much consternation in arriving at an understanding of both the philosophical form of discourse and the necessary qualities of its practitioners. Of some significance is the fact that these two historical situations were quite different in so far as Plato's time enjoyed the use of the technol-

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16. S. Heath, *The Sexual Fix*, (Macmillan, London, 1982) p. 120.

17. The phrase 'pre-Homeric times' refers to the period between the collapse of the Mycenaean world and the Homeric period (c. 8th century B.C.). This period is generally regarded as the 'oral period' of Greek history. More details on this are given in Chapter 1.

ogy of writing whereas the bards did not.

To underscore this difference so that the relevant issues can be brought out as clearly as possible the two periods are characterised in terms of their particular *mode of discourse*. Thus the period where the technology of writing was present is treated as constituting a *literate mode of discourse* whereas the period where such a technology was absent is treated as constituting an *oral mode of discourse*.

By 'mode of discourse' is meant the manner in which the formal discourse is organised for the articulation, preservation, and transmission of the relevant knowledge and values of a society; as was indicated in Heath's definition given earlier. Moreover, such a term makes explicit the need to take full cognisance of the particular means and techniques available for such organisation to be realised. This also includes the particular relations between those engaged in producing and disseminating the form of discourse under consideration and those in the wider society. Of central importance is the fact that the specific means and techniques available within each mode will have definite and determinate effects on the nature of the knowledge and values so addressed. It will be argued in this thesis that as the means changed, so too did the constitutive nature of Greek knowledge and values.

A further distinction is also made between *mode* of discourse and *form* of discourse.<sup>18</sup> To some extent this distinction is strongly implied by what has already been said above. A 'form of discourse' refers to the products or works relative to and produced within a particular mode. The possible range or types of forms<sup>19</sup> will be determined by the

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18. The above distinction between 'mode' and 'form' is drawn from R. Williams, *Culture*, (Fontana Books, London, 1981) particularly Chapters 4 and 6.

19. It needs to be stressed that in using the word 'form' no implication is intended with respect to Platonic Forms. Wherever Plato's notion of 'form' is mentioned in this study the word will be capitalised.

particular way or ways in which a particular mode can be constituted. Depending on the conditions presupposed by a given mode there may emerge one or more forms of discourse. Thus in the oral mode of discourse the relevant form was song (and dance). In the literate mode numerous forms emerged, the most important of which (for this study) was philosophy. The transition from one mode (oral) to the other was not abrupt and neat, but gradual and variegated. Song and dance remained important for many of the developments within the gradually emerging literate mode.

The gradual displacement of the winged word by the written word resulted from specific, determinate changes to the available means of discourse. Such changes are "determined not only by nature but by historical circumstances as well".<sup>20</sup> It is the specification of both the natural and historical circumstances that is required if the organisation of particular discourses is to be properly understood and explained. Benjamin makes another point which is particularly pertinent here.

Before I ask: how does a literary work stand in relation *to* the relationships of production of a period, I would like to ask: how does it stand *in* them? This question aims directly at the function that the work has within the literary relationships of production of a period. In other words, it aims directly at a work's literary *technique*.<sup>21</sup>

By 'technique' Benjamin did not just mean the formal or aesthetic qualities of a particular work. He also meant its "scientific and manufacturing connotations... [that is] ...the technical means by which a work is

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20. W. Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", in his *Illuminations*, trans. by H. Zohn, ed. and introduced by H. Arendt, (Collins/Fontana Books, London, 1973) p. 224.

21. W. Benjamin, "The Author as Producer", trans. by J. Heckman, *New Left Review*, No 62, July/August, 1970. p. 85. (Emphasis in original).



produced, its means of production".<sup>22</sup> While Benjamin was clearly concerned with written literature his point is equally applicable to orally produced works or oral literature.<sup>23</sup> The notion of "literary relations of production" can also be applied to an oral mode with some success.

While it may seem strange to use terms like 'production', 'production relations', or 'relations of production' in discussing and analysing particular forms of discourse within a given mode, such terminology is not as inappropriate as would appear at first glance. This can be seen from the words *poiesis* and *poietes* from which the words 'poetry' and 'poet' are derived. The dominant meaning of *poiesis* for the ancient Greeks was "making, producing, executing" especially in relation to works of an artistic nature.<sup>24</sup> As a verb, it also came to mean "to compose, write esp. in verse, to make: also to invent: - also to make, represent in poetry".<sup>25</sup> It is difficult to determine whether the latter meaning, a writer or composer of verse, strictly post-dated the introduction of writing.<sup>26</sup> It is, however, abundantly clear that the craft connotations, the emphases on producing and making, were central and common features of the meaning of *poiesis*. It was a skill, *techne*, that applied not just

22. *ibid.*, p. 85 n. 2. (Translator's note).

23. While a term like 'oral literature' may sound contradictory, or at least somewhat confused and misleading, there is really little alternative. For some discussion of the relevant issues see R. Finnegan, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance, and Social Context*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977); R. Kellog, "Oral Literature", *New Literary Review*, Volume V, No. 1, Autumn 1973. See also the references mentioned in Chapter 2 below.

24. *A Lexicon, op.cit.*, p. 568.

25. *ibid.*, p. 568.

26. Given what is said above about the craft connotations it is not an unreasonable inference that the craft basis was primary and came to be extended to apply to those who made use of the new means of writing. Hence the distinction between verse and poetry that was made earlier on pp. 5-6.

to works involving words but to other artistic endeavours as well. It therefore embraced both the ends (i.e. the works of art themselves) and the means to realise them. Hence in discussing such means or techniques and their products one is at the same time discussing a form of production and the particular relations involved in it.

In the creation of a particular work, whether oral or written, the language in which it is expressed constitutes the basic medium of communication. As far as orally produced works are concerned, the language is both a natural and an historical circumstance. It is a "natural circumstance" in as much as it is independent of any particular human situation in the sense that it can be regarded as constitutive of being human. Yet, at the same time, it is an "historical circumstance" since the uses to which a particular language can be put, the construction and organisation of meaning, remains dependent upon human action and initiative which is itself dependent upon the technical means available for its expression.

Havelock drew a particularly important distinction between the "discourse of preserved communication" and the "usual domain of daily discourse".<sup>27</sup> In the former, the language will be specialised, constituting a preserved language of discourse, generally more remote from that of everyday discourse. Moreover, the language of everyday discourse drew its content and meanings from the preserved language of discourse because the latter was the "domain of maximum sophistication" as far as the expression of knowledge and values was concerned.<sup>28</sup> This distinction can be demonstrated with some precision for the oral mode of discourse. With the introduction of the technology of writing such a distinction became less clear-cut for the emerging literate mode of discourse.

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27. E. A. Havelock, *Preface to Plato*, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1963) pp. 134-135.

28. *ibid.*, p. 135.

Whereas the preserved language of oral discourse was restricted to those skilled in its construction and manipulation, the introduction of writing meant that what was preserved need not be a specially created language but could also include the "the usual domain of daily discourse", the vernacular. Anyone skilled in the art of writing could preserve their ideas without having to be necessarily skilled in the particular techniques of orally preserved discourse.

The transition from an oral to a literate mode made possible some radical reconceptualisations of traditional knowledge and values. In particular, writers were able to explore, consciously and deliberately, their own private meanings as part of the process of composing their works. In comparison with the more generally homogeneous nature of orally preserved knowledge and values, the views of the writers became increasingly idiosyncratic. It needs to be stressed, however, that this development was not automatic or mechanical. While it will be argued that it was made possible by the introduction of the technology of writing, its realisation was not a foregone conclusion. That is, to the extent that the oral mode exerted a strong influence long after writing had become available, recognising and developing the potentials of literate discourse required more than the existence of the written means to preserve knowledge and values. The tensions generated during the transition from a completely oral mode to a predominantly literate one were often quite pronounced and strongly contested. Indeed, these tensions seemed to become more pronounced the more the oral mode became displaced from the organisational centres of knowledge discourse.

By the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., traditional knowledge and values were increasingly challenged by a range of alternative cultural patterns from the Mediterranean world and beyond. By 'knowledge and values' we refer to ideas and beliefs about models of

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human conduct, private and public, political and social, within the Greek world. For the Greeks, models of conduct were inextricably intertwined with questions of knowledge and values, and this in turn formed the basis of their morality.<sup>29</sup> Seen in this light the tensions generated by the transition from the oral to the written mode are apparent.<sup>30</sup>

The authority of traditional knowledge and values was breaking down at the centres of Greek civilisation. But in its place appeared not so much the authority of a new tradition but a veritable proliferation of contradictory views which rested on the self-proclaimed authority of their proponents. For the pre-Socratic "schools" and Socratic thought, as well as for the Sophists, the philosophical form of discourse became a particularly acute arena of conflict in this respect. For Plato, philosophy was in danger of losing whatever authority it may have had as an appropriate guide to moral and civil conduct. In addressing himself to this problem Plato was well aware of the background tensions arising from the transition from the oral to written mode of discourse. The key to understanding Plato's conception of dialectic is rooted deep in the cross-currents of that transition.

But to reach the point at which Plato's conception of dialectic can be fully comprehended a number of key developments need to be established and placed into context. In particular, an understanding of the oral mode of discourse is essential so that the nature of the knowledge and values expressed through it, the nature of orally preserved discourse,

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29. C. M. Bowra, (1973), pp. 68-69.

30. While this study is concerned with charting these tensions in some detail, an overview of this situation can be gained from J. Notopoulos, "The Introduction of the Alphabet into Oral Societies: Some Case Histories of Conflict Between Oral and Written Literature", *Society of Macedonian Studies*, Volume IV, 1953. pp. 516-524.

and the relationship between the *aoidoi* and their audiences can be made explicit. These issues are addressed in Chapter 2. This chapter will also give an account of how such knowledge was capable of being retained over time via the winged word.

Chapter 3 will chart the changes that began to emerge following the introduction of writing. The focus is on the Greek writers, Hesiod, Archilochus, Sappho, and Solon. By examining their writings in their historical context some of the changes in the preservation of language discourse can be disclosed. While that discussion deals primarily with poets and poetry it nevertheless provides the necessary bridge between the *aoidoi* and the development of the philosophical form of discourse.

Chapter 4 takes up the specific issue of the philosophical form of discourse and establishes that it was a distinctively new form within Greek discourse. It also provides the beginnings of a definition of 'philosophy' (as a form of discourse). Of some importance in this chapter is an examination of the ways in which the means of composition and the means of dissemination interacted, and the extent to which the latter constrained the former. The views of Thales, Anaximander, Anáxímenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides are examined for this purpose.

In Chapter 5, the extremely important issue of the connection between writing and the philosophical form of discourse is examined. A number of explanations for the emergence of philosophy in the Greek world are reviewed as part of this discussion. In particular, the development of a specifically specialised language for philosophical discourse is noted and shown to be related to the use of writing.

Chapter 6 examines the contribution of the sophists to specialised discourse in ancient Greece. The sophists are important because

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of their emphasis on rhetoric and their methods of argumentation. Their contributions to rhetorical discourse showed some strong continuities with oral techniques. In addition, their concern with argument, particularly with *antilogos*, placed them firmly in the philosophical tradition in so far as such methods can be discerned in the works of some of their pre-Socratic predecessors. Finally, the sophists are important because of their approach to knowledge and values. While they were certainly not homogeneous in their views they nevertheless exerted a substantial influence on the state of knowledge in ancient Greece. Indeed, Plato saw them as constituting his main intellectual opponents.

The stage is thus set for an analysis of Plato's attempt to re-conceptualise the foundations of philosophy and establish it as the primary arena for the serious investigation of knowledge and values. Plato's intention was to establish the authority of the philosopher and at the same time enable him to rule out of consideration those who could not be so regarded. A major undertaking for Plato was the creation of a specialised language of discourse in which key terms and concepts could be articulated clearly and explicitly. A philosopher was one who was skilled in the use of such a language. Central to this project was the concept 'dialectic' which, it will be argued, was Plato's "invention". For Plato, dialectic became the means to place philosophers, at least those who conformed with his criteria, in an authoritative position as far as knowledge and values were concerned. Only they would have the means to arrive at the truth.

Plato was not attempting to turn back the clock. In many respects he was reconstructing the clock. Plato was enmeshed in the paradox of desiring to retain the traditional values of the past (at least those of which he approved), and hence the authority of tradition, yet having to make use of the very skill, namely writing, that was under-

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mining the authority of tradition. Plato's attitude toward writing is also examined because he clearly felt the tensions arising from the conflicting values of oral and written discourse. It will be argued that his attempt to resolve those tensions culminated in his conception of dialectic. The argument so presented provides an explanation for the origins of that concept and its incorporation within the philosophical form of discourse in ancient Greece.

The place to begin, however, is with writing itself, and the very emergence of this technology in the ancient Greek world. This will require a re-examination of some important assumptions in the literature about the elements of early scripts and the extent of their use in the ancient Greek world.

## Chapter 1

### The Alphabet and Writing in the Ancient Greek World 1200-700 B.C.

A central assumption of this study is the importance of a system of writing as the major determinant for the development of a literate mode of discourse in the ancient Greek world. It was not just any system of writing that was necessary but a system that met the needs of the Greek language with all its various dialects. This system was the alphabet, as writers of another era were to call it.<sup>1</sup> The alphabet, or at least its development in the Greek world, has been described by Havelock as revolutionary because of its impact on Greek culture.<sup>2</sup> While the significance of this development cannot be denied its degree of significance is nevertheless open to question.<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter a survey of writing in the ancient Greek world is presented so that the development of the alphabet can be established as an important pre-condition for the development of a new, literate mode of discourse. The subsequent development of the various forms of discourse within the new mode, though clearly ramifications of the alphabet by virtue of being distinctive products of a literate mode of discourse, were substantially influenced by other important developments in the Greek world.<sup>4</sup> Some caution must therefore be exercised over what can

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1. E. A. Havelock, *The Literate Revolution in Greece and its Cultural Consequences*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1982). p. 7.

2. *ibid*, p. 6.

3. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), esp. Chapter 4 where he argues against the mono-causal status of the alphabet. See also his *Science, Folklore and Ideology*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1983) pp. 115-116.

4. This appears to be the gist of Lloyd's (1979) approach to the importance of the Greek alphabet. But note also that his treatment of the issues deals uncritically with the central notions 'alphabet', 'literate', and 'literacy'.



be properly ascribed to the alphabet. In this chapter all that will be claimed for the alphabet will be the distinctively Greek nature of its invention. Subsequent chapters will be concerned with what the Greeks did with it once it became a part of their culture.

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It is generally assumed that the Greeks lacked a system of writing for at least four centuries from about 1100 B.C. to about 750 B.C.. In this study this assumption is accepted, but it is worthwhile reviewing a few points with respect to its credibility. At least one dissenting voice has been raised<sup>5</sup> in favour of the contrary assumption that the Linear B script of the Mycenaean era<sup>6</sup> survived until an alphabetic script superseded it. This view has found little support<sup>7</sup> though an earlier version of it appears to have been propounded by Kenyon.<sup>8</sup> Kenyon is ambiguous as to whether his argument applied to the Greeks generally, from the

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5. A. J. B. Wace, "Foreword" to J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek*, sec. ed., (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1973) p. xxxii. Wace's claim is not to be confused with the different claim put forward by J. Goody, "Alphabets and Writing" in R. Williams, (ed.), *Contact: Human Communication and its History*, (Thames & Hudson, London, 1981 pp. 102-126, that the Greeks developed their alphabet as early as 1000 B.C.. This view is examined below.

6. To describe the Greek world (pre-1000 B.C.) as 'Mycenaean' is simply to claim that the city of Mycenae can be taken as typical of the Greek cities of the period. It does not imply that Mycenae exercised some sort of hegemony over the other cities. M. I. Finley, *Early Greece: The Bronze and Archaic Ages*, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1970) p. 56. See also C. G. Starr, *The Origins of Civilisation 1100-650 B.C.*, (Jonathan Cape, London, 1962); C. Tsounas & J. Manatt, *The Mycenaean Age*, (Macmillan & Co., London, 1897); G. E. Mylonas, *Mycenae and the Mycenaean Age*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1966); J. T. Hooker, *Mycenaean Greece*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976); R. J. Hopper, *The Early Greeks*, (Weidenfeld & Nicolson, London, 1976); J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973).

7. J. A. Davison, (1962), p. 147 n. 8.

8. F. G. Kenyon, (1951), p. 9.

Mycenaean period to the late Archaic period, or whether it applied only to the Mycenaean Greeks. After surveying the neighbouring countries in the Mediterranean world and establishing that each had a system of writing which had been in habitual use for some time, Kenyon asked the following question.

Is it likely that a people such as the Greeks, of lively intelligence, of ready initiative, and with literary tastes, would have remained ignorant, or have made no use, of an invention currently practised among their neighbours, and even their Minoan ancestors, and of such obvious utility for their own purposes?

To which he answered that the "natural presumption must clearly be to the contrary".<sup>10</sup>

Kenyon's purpose was to establish that it was entirely possible for the earliest extant pieces of Greek literature, the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, to have been written down; and indeed that they had been produced with the aid of writing because it "is difficult to conceive how poems on such a scale could have been produced" otherwise.<sup>11</sup> An account of how they could have been produced is given below in Chapter 2. The possibility that writing existed when these tales were "Homer-ised" (c. eighth century B.C.)<sup>12</sup> need not be discounted because such a view is compatible with the view that the tradition upon which Homer's efforts came to fruition was an oral tradition.

Kenyon dealt with two possible objections to his view. The

9. *ibid.*, p. 9.

10. *ibid.*, p. 9.

11. *ibid.*, p. 13.

12. That is, the time at which these tales became firmly established and connected with the name 'Homer' and hence at a time when the question of authorship of such works came to be seen as important. For further discussion see Chapters 2 and 3 below.

first was that since no specimens of any sort have survived to indicate the use of writing then one is not in a position to infer its existence. Kenyon responded that the Greeks did not use baked clay tablets as did their neighbours. Rather he presumed that they must have used skins and papyri since such materials were definitely known to have been used in later times. This type of material would have perished more easily in the Greek world than elsewhere in the Mediterranean because of the nature of the Greek climate.<sup>13</sup> The evidence for the use of papyrus, however, cannot be taken further back than about the late eighth century B.C. when the Greeks established their trading contacts with Egypt at Naucratis or with Syria at Al Mina,<sup>14</sup> after the Greek world had begun to recover from the consequences of the collapse of the Mycenaean world. The Greeks only really began their outward spread in earnest in the early eighth century and it took some time before this movement reached full momentum. Therefore contact with and hence knowledge of their neighbour's practices would also have been at a very rudimentary level. The argument about the climate is also tenuous because papyrus specimens of a later time when a system of writing was definitely in use have survived despite the vagaries of climate. Finally, it must be pointed out that Kenyon's own response is based on a presumption on his part that is not supported by any evidence.

The second objection was that if a system of writing had been in existence then some inscriptions in stone could be expected to have survived. Kenyon cited the Minoan example in which evidence for a system of writing had been discovered despite the absence of inscriptions.<sup>15</sup>

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13. F. G. Kenyon, (1951), p. 9.

14. R. M. Jones, "Ionia and Greece in the Eighth and Seventh Centuries B.C.", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume LXVI, 1946. p. 77.

15. F. G. Kenyon, (1951), p. 10.

The earliest known artefact bearing an alphabetic inscription has been dated to the mid-eighth century B.C.<sup>16</sup> and even then all that is reasonably certain is the date of the artefact; the date at which it was actually inscribed may have occurred up to a generation after manufacture.<sup>17</sup> Of artefacts bearing Linear B inscriptions, none has been dated beyond the collapse of Mycenaean society. While it is possible that the absence of inscriptions in stone for the intervening period may one day be rectified by new discoveries as Kenyon supposed,<sup>18</sup> their absence cannot simply be sidestepped by appealing to the Minoan example. The arguments have not been refuted by Kenyon. Without firm evidence to the contrary these arguments continue to be more compelling than Kenyon's counter-arguments.

Furthermore, Kenyon rested his case on the existence of systems of writing in other contemporary societies and his conclusion was that the Mycenaean Greeks must have been acquainted with a system of writing. Yet, as was noted above, throughout his argument he talked of the Greeks and was implicitly attempting to show a continuity (in terms of knowledge of a system of writing) between the Mycenaean era and the late Archaic era (where writing was attested as an established phenomenon). Kenyon's views were published prior to the decipherment of the Linear B script but its existence was still known. Moreover, the script had been preserved on clay tablets. His conclusion with respect to the Mycenaean Greeks was sound but it still left open the question of the existence of a system of writing for later Greeks until at least the Archaic period. Kenyon would appear to be committed to supporting a view favouring its survival beyond the Mycenaean period given that he was arguing that the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* were representative of a written tradition.

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16. E. A. Havelock, (1982), p. 15.

17. *ibid.*, p. 15.

18. F. G. Kenyon, (1951), p. 10.

Kenyon's argument is open to further objections because of his completely uncritical use of the term 'writing' in relation to its existence and use in diverse contemporary civilisations. No attempt was made to differentiate between the uses to which a system of writing may be put in these societies. It was assumed that the social need for a system of writing was constant and identical across different societies. Furthermore, Kenyon made no attempt to differentiate between particular scripts, but rather contented himself with talking about writing in the abstract as if it was an homogeneous process separate from the particularities of geographical and historical locations. These sorts of considerations would appear to be crucial for an adequate understanding of the issues in question.

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Was there a break between the use of the Linear B script and the eventual adoption of another system of writing? A detailed inquiry would require a careful examination of the Mycenaean world, which is beyond the scope of this thesis, but several salient points can be reviewed. The Mycenaean world was described by Finley as having been comprised of a number of "petty bureaucratic states".<sup>19</sup> Each of these states was identified by a particular centre or city.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent of these included Mycenae, Pylos, Tiryns, Thebes, Orchomenos, Gha, Volos, and Athens.<sup>21</sup> Political and social power emanated from and was mediated by the city.

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19. M. I. Finley, (1970), p. 56.

20. Some care needs to be exercised in the use of the term 'city' because the Mycenaean city differed in many respects from its near-Eastern counterparts and from subsequent cities of later Greek periods. For an overview see L. Mumford, *The City in History*, (Pelican Books, London, 1974). Chs. 1-4.

21. J. T. Hooker, (1976), pp. 148-149.

A typical Mycenaean city was a citadel which doubled as a fortress and housed the palace complex of rulers and their functionaries. Most of the population, however, lived in the surrounding hills and valleys.<sup>22</sup> The citadel was physically distant from the bulk of the population. It is generally thought that the few houses which were located close to the citadel were for palace retainers or for some of the more important artisans working in the palace.<sup>23</sup> The citadel was the principal feature of Mycenaean society.

The Mycenaean world was generally very wealthy. That is, the rulers were extremely wealthy, and lived in opulent surroundings of gold, ivory, gems, and bronze.<sup>24</sup> The materials found in the graves of the rulers indicate that the general level of accumulated wealth was substantial. In addition, the Mycenaean world exhibited architectural feats the scale and complexity of which were "unparalleled in Bronze Age culture the world over".<sup>25</sup> Two excellent examples of this, at Mycenae, are the Treasury of Atreus and the Lion Gate.<sup>26</sup> Similar achievements can be cited for other Mycenaean cities. The architectural feats found at Mycenae attest to both the level of wealth that existed at the time and the high degree of social organisation needed to undertake and complete such works. On the basis of the architecture alone one would be justified in concluding that Mycenaean society was tightly organised. This conclusion is confirmed by the information contained in the extant Linear B script as deciphered by Chadwick and Ventris.

These tablets reveal that Mycenaean social formations were

22. C. G. Starr, (1962), p. 44.

23. *ibid.*, p. 44. See also G. E. Mylonas, (1966); C. Tsounas & J. Manatt, (1897).

24. C. G. Starr, (1962), p. 43.

25. G. E. Mylonas, (1966) p. 188.

26. *ibid.*, for various photographs of these works.

very complex and highly stratified. There was a king-ship system (with a possibly religious connection), a palace bureaucracy that closely monitored the economic transactions and taxation records, an elaborate system of land ownership or tenure, and a very complex division of labour.<sup>27</sup> The palace controlled all facets of the economy, hence Finley's description of it as a "palace-economy".<sup>28</sup> All movements of goods, personnel, activities and services were subject to the administrative schedules of the palace.<sup>29</sup> Each of the Mycenaean cities had an army. There were also officials whose task it was to ensure that the various production quotas were met.<sup>30</sup> As a result it can be assumed that the palace bureaucracy extended into every area of Mycenaean life.

The complexity of organisation and the diversity of tasks involved could not have been carried out without some effective means to maintain accounts and records. This does not mean that writing as such was absolutely necessary as the example of the Incas demonstrates.<sup>31</sup> However, since the discovery and subsequent decipherment of the Linear B tablets, it has thus been proven that a system of writing was in existence and was in fact the script used by the Mycenaean Greeks to maintain their

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27. J. Chadwick & M. Venturis, (1973), pp. 119-125. The suggestion that the *wanax* (i.e. king) was in fact a priest-king was canvassed by them on p. 120. They concluded that the *wanax* was not a priest-king.

28. M. I. Finley, "The Mycenaean Tablets and Economic History", *Economic History Review*, Second Series, Volume 10, No. 1, 1957b. p. 134.

29. *ibid.*, p. 135. See also J. T. Hooker, (1976), p. 190.

30. G. E. Mylonas, (1966), pp. 206-207.

31. The Incas used a device known as a *quipu* which was a cord about two feet long from which were hung other knotted cords. The application of this device was the key means of keeping an accurate record of all administrative procedures. Cited in P. Woolley & P. Hirst, *Social Relations and Human Attributes*, (Tavistock Publications, London, 1982). pp. 34-35.

records. Sufficient evidence of this script exists to allow at least a partial determination of the extent of its use and its level of availability.

The extant examples of Linear B script are clay tablets and sealings and some inscriptions on about fifty stirrup-jars.<sup>32</sup> As has been noted, the tablets contained details of inventories, transactions, production quotas etc.. The main features of the script were its limited vocabulary (to the extent that such can be inferred from the data available), the rigidly uniform nature of the language, and a formulaic style of phrasing. The Linear B script had all the hallmarks of being a specialist's language, the jargon of professional scribes and administrators.<sup>33</sup> It was certainly well suited to produce inventories and lists. However, the problem of whether it was so restricted or was in fact more widely used must be addressed.

Chadwick and Ventris have summarised the debate over this issue.<sup>34</sup> A point in favour of a widespread competency in the use of Linear B concerns the tablets which were found in the three adjoining houses at Mycenae. Wace has claimed that these were the records of private citizens, presumably merchants.<sup>35</sup> There is, however, some doubt that these houses were those of private citizens. It is equally likely that they housed palace officials of one sort or another.<sup>36</sup> Consequently the tablets may not have been "private" but a proper part of the palace documents. Wace put forward a second argument to support the case for widespread literacy that focussed on the inscriptions on the stirrup-jars. According to Wace these inscriptions would have been useless

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32. J. Chadwick & M Ventris, (1973), p. 108.

33. M. I. Finley, (1957b), p. 132.

34. J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), pp. 109 ff.

35. Cited in *ibid.*, p. 109.

36. M. I. Finley, (1957b), p. 134 n. 4.



if only a few people could read or understand them.<sup>37</sup> However, the number of stirrup-jars with inscriptions was few when compared with the total number of extant stirrup-jars which had no inscriptions.<sup>38</sup> There is no way of knowing who inscribed the jars nor is there any way of knowing why only so few were inscribed. It is a shaky inference indeed that such limited numbers of inscriptions imply a widespread use of Linear B by the wider population.

Furthermore, a distinction needs to be made between fluency in reading and writing Linear B (possessed by the scribes) and a limited ability to distinguish letters or signs as part of one's trade or occupation.<sup>39</sup> The latter situation is quite consistent with the evidence of the stirrup-jars. The ability to identify one's produce by the label or inscription need not imply that the "owner" of that produce could read or write (i.e. use the Linear B script in the same fashion as the scribes). Hence the ability to recognise an inscription or certain individual characters of the script need not imply that fluency in the use of the script extended beyond the bureaucracy.

Another argument in support of widespread fluency was put forward on the basis of handwriting analyses of the tablets.<sup>40</sup> These analyses revealed that the tablets were the work of more than one scribe. However, all that this proves is that there was more than one scribe in each of the various palaces. It does not prove that the population in general was adept at reading or writing (or both). It does however

37. Cited in J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), p. 109.

38. S. Dow, "Minoan Writing", *American Journal of Archeology*, Volume 58, 1954 cited in J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), p. 110.

39. This is a variation of Havelock's notion of 'craft-literacy' as put forward in his (1976) pp. 71-73.

40. J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), p. 109.

lead to the assumption that there was a distinct occupational grouping for the purposes of keeping records.

Chadwick & Ventris also noted the suggestion that the shapes of the signs and letters indicated that they were more suited for writing in ink on skins or papyrus. The symbols were not really designed to be used on clay tablets because the nature of the script was thought to be more conducive to writing than to scratching on clay. The use of clay was thought to have been confined to special needs like protecting the records from mice and other pests.<sup>41</sup> Implicit in this last point was the view that clay was a permanent means of storing information whereas papyrus and skins were of a more temporary nature. The argument followed that if papyrus and skins were the dominant materials then it is possible that their use was comparatively widespread and hence more accessible. It would thus follow that the *skills* of writing and reading were themselves widespread.

However, several objections can be made to this view. First, as Dow pointed out, there is no conclusive archeological evidence for the use of pens or ink-pots.<sup>42</sup> Dow also included stylii in his objection but this is perhaps too sweeping since the marks on the tablets had to be made with some sort of instrument. It is not stretching the connotations of 'stylus' too much to allow it to be understood as meaning "that which makes a mark". Dow's point about pens and ink-pots is not conclusive but it does cast some doubt on the above argument about the relevance of skins and papyrus because it is not unreasonable to expect to find some material remains like pens and ink-pots to attest the use of skins or papyrus. A second, more substantial, objection is that there is no evidence that the tablets were permanent fixtures. Rather, the

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41. *ibid.*, pp. 109-110.

42. S. Dow, "Minoan Writing", cited in J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), pp. 110-113.

tablets were pulped and re-used after the specific information they contained was no longer needed.<sup>43</sup> When the clay was formed into tablets it was not baked but allowed to dry of its own accord.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that it was destined for re-use because clay which was intended for permanent use was usually baked.

Dow made a further objection to the view that the ability to manipulate the Linear B script was widespread. He suggested that the script was not used for public purposes such as descriptive texts, wall paintings, or public inscriptions.<sup>45</sup> In most other societies (contemporary with the Mycenaean world) in which scripts of various types were in evidence the scripts were visible to all even if the actual practitioners of these scripts comprised a more or less exclusive social group. This would seem to indicate that the Linear B script was limited to palace functions and hence remained the special province of palace functionaries.

The picture of the Mycenaean world which thus emerges is one of a finely balanced, stratified, and highly centralised society. The Linear B script can thus be seen to play an integral role in the success of the palace economy. It was the key to regulating the fundamental social relations in Mycenaean society. Knowledge of how to use the script was localised to the functionaries, and almost certainly did not extend to the wider population as the above argument has sought to demonstrate. Whilst the Linear B script may have been based on the spoken language, it was more akin to a bureaucratic shorthand which was ideally suited to record-keeping, inventories, lists and accounts.

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43. J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), p. 114.

44. *ibid.*, pp. 37-38, also p. 114.

45. S. Dow, "Minoan Writing" cited in J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), pp. 110-113.

The very structure of the script told against its use in what would now be described as literary fields like prose or poetry.<sup>46</sup> That is, it was unsuited as a medium for preserving the songs of the *aidoi*. As Finley has argued, the sort of creations that are associated with Homer and his successors would have been impossible using Linear B and even continuous prose would have been difficult.<sup>47</sup> Evidence of cultural works such as lyrical, rhetorical or poetical pieces based on writing have not survived (or at least have yet to be discovered). It is quite conceivable that Linear B could have been used to document the palace history and hence glorify the *wanax*. Indeed, it is highly likely that the *wanax* was honoured in forms other than the architectural. Whether this was in the form of written chronicles or not must remain moot. Linear B could also have been used for simple messages or instructions but again no examples to substantiate this possibility have survived. The important point is that Linear B was, on the basis of the evidence, very specific in its use. This meant that the content of any written work was more or less limited to list-styled applications.<sup>48</sup> And as suggested above, Linear B would have been unsuitable as a medium for preserving and transmitting knowledge and values in the broad cultural sense because of its limited accessibility and structure.

Yet it is certainly reasonable to assume that the cultural mores were reproduced in some fashion. The most likely alternative would be that this occurred orally through the work of *aidoi*. Unfortunately the evidence to substantiate such a claim directly is lacking.

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46. M. I. Finley, (1957b), p. 130 n. 5 and p. 132.

47. *ibid.*, pp. 132-133. See also his note 1 on p. 133 for an interesting aside about literacy.

48. The list is not as inflexible a form as might first appear. See J. Goody, *The Domestication of the Savage Mind*, (Cambridge University Press, London, 1977) Ch. 5 for a detailed discussion of the list as a form of creative written expression.

However, such a claim may be inferred from what little is known about Mycenaean civilisation. Given that the Mycenaean world was quite well developed and boasted a wide range of achievements of a cultural nature such as pottery, art, gem-work, metal-work, and architecture<sup>49</sup> it is a reasonable assumption that it also had an oral tradition of bards. The fact that it was not written down does not, of necessity, justify a conclusion that it did not exist. The lack of that sort of evidence cannot be considered conclusive because there are traces of Mycenaean elements in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*.<sup>50</sup> This does not mean that Homer's works were necessarily Mycenaean in origin. But it does seem highly probable that the Greek epic tradition (of which Homer's poems are the prime examples) had a Mycenaean past.<sup>51</sup> The oral tradition of the so-called Greek Dark Ages extended back until at least the efflorescence of the Mycenaean period. Thus when the Mycenaean civilisation collapsed, the survival of at least some of the knowledge and values of that era could find expression and hence a partial survival through a tradition which did not depend upon the written word.

It has already been noted that Linear B was a necessary part of the successful organisation of the Mycenaean palace economy. But the converse also applies. The continued use of Linear B depended upon

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49. See for example J. T. Hooker, (1976), pp. 81-107; G. E. Mylonas, (1966), pp. 187-202; R. J. Hopper, (1976), pp. 19 ff..

50. H. L. Lorimer, *Homer and the Monuments*, (Macmillan & Co., London, 1950) p. 453.

51. *ibid.*; M. P. Nilsson, *Homer and Mycenae*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1933) p. 206; T. B. L. Webster, *From Mycenae to Homer*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1958) p. 93; and G. S. Kirk, *The Songs of Homer*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962) reprinted and abridged as *Homer and the Epic*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1964).

the continued existence of the palace-economy because its use was localised to the palace functionaries whose task was to ensure that the economy functioned smoothly. As Dow put it, "Destroy the palace, and the whole community was wrecked".<sup>52</sup> If the manipulation of the techniques of the Linear B script had been widespread then it is reasonable to expect some evidence of its survival beyond the collapse of the palace-economies. But the evidence suggests that the use of the script came to an end at the same time as the collapse of the Mycenaean civilisation. The social need for this system of writing thus disappeared.<sup>53</sup>

With the old society totally (or at least irreparably) destroyed, it was to be some time before a new set of social arrangements could be forged in which the need for a system of writing would be felt. While this process was occurring the survivors and descendants of that period made full use of the oral tradition as a medium to maintain a sense of continuity with the past as well as to provide a mirror for the present. In such conditions the cultural need for a system of communication was fulfilled by the techniques of the oral mode of discourse.

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The re-generation of Greek society was a slow process. It

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52. S. Dow, "The Greeks in the Bronze Age", *11th Congress Internationale des Sciences Historique*, Stockholm, 1960. p. 24. Reprinted in G. S. Kirk, (ed.), *The Language and Background of Homer: Some Recent Studies and Controversies*, (W. Heffer & Sons, Cambridge, 1964) with original page numbering.

53. A. Snodgrass, *Archaic Greece: The Age of Experiment*, (J. M. Dent & Sons, London, 1980) p. 79 where he says,

"If it was [the Linear B]... was the almost exclusive preserve of the palace bureaucracies as seems likely, then their disappearance will have removed its raison d'etre."

was not until about the beginning of the eighth century B.C. that the various Greek city-states could be said to have emerged from the devastation precipitated by the collapse of the Mycenaean world.<sup>54</sup> By the late ninth century B.C. the mainland population began to increase rapidly. This was in contrast with earlier centuries in which the population had been generally declining.<sup>55</sup> There was a marked increase in the use of metals for dedications and farming<sup>56</sup> and iron came to be used in the Greek world for the first time.<sup>57</sup> It was in the early eighth century that the Greeks of the mainland (and later Ionia) began to settle abroad and establish new cities and trading posts.<sup>58</sup> This occurred in two broad waves. First to Sicily and Italy in the west early in the eighth century till at least 600 B.C., and to Thrace and the Black Sea in the northeast after about 700 B.C..<sup>59</sup> The resultant cities were, for all intents and purposes, economically and politically independent of the city-state of origin. Trading posts such as Naucratis and Al Mina, for example, were relatively few and were established specifically for trading purposes. They did not develop into autonomous city-states but remained essentially meeting places.<sup>60</sup>

The reasons for this emigration were largely due to the pressure

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54. *ibid.*, p. 19; M. I. Finley, (1970), pp. 66 *et seq.*.

55. C. G. Starr, (1962), p. 80; M. I. Finley, (1970).

56. A. Snodgrass, (1980), pp. 53-55.

57. M. I. Finley, (1970), p. 68; C. G. Starr, (1962), p. 87.

58. R. M. Jones, (1946).

59. M. I. Finley, (1970), pp. 93-94.

60. *ibid.*, pp. 97-98.

of a rapidly increasing population and the increasing scarcity of land within the mainland city-states.<sup>61</sup> The social crises which these developments engendered were to some extent defused by emigration movements.<sup>62</sup> As R. M. Jones has argued, trade generally followed in the wake of emigration rather than caused it.<sup>63</sup> His view is supported further by the fact that the new settlements were primarily for land. In many cases, the areas which would have been better suited for trade and commercial purposes were ignored in favour of areas more suited to agrarian pursuits.<sup>64</sup> Prior to the waves of emigration contact with other neighbouring societies was at best sporadic. In general, such contact was then of peripheral importance for the Greek world.<sup>65</sup> Once emigration began in earnest, contact with other societies by way of trade increased rapidly. Consequently the Greeks began to be exposed to different ideas, technologies,<sup>66</sup> materials etc. which were then incorporated as needed into the Greek world.

This brief synopsis of the Greek world at the turn of the

61. *ibid.*, p. 99.

62. This situation was not completely defused by emigration as is evidenced by Hesiod's *Works and Days*, (c. late 7th century B.C.) in which the problems of land ownership and justice are addressed. It was also necessary for the Greeks to find some internal solutions to these problems as has been argued by M. I. Finley, (1970), pp. 104-105.

63. R. M. Jones, (1946), p. 86.

64. M. I. Finley, (1970), p. 98.

65. *ibid.*, p. 79. The importing of various minerals (e.g. copper, tin and iron) was perhaps not "peripheral" but in the overall context where the use of metals was at a low ebb prior to the eighth century B.C. it can be considered as such.

66. The term 'technology' is here used in a general way to refer to ways and means of doing things. Such technologies may not have been innovative in the sense used by Finley in his article "Technical Innovation and Economic Progress in the Ancient World", *Economic History Review*, Second Series, Volume 18, No. 1, 1965.



eighth century establishes the context for the adoption of the technology of writing. Given the extent of trading connections and contacts in the period prior to the eighth century it would appear unlikely that the Greeks adopted a writing system before about 800 B.C..

There is some debate in the literature concerning the precise date<sup>67</sup> at which the Greeks developed their system of writing by transforming the Semitic script of the Phoenicians. This debate was reviewed by Havelock in 1963,<sup>68</sup> marking out the main positions of dispute. The chief protagonist in this debate was Rhys Carpenter who argued that on the basis of the historical evidence (i.e. possible trading contacts with the Phoenicians and other neighbouring civilisations) and the epigraphic evidence (i.e. surviving inscriptions or graffiti and the comparison of the shapes of individual letters) a date of 720-700 B.C. was warranted.<sup>69</sup>

Prior to Carpenter's thesis the accepted date for the Greek alphabet had been put as early as the tenth century B.C.<sup>70</sup> and some, notably Wace, had argued for some sort of continuity between the Mycenaean script and the later alphabetic script.<sup>71</sup> The critical responses to Carpenter varied as to the particular date but all refused to concede a late eighth century date. Rather, it was argued that a very early eighth century date or one which was in the late (or even early) ninth

67. It is understood that often *precise* dates are not the real issue but that the concern is with the approximate decade in a particular century.

68. E. A. Havelock, (1963), pp. 49-52 note 4. A similar but much abbreviated review was also given by R. M. Jones, (1946), p. 89 notes 180, 181, and 182.

69. Rhys Carpenter, "The Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet", *American Journal of Archeology*, Volume 37, 1933. Also his "The Greek Alphabet Again", *American Journal of Archeology*, Volume 42, 1938.

70. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 49 note 4.

71. *supra*, p. 19 note 5.

century was more likely.<sup>72</sup> As Havelock noted, none of these took full cognisance of Carpenter's key points but dealt only with those that bore most heavily on their own preferred date (for reasons which often had little to do with the evidence<sup>73</sup>). As this debate progressed, however, there emerged a tendency for that date to be moved closer to the middle of the eighth century. Page, for example, argued for a date not later than 750 B.C..<sup>74</sup> L. H. Jeffery argued for a date of about 750 B.C. although she tended to lean to the late rather than early eighth century.<sup>75</sup> Havelock opted for a date of 720-700 B.C., a position he has maintained in subsequent works.<sup>76</sup>

The view that emerges is that an acceptable date would appear to be about 750 B.C.. Certainly, the historical evidence discussed above<sup>77</sup> would suggest a mid-eighth century date is a reasonable conclusion.

72. B. L. Ullman, "How Old is the Greek Alphabet?", *American Journal of Archeology*, Volume 38, 1934 who argued for a date somewhere in the eleventh or twelfth centuries B.C.. Carpenter's response in 1938 was to show that on the basis of Ullman's evidence a date of no earlier than c. 825 B.C. was all that could be asserted. H. L. Lorimer, (1950), p. 129 argued for a date of c. 780 B.C.. T. B. L. Webster, (1958), p. 272 argued for a date somewhere between 850 and 750 B.C.. W. F. Albright, *The Archeology of Palestine*, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1949) p. 196 suggested the late ninth or perhaps the very early eighth century B.C..

73. E. A. Havelock, (1963), pp. 51-52 note 4.

74. D. Page, *History and the Homeric Iliad*, (University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1959) p. 157.

75. L. H. Jeffery, *The Local Scripts of Archaic Greece: A Study of the Greek Alphabet and its Development from the Eighth to the Fifth Centuries B.C.*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1961) pp. 1-21.

76. E. A. Havelock, (1963); (1976); and (1982). The last work contains a number of essays published since 1963 in which the date for the Greek alphabet is taken as 720-700 B.C.. His introductory essay, "The Oral and Written Word: A Reappraisal", written, one assumes, especially for the 1982 collection of essays recapitulates his views on this issue.

77. *supra*. pp. 33-34.

Given the Phoenician basis for the Greek system of writing<sup>78</sup> it would seem that the Greeks became familiar with the Phoenician system as a result of their contacts with the Phoenicians. The most likely point of contact where this would have occurred was at Al Mina in Syria. As noted earlier, this was a trading post established by the Greeks at some time in the eighth century. This accords with a mid to late eighth century date for the appearance of a specifically Greek version of the Semitic script.

The earliest *extant* epigraphical evidence has been dated to about 750 B.C.. This a vase known as the Dipylon vase,<sup>79</sup> which bears an alphabetic inscription. All that can be reliably inferred from this is that the vase itself is no older than about 750 B.C.. The inscription was made at some time after the vase had been fired but whether this was done more or less contemporaneously with its manufacture or, as Havelock suggested,<sup>80</sup> up to a generation later, cannot be known with any certainty. By assuming a later date for the inscription, the date for the emergence of a Greek version of the Semitic script can be assumed to have occurred closer to the end rather than the beginning of the eighth century. That sort of assumption, though plausible, is not necessary for present purposes.

Another epigraphical argument, based on a comparison of the letter shapes of the Greek alphabet with the Proto-Canaanite script

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78. There is little doubt about the Phoenician background of the Greek script. See S. Hooke, "Recording and Writing", in E. J. Holmyard & A. R. Hall, (edd.), *A History of Technology Volume I: From Early Times to Ancient Times*, of six volumes, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1954); D. Diringer, *The Alphabet: The Key to the History of Mankind*, (Hutchinson, London, 1947); I. J. Gelb, *A Study of Writing*, rev. ed., (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963).

79. L. H. Jeffery, (1961), pp.16-17 and p. 68; also E. A. Havelock, (1963), pp. 49 ff.

80. E. A. Havelock, (1982), p. 15.

(c. 1100-1000 B.C.), has been used by Goody to support the view that the Greeks developed their system as early as 1100 B.C..<sup>81</sup> The epigraphical argument was put forward by Naveh<sup>82</sup> but it remains unconvincing despite its suggestiveness. This is because it assumes that the Greeks were in sufficient contact with the Semitic world at the time (c. 1100 B.C.) to have learnt and adapted the Proto-Canaanite script to their needs. Yet at that time the Greek world was in a state of turmoil. In addition, the Greeks were not then travelling outwards from their own lands. Following the Mycenaean collapse, contact with any neighbouring societies was virtually non-existent. The only Mycenaean centre left after the collapse, Athens, exhibited no evidence of having had contact with or use of the Proto-Canaanite script. Even during the height of the Mycenaean period Athens was of very minor importance. The collapse of the Mycenaean world left Athens to atrophy until the Greek world had rebuilt itself over the course of later centuries.<sup>83</sup> It is also significant that the use of Linear B script has only been assumed for Athens on the basis that other contemporary Mycenaean centres used it. Contemporary knowledge of the Proto-Canaanite script must remain speculative.

The apparent similarity of the letters of the early Greek alphabet with those of the Proto-Canaanite script is not surprising given the common basis for the latter and the Phoenician script. Although similarity of letter shapes is a promising indicator it needs to be supported by evidence (or at least substantial inferences) of historical contact and diffusion. At the time when such contact and diffusion is

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81. J. Goody, (1981), p. 121.

82. J. Naveh, "Some Semitic Epigraphical Considerations on the Antiquity of the Greek Alphabet", *American Journal of Archeology*, Volume 77, 1973. A more recent restatement of Naveh's views on the Greek alphabet can be found in his *Origins of the Alphabet*, (Cassell, London, 1977).

83. For details on Athens in the Mycenaean period see J. T. Hooker, (1976) and M. I. Finley, (1970).

assumed, what historical evidence there is points to the Greek world as one of isolation and removal from other societies in the Mediterranean region. Furthermore, the social needs that might have prompted the contact with other societies and possible adoption of their writing systems are not discussed. Even if it can be argued that the Greeks had sufficient contact with those using the Proto-Canaanite script to have adopted it, it still has to be established why this occurred, and whose or what needs were to be satisfied by such a development. These aspects remain unexamined in both Naveh's and Goody's arguments.<sup>84</sup> Despite the apparent similarity of letter shapes this epigraphical argument must remain speculative at best. Given what has already been said in preceding arguments, a date for the emergence of a specifically Greek system of writing prior to about the middle of the eighth century B.C. would thus appear unlikely on the basis of the available evidence.

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Two questions now arise which must be addressed. Given that the Greeks had managed without a system of writing for several centuries, what prompted them into developing one? And secondly, in what ways did the Greek system differ from its Phoenician counterpart? These two questions are, to some extent, interrelated, and cannot be separated

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84. In addition, neither Goody nor Naveh gives any critical appraisal of the use of the term 'alphabet'. No account is given of why the Greek system of writing should be accepted as being of the same typology as the various Semitic scripts. As is argued below, the Phoenician script was not an alphabet but a syllabary. The Semitic script (and indeed, its Semitic cognates) operated on a consonantal basis using syllables as their minimal linguistic unit. Although some of the Semitic scripts used consonant graphemes in approximate vowel-like functions, none presupposed vowel graphemes as the Greeks did. The Greeks did not rely on syllables alone but went one step further to establish their writing system on a phonemic basis that more closely approximated actual linguistic utterances for the various Greek language dialects. These points are taken up in the next section in more detail.

as easily as might be preferred. Nevertheless, in order to discuss the issues as clearly as possible, the second question will be dealt with first.

A system of writing may be defined as a series of visible marks with which to encode (or record) ideas or thoughts. Such information may be understood as having its basis in the spoken language of whatever society is under consideration. A variety of means have been used to arrive at systematic representations of ideas or thoughts in a visible, more or less permanent form. In accordance with this, systems of writing can be described as pictographic, where the minimal constituent mark or grapheme is a picture of a particular object that illustrates the message to be conveyed (e.g. Egyptian hieroglyphics, Aztec and Mayan writing); logographic, where the graphemes generally correspond to words or word-meanings (e.g. Chinese writing); syllabic, where the graphemes generally correspond to syllables; and alphabetic, where each grapheme corresponds to the sound classes or phonemes of the spoken language.<sup>85</sup> This does not exhaust the possible types of writing systems because, as Pulgram noted, modern linguists have devised other systems which attempt to capture the full spectrum of linguistic utterance;<sup>86</sup> but the former systems are those which have been most commonly found in historical use and hence the latter, more artificial systems, need not be considered here. Of the four systems, pictographic, logographic, syllabic, and alphabetic, the two that are of immediate concern are the syllabary and the alphabet.

The Phoenician script was a syllabary, whereas the Greek script

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85. Ernst Pulgram, "The Typologies of Writing Systems", in W. Haas, (ed.), *Writing Without Letters*, (Manchester University Press, Manchester, 1976) pp. 6-7.

86. *ibid.*, pp. 7 ff.

was more properly an alphabet. Havelock pointed out that there was a common temptation to treat both as forms of alphabetic systems where the Phoenician system was accepted as an earlier and the Greek system as a later, much improved version.<sup>87</sup> This tendency can be traced to the fact that both used a very small number of graphemes<sup>88</sup> — the Phoenician used twenty-two signs and the Greek system twenty-four. But as Havelock suggested, this said nothing at all about each script's ability "to symbolize phonemes accurately".<sup>89</sup> Furthermore, such a tendency also assumed that since the Greek script was capable of a high degree of correspondence between grapheme and phoneme, then its precursor, the Phoenician script, functioned in a similar fashion. However, that sort of assumption was unfounded, because it obscures the fact that the graphemes of each script did not necessarily represent the same class of linguistic sounds. The Phoenician script did not function phonemically but syllabically.<sup>90</sup>

The Phoenician script used graphemes to represent the consonants of the spoken language. Since the spoken language exhibited a triconsonantal root structure, it was possible for the Phoenicians to represent their words adequately using only consonants.<sup>91</sup> The basic linguistic unit was the syllable (hence a major reason for classifying it as a syllabary) and this could be rendered quite successfully using only consonants. Vowels were not a feature of the Phoenician script. This presented some problems for the reader in that a consonantal grapheme

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87. E. A. Havelock, (1976), p. 25.

88. *ibid.*, p. 25.

89. *ibid.*, p. 25.

90. Ernst Pulgram, (1976), p. 23.

91. *ibid.*, p. 23.

often had to represent more than one sound or type of utterance. The reader then had to choose between several (often conflicting) sounds when attempting to vocalise the graphemes.<sup>92</sup> To some extent the Phoenicians attempted to off-set this ambiguity by adding signs (described by Pulgram as "vocalic phonographemes called *matres lectionis*"<sup>93</sup>) to give some clue to the reader as to the appropriate vocalic sound. However, this was not a systematic feature of the Phoenician script and it was used only "sporadically and not regularly".<sup>94</sup> For the most part, there remained an inherent ambiguity between the linguistic utterance and its symbolic representation and vice versa. This meant that the readers of the script had to have sufficient expertise to be able to interpret the graphemes with reasonable accuracy. As a result the use of such scripts remained the preserve of those trained specifically in their use which usually meant that only the scribes and priests possessed such a skill.

The Greek script, on the other hand, exhibited a number of quite distinct changes. The Greek languages were generally not triconsonantal in their root structure and hence the use of consonants alone would not have provided an adequate basis for the graphemes. The first major difference was the use of a number of Phoenician letters, having no counterparts in the Greek language, as the graphemes for vowels.<sup>95</sup> In addition, the Phoenician letter *waw* was used as the basis for two letters — *digamma* and *v*.<sup>96</sup> Hooke noted that two other signs were also created

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92. E. A. Havelock, (1976), p. 31.

93. Ernst Pulgram, (1976), p. 23.

94. *ibid.*, p. 23.

95. S. H. Hooke, (1954), p. 768.

96. J. N. Coldstream, *Geometric Greece*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1977). p. 300. Note that Coldstream treated the Phoenician script as an alphabet rather than a syllabary.



from *waw* but these, along with the *digamma*, became obsolete fairly quickly as the Greek script became more developed and standardised.<sup>97</sup> The Greeks also distinguished between aspirated and non-aspirated vowels and introduced extra signs to represent the double consonants.<sup>98</sup> These were quite significant departures from the Phoenician script. Although the Greek script did not become completely standardised until about the fourth century B.C.<sup>99</sup> the above differences were common to all the early Greek scripts, despite any other linguistic differences which may have existed between the Greek scripts.<sup>100</sup>

The resultant Greek script can thus be regarded as having been based upon the atomisation of linguistic sound.<sup>101</sup> It went beyond the parameters of the Phoenician syllabary to a more phonemically orient-set of letters. A closer correspondence between linguistic utterance and its symbolic representation was thus achieved. This was not a completely isomorphic correspondence, however, as the Greek script remained phonemically rather than phonetically based.<sup>102</sup> Nevertheless, it remained possible for practically every meaningful linguistic utterance to be symbolically represented with minimal ambiguity. Consequently, the vocalisation of graphemes required far less interpretation on the part

97. S. H. Hooke, (1954), p.768.

98. *ibid.*, p. 768.

99. *ibid.*, p. 768. See also E. A. Havelock, (1976), and L. H. Jeffery, (1961) for some discussion of this "standardisation" process.

100. J. N. Coldstream, (1977), p. 300.

101. E. A. Havelock, (1976), pp. 29 & 31.

102. The differences between phonemic writing and phonetic writing need not be discussed here. For some discussion see Ernst Pulgram, (1976), pp. 7-9. Suffice it to say that the Greek script probably came closer than any other script then in existence to achieving phonetic consistency in its actual use.

of the reader of the Greek script. This resulted in a level of stability in encoding and decoding the spoken world unequalled by any other system of signs then in use. It was, as Hooke noted, "the most perfect instrument for recording and preserving human speech that had come into existence".<sup>103</sup>

The changes to the Phoenician script made it more applicable to the various Greek languages. But this does not of itself explain what social needs (if any) prompted the Greeks to adopt a writing system in the first place, given that they had managed quite successfully without one for several centuries. Two basic explanations suggest themselves but neither, taken on its own, is entirely convincing.

The first may be described as being based on economic considerations. As a result of trading contacts with the Phoenicians, it is suggested that the Greeks needed some means to record transactions, contracts, and other associated dealings.<sup>104</sup> Yet, as Snodgrass then went on to point out, this does not explain the distinctive innovations that the Greeks implemented.<sup>105</sup> For Snodgrass, the innovation of signs to represent vowel sounds was significant<sup>106</sup> because a writing system for commercial and record-keeping purposes did not necessarily have to be capable of representing the full range of possible meaningful linguistic utterances. Furthermore, contracts and transactions in the Archaic period were generally of an oral nature and remained so until at least the late fifth century B.C.. Evidence of written contracts can only

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103. S. H. Hooke, (1954), p. 768.

104. A. Snodgrass, (1980), p. 81.

105. *ibid.*, p. 81.

106. *ibid.*, pp. 81-82.

be attested for the fourth century and hardly at all for the fifth century.<sup>107</sup> when Athenian trading power was at its peak. The eighth century, when trading ventures by the Greeks were only beginning to be established, remains obscure. On its own, the economic impetus for a writing system cannot explain why the emerging Greek script developed the particular characteristics that it did.

The second sort of explanation focusses on the *aoidic* tradition. On this account, the Greek alphabet developed in the way that it did to facilitate the preservation of the social knowledge and values as produced by the *aoidoi*.<sup>108</sup> The need for writing was as a mnemonic aid for orally produced and preserved discourse. The *aoidoi*, because of their practice of travelling widely, came into contact with the practices found in other societies and adopted and adapted whatever proved to be useful for their own purposes. In this case it was the Phoenician syllabary that was adopted.<sup>109</sup> This explanation has the virtue of accounting for the innovation of vowel signs. In order for a writing system to be capable of preserving the oral works of the *aoidoi* for subsequent re-use, it had to be able to represent faithfully the sounds actually uttered by the *aoidoi*. The combination of vowels and consonants graphemically represented made that possible.

Robb suggested that the *aoidoi* learnt to write in a bi-lingual situation in which they began to experiment with the Phoenician syllabary to adapt it to the needs of their own language use. A crucial point for Robb was that the *aoidoi* worked with the sound of the Greek language,

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107. F. D. Harvey, (1966), p. 608.

108. A. Snodgrass, (1980), pp. 82-83.

109. K. Robb, "Poetic Sources of the Greek Alphabet: Rhythm and Abecedarium from Phoenician to Greek", pp. 27-28 in E. A. Havelock & J. P. Hershbell, (edd.), *Communication Arts in the Ancient World*, (Communication Arts Books, New York, 1978).

and hence needed to ensure that the visible representation of such sounds was capable of the task. Therefore such *aidoi* would have experimented with the letters and their shapes in arriving at an appropriate script.<sup>110</sup> Havelock has objected to this account on the grounds that this sort of experimentation would not have been undertaken by the *aidoi* in the first instance because they worked with the ear rather than with the eye.<sup>111</sup> Havelock suggests that trial and error would have been more probably undertaken by stonecutters and other artisans who physically worked with the letter shapes.<sup>112</sup> Yet in making his objection Havelock has perhaps posed the alternatives too sharply.

Adaptation of letter shapes suitable for the Greek language by practical artisans need not have required vowel graphemes for inscribing information of an economic or anecdotal nature. This could still have been achieved using a basically consonantal or syllabic script as Robb himself acknowledged with respect to the Phoenician script.<sup>113</sup> Yet Robb and Snodgrass would appear to be on the right track. For as Havelock has acknowledged, the earliest inscription (on the famous Dipylon vase c. 750 B.C.), "is metrical, consisting of a complete hexameter in the Homeric manner".<sup>114</sup> This would suggest that whoever composed the line, as distinct from the inscription of it, would have had more than a passing knowledge of the techniques of oral composition. While one can assume, with Havelock, that most Greeks would have had some familiarity

110. *ibid.*, pp. 27-32.

111. E. A. Havelock, (1982), p. 13 where he specifically addressed Robb's argument.

112. *ibid.*, p. 13. Also his "The Preliteracy of the Greeks", *New Literary History*, Volume VIII, No. 3, Spring 1977. p. 373. (Reprinted in his (1982) pp. 185--207.)

113. K. Robb, (1978), p. 32.

114. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 377.

with the techniques of oral composition it is unlikely that the precise formulation of hexametric lines "in the Homeric manner" would have been a skill ordinarily possessed by stonecutters and artisans.<sup>115</sup> Such a skill was the *specific* preserve of the *aidoi*. It would thus follow that the impetus to achieve faithful representation of an oral composition would have come from the *aidoi*.

This does not deny the role of stonecutters or other artisans in aiding the process of creating the Greek alphabet. Rather it is to suggest that both *aidoi* and artisans would have made contributions to the physical manifestation of the Greek script. The important point, however, is that changes to the Phoenician script to represent accurately orally produced and preserved compositions had to be such that the reader could vocalise what was written in the same way in which the *aidoi* presented it.<sup>116</sup> The inclusion of graphemes to indicate vowels made this possible and hence reflected the influence and needs of oral composition in determining the sort of writing system that emerged.<sup>117</sup>

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Alphabetic writing in the ancient Greek world represented the emergence of a new technology for the recording of previously orally preserved knowledge and values. Entering Greek culture as primarily a mnemonic aid its use quickly opened up new possibilities of expression

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115. One possible objection to this line of argument is that the metrical inscription referred to above was a quotation that the stonecutter simply reproduced. Therefore such an artisan need not have any specialised knowledge of oral techniques. However, it is clear from the context of the inscription that it was not a quotation but a line having relevance to the owner of the vase. For this objection to have any force it would have to be shown that the inscribed line was from some commonly known composition. This would appear not to be the case.

116. On this point Havelock and Robb are in agreement.

117. K. Robb, (1978), pp. 27-32.

and composition. In large part, the Greek alphabet effected, or at least made possible, the transition from an oral to a predominantly literate culture. As will become evident, other factors within the Greek world also played their part in shaping the contours of this transformation. In order to understand the intricacies and vicissitudes of this transformation it will be necessary to explore more fully the nature of the oral mode of discourse in the Greek world prior to the introduction of an alphabetic system of writing. A full appreciation of this transformation presupposes an understanding of the techniques of the oral versifiers, their relationship to their audiences and hence to their social milieu, and of the nature of the knowledge and values preserved by oral discourse.

## Chapter 2

### Words with Wings: On the Oral Mode of Discourse

The ancient Greeks developed a sophisticated capacity to articulate, preserve and transmit their socially necessary ideas and values through the art of the winged word. This was the mainstay of the oral mode of discourse. The techniques constitutive of this mode of discourse and the ways in which these techniques operated and helped shape Greek thought comprise the focus of this chapter, the aim of which is two-fold. The first aim is to show how socially necessary ideas and values were in fact retained over time and the second is to illustrate how the oral mode was important for the subsequent development of the concept 'dialectic'.

Two distinctions in terminology need to be made. The first distinction is that between 'oral tradition' and 'oral literature'. This was succinctly drawn by Berkley Peabody.<sup>1</sup> 'Oral tradition' refers to a process in which the products are totally oral both in their production and dissemination. 'Oral literature' refers to "the recorded phenomena of an oral tradition" and thus presupposes some form of writing system. This distinction is necessary because it minimises the amount of confusion that inevitably arises when one attempts to explain non-literate phenomena in terms of literate categories.<sup>2</sup>

The second distinction follows from the first. It is nece-

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1. Berkley Peabody, *The Winged Word: A Study in the Technique of Ancient Greek Oral Composition as Seen Principally through Hesiod's Works and Days*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1975) p. 1.

2. Cf. the comments made earlier on p. 11 note 23.

ssary to be able to distinguish between those who produce cultural sets of words<sup>3</sup> under conditions when writing is unknown, and those who produce when writing is known. The distinction is that between *aidos* and *poietes*.<sup>4</sup> 'Aidos' refers to a bard or singer of songs who composes in performance, whereas 'poietes' refers to one who constructs sets of words with the aid of writing and hence need not compose in performance. Havelock criticised F. M. Cornford's translation of *poietes* in Plato's *Republic* as 'writer' as "unfortunate".<sup>5</sup> Havelock argued that *poietes* had to be interpreted in an oral way to reflect its origins in a period when writing was not known. Whilst this criticism was aimed in the right direction, it clouded the important point that oral versifiers were different from poets in as much as their respective conditions of production were different. As such an oral versifier need not be identical with an oral poet. Failure to distinguish between the two can only lead to further confusion about oral tradition and oral literature. This confusion is unnecessary especially since 'aidos' is available to describe those who were oral versifiers.<sup>6</sup> Hence in this study the dis-

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3. The use of the phrase 'cultural sets of words' is a bit imprecise. Although the word 'songs' is perhaps a better term to describe such products, especially in an oral context (and will be henceforth so used), the intention here is to use a phrase that did not presuppose a particular ordering or formation of words. For many people 'song' often means a musical poem and since the view here is that 'poem' is a literate term the interchangeability of the two must be guarded against.

4. F. E. Peters, *The Harvest of Hellenism: A History of the Near East from Alexander the Great to the Triumph of Christianity*, (George Allen & Unwin, London, 1972) p. 186. Note that Peters used this distinction in a slightly different way to that above in that he regarded the distinction between *poietes* and *aidos* as being blurred even in Plato's time. However, that does not preclude the interpretation adopted here.

5. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 49 n. 1.

6. W. C. Greene, "The Spoken and Written Word", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 60, 1951. p. 40 where he used *aidos* to refer to the bards of the oral tradition whom he described specifically as oral versifiers.



inction between those who composed without the aid of the technology of writing (i.e. oral versifiers) and those who had the use of this technology (i.e. poets) will be signified by the terms *aidos* and *poietes* respectively.

The two terminological distinctions fit neatly together. An *aidos* belonged to the oral tradition. A *poietes* belonged to a tradition that had the use of writing. The works produced by a *poietes* were no longer simply songs (as in the oral tradition) but poems (even though they may have been sung). Underlying the terminological distinction of *aidos/poietes* is the view that each term presupposes different (but not necessarily antithetical) conditions of composition or production.

Before proceeding with the analysis of the oral mode of discourse the question of evidence needs to be addressed. Given that the oral tradition is, by definition, not written down, how can one be sure that one's analysis of the oral mode bears any resemblance to what actually took place? Most writers on this topic usually predicate their discussion on the extant text (or texts) of a particular producer (such as a Homer or a Hesiod) and make their inferences accordingly. This is a reasonable approach but it has the implicit drawback of raising controversial questions about the producers themselves.<sup>7</sup> For example, was there a Homer?, was there more than one Homer?, was Homer an *aidos* or a *poietes*?, was Homer prior to/ contemporary with/ later than Hesiod?, and so on. These are important questions but as noted they are, in themselves, peripheral to the main concerns of this study. Nevertheless, some position must be taken with respect to these questions, whilst maintaining

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7. The raising of controversial questions is not itself a drawback. The drawback lies in the fact that adequate answers to these questions are beyond the scope of this thesis, and often beyond the range of available evidence.

some degree of distance from the actual analyses of the controversies.<sup>8</sup>

For the purposes of this study it will be assumed that the name 'Homer' refers to a single, historical individual; that Homer was a man;<sup>9</sup> that he was responsible for both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*; that the *Iliad* was prior to the *Odyssey*; that Hesiod may have been alive when Homer was alive but that Hesiod's period of activity was slightly later than Homer's, hence Hesiod's *Theogony* and *Works and Days* will be assumed to be later than the *Odyssey*; and finally it will be assumed that both Homer and Hesiod were oral poets (i.e. *poietai*). This last assumption may seem a little rash because Homer's poems are often taken as the paradigm of oral discourse.<sup>10</sup> Yet as Peabody has demonstrated, the poems of Hesiod constitute similar proof. And there is little doubt that Hesiod possessed writing skills, as both West<sup>11</sup> and Edwards<sup>12</sup> agree. The point is, however, that while both Homer and Hesiod provide works that are outstanding

8. It cannot be stressed enough that a study of this kind stands indebtedly on the shoulders of the classical specialists whose detailed works have contributed immeasurably to our understanding of the Greek world. For some discussion of the above controversies see M. Platnaeur, (ed.), *Fifty Years (and Twelve) of Classical Scholarship*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1968); J. A. Scott, *The Unity of Homer*, (University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1921); G. P. Edwards, *The Language of Hesiod in its Traditional Context*, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1971); M. West, *Hesiod: Theogony*, ed. with prolegomena & introduction, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1966); D. L. Page, (1959); G. S. Kirk, (ed.), (1964).

9. S. Butler, *The Authoress of the Odyssey*, (A. C. Fifield, London, 1897) argued that the *Odyssey's* Homer may have been a woman. Butler's view was based on a notion of a universal feminine psychology. It is extremely doubtful that such a notion has much validity. Moreover, given the patriarchal nature of Greek society in this period and the relative social immobility of women at the time, it is almost certain that Homer was a man.

10. Milman Parry, *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, ed. by Adam Parry, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971).

11. M. West, (1966), p. 40.

12. G. P. Edwards, (1971), p. 193.

examples of oral literature their status as examples of the oral tradition are less certain. For reasons that will become clear as the discussion of the oral mode of discourse unfolds, the Homer-isation of these songs was a written process. However, to deem the poems of Homer and Hesiod products of *poietai* rather than *aidoi* does not preclude them from providing clues about the nature of the oral mode of discourse. It merely means that their efficacy as evidence must be treated with caution.

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The songs of the *aidoi* were

primarily a preservative device subserving the cultural requirement for something like a public Greek record and for a "book" of moral and technical precedent which could then be available to all Greeks for education in the widest sense.<sup>13</sup>

That is, the *aidos*-in-performance (and later the poet-in-performance)<sup>14</sup> made manifest the social knowledge and values characteristic of the ancient Greeks. It was through the person of the *aidos* that this knowledge was made available and transmitted to future generations. In and through the public performance of such works the efforts of the *aidos* received their authority. And this authority was the living tradition of *mythos* (i.e. myth).

It is important to be clear about the full meaning of *mythos* for the ancient Greeks in the oral period. *Mythos* did not mean, as it did for the Greeks of a later, more literate period, tales and stories of a legendary past that were interesting and entertaining but of little

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13. K. Robb, "Greek Oral Memory and the Origins of Philosophy", *The Personalist*, Number 51, 1971. p. 7.

14. The notion 'aidos-in-performance' is discussed later in this chapter. The notion was developed initially by A. B. Lord, *A Singer of Tales*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1960) pp. 13 ff.

direct relevance for the present. On the contrary, *mythos* dealt with stories that revealed, for the Greeks, the "truth about life in general".<sup>15</sup>

One of its functions was

to make the past intelligible and meaningful by selection, by focusing on a few bits of the past which thereby acquired permanence, relevance, universal significance.<sup>16</sup>

But it was also more pervasive than this because for *mythos* there was no definitive past or future, only the timeless present, the "forever living present of the song" as Versenyi put it.<sup>17</sup>

Although *mythos* dealt with the past, the past itself was not the immediate objective. Rather, the past served as a convenient backdrop against which the present could be illuminated. *Mythos* served "not to reveal a dead past but to hallow the living present".<sup>18</sup> In this way each generation maintained continuity with those that preceded it. Since *mythos* was a process of telling and retelling, each generation inserted its own concerns and values. Differences between generations were effectively edited because each generation retained only what suited it and simply omitted the rest. In this way *mythos* was true for every generation.

For they know no image, no experience, other than their own. This is what gives living myth its force: the unshaken authority of a tradition that has always been, the tremendous weight of a time without end that passes but does not change.<sup>19</sup>

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15. M. I. Finley, "Myth, Memory, and History", *History and Theory*, Volume 4, No. 3, 1964. p. 283.

16. *ibid.*, p. 283.

17. L. Versenyi, *Man's Measure: A Study of the Greek Image of Man from Homer to Sophocles*, (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1974). p. 3.

18. *ibid.*, p. 2.

19. *ibid.*, p. 3.

As long as oral conditions prevailed, *mythos* remained a living tradition of continuously relevant truths.

It is no exaggeration to say that *mythos* was the "cement of the universe" for the Greeks of this period. Every Greek was intimately familiar with the general storylines and themes performed by the bards.<sup>20</sup> Hence, with each performance an audience "knew" what to expect. The *aidos* was not only constrained by the techniques of oral composition but also by the expectations of the audience. The response of the audience was a major contributing factor to the *aidos's* performance. Far from being passive receivers, the audience was extremely active in the execution of the bard's performance. Indeed, the active participation of the audience was a necessary prerequisite for a successful performance by the *aidos*.<sup>21</sup> As Havelock has argued, the relationship between the *aidos* and the audience was not given but had to be established, each and every time, at the point of performance.<sup>22</sup> The *aidos* had to win over the audience; its support and acclaim could not be presumed. The importance of the audience cannot be stressed enough because its active participation ensured that the *aidos* always gave of his best.<sup>23</sup>

Although the audience "knew" what to expect the precise

20. K. Robb, (1971), p. 8.

21. J. Notopoulos, "Studies in Early Greek Oral Poetry", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 68, 1964. p. 48 and pp. 53 ff. for a discussion about the importance and presence of an audience. See also E. A. Havelock, *The Greek Conception of Justice: From its shadow in Homer to its Substance in Plato*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1978) pp. 13 ff. and Chapter 8.

22. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 146.

23. John Ferguson, *A Companion to Greek Tragedy*, (University of Texas Press, Austin, 1973) p. 13 for a summary of audience behaviour in the fifth century B. C.. Though this cannot be taken as definitive evidence for audience behaviour in the earlier oral period it nevertheless gives some ground for thinking that it reflects a tradition of active audience participation and a willingness to judge, quite vocally, the performers' presentations.

nature and interpretation of the material was not known (in advance) until it was actually performed. The choices of what to present, how to present it, and the emphases and interpretations to be pursued and brought out were, within the given limits of the medium, the prerogative of the *aidos* — at least in the first instance. The reactions of the audience would then determine the course of the *aidos's* performance in that the *aidos* would tailor the performance to retain the interest, attention, and hence acclaim of the audience. No two performances would be the same in every detail.<sup>24</sup>

The nature of an oral performance was extremely dynamic and fluid but, equally important, it was also very conservative. This was because what was being presented was the traditional knowledge of *mythos* rather than a new form of knowledge in the sense of new discoveries. The *aidos* had to preserve what was known and trusted so that the sense of continuity between generations could be maintained. In addition, audience expectations meant that the *aidos* could not diverge too far from what had already been established by *mythos*. As was noted above, *mythos* was quite effective in enabling the knowledge of one generation to be absorbed or modified by subsequent generations. Novelty, innovation for its own sake, was not a characteristic feature of the oral mode of discourse.<sup>25</sup> Any changes that may have occurred to the stock of social knowledge happened slowly and gradually in accordance with the tempo of oral requirements.<sup>26</sup>

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24. This is perhaps axiomatic of all oral performances. Minute variations will always occur owing to the needs and conditions of each performance and also to the human limitations of the performer's memory to store every detail of every performance.

25. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 2.

26. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 122.

As was noted earlier, the songs of the *aidoi* made it possible for the Greeks to retain a sense and feeling of common heritage despite the fact that, as a people, they were linguistically and geographically fragmented. The songs provided the store of ideas and values that made it possible for the Greeks simultaneously to make sense of and engage their existential situations, for example, as patriot-warriors. Hence the performance of the *aidos* was very much a didactic occasion. Some authors have argued for a view in which the entertainment value of the performances was the upper-most feature.<sup>27</sup> However, the extant examples of the oral tradition, Homer's and Hesiod's poems,<sup>28</sup> do not support the view that the didactic purpose was subordinated to that of entertainment.<sup>29</sup>

Havelock has ably demonstrated the didactic features of Homer's poems.<sup>30</sup> Hesiod's two poems were also in the same vein, especially his *Works and Days*.<sup>31</sup> The status of these poems, Homer's in particular, amongst the Greeks themselves, as compendiums of appropriate values and forms of behaviour, is attested by the fact that the poets in general

27. H. Frankel, *Early Greek Poetry and Philosophy*, trans. by M. Hadas & J. Willis, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1975) p. 9 where he also denies the ritual function. Also C. R. Beye, *The Iliad, The Odyssey, and the Epic Tradition*, (Peter Smith Books, Gloucester, 1972) p. 8.

28. Since the poems of Homer and Hesiod were the products of oral literature it is reasonable that the songs on which they were based were also didactic.

29. The entertainment aspect is not being denied. In order for the songs to be successful they had to be entertaining. What is being denied is that these poems should be understood in those terms alone. See G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society: The Prehistoric Aegean*, volume I of two volumes, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1954) especially Chapter XV. Also E. A. Havelock, (1978), pp. 39 ff..

30. E. A. Havelock, (1963) and his (1978) provide detailed accounts of the didactic nature of Homer's poems.

31. M. West, *Hesiod: Works and Days*, ed. with prolegomena and commentary, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1978).

were the targets of much criticism for their views.<sup>32</sup> From the pre-Socratic philosophers to Plato and beyond the educative role of the poets was increasingly coming into question.<sup>33</sup> Such criticism and challenges to the authority of the poets give some indication of the fact that the works of the poets, and hence the products of the oral tradition before them, were the bearers of knowledge for the ancient Greeks.

Care must be exercised in applying the Homeric and Hesiodic values too widely (or at least claiming too much for them) when making inferences about the oral period. This is partly because the values of an oral poem will tend to reflect or embody the values of the period in which it is first written down. Hence such *poems* will only be suggestive of the values of oral *songs* rather than definitive.

The specific values expressed by Homer and Hesiod conflict in many ways. This is indicative of the fact that Hesiod's were written some time later than Homer's; under different conditions and with different aims. Hesiod's *Works and Days* was a bitter critique of the way

32. For a general overview see Henrietta V. Apfel, "Homeric Criticism in the Fourth Century B.C.", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Volume 69, 1938; J. L. Myres, *Homer and his Critics*, ed. by Dorethea Gray, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958).

33. For some pre-Socratic comments see K. Freeman, *Ancilla to the Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Complete Translation of the Fragments in Diels, Fragmente der Vorsokratiker*, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1948); where Xenophanes says (p. 22):

[Fr.10] "Since the beginning all have learnt in accordance with Homer ..."

[Fr.11] "Both Homer and Hesiod have attributed to the gods all things that are shameful and a reproach among mankind: theft adultery and mutual deception.";

and Heraclitus (p. 27):

[Fr.40] "Much learning does not teach one to have intelligence; for it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, ..."

[Fr.42] "Homer deserves to be flung out of the contests and given a beating; and also Archilochus."



in which he felt he was cheated out of his rightful claim to his family's land. Hesiod's poem was a stirring plea outlining a new and fairer approach to the question of justice.<sup>34</sup> His poem also reflects in large measure a situation that was fairly common in his day, namely the dispossession of peasant-style holdings by larger more powerful landholders. This situation eventually precipitated the reforms of Solon.<sup>35</sup> Homer's poems on the other hand, dealt with a more heroic past as lived by such people as Achilles, Agamemnon, Odysseus etc.. His poems have often been regarded as portraying a world that was "the idealized past of the upper class, and its values are not questioned."<sup>36</sup> That is, the Homeric poems portrayed the values of the aristocratic families.

The differences between the Homeric and Hesiodic poems spring from the different conditions in which they were written and the different aims of the two *poietai*. This difference also gives some indication of the flexibility of the oral tradition that subtended them.<sup>37</sup> More importantly, however, the differences between the two sets of poems reflected the growing division between a rising aristocracy and the ordinary people. This was a division that was becoming more pronounced and universal in the Greek world in the eighth century B.C..<sup>38</sup>

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34. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 53; E. A. Havelock, (1978), Chapter 11.

35. V. Ehrenberg, *From Solon to Socrates*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1973); G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests*, (Duckworth, London, 1981).

36. S. C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1978) p. 215.

37. This flexibility does not mean that it is necessary to postulate the existence of two separate traditions, as does J. A. Notopolous, "Homer, Hesiod, and the Archaic Heritage of Oral Poetry", *Hesperia*, Volume 29, 1960.

38. V. Ehrenberg, (1973); G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981) for some discussion of this.

Prior to that, the division was minimal for most of the so-called "dark ages". Just how minimal this division was is difficult to assess definitively. However, several things point to this conclusion. First, there was the total collapse of the socio-economic structures of the Mycenaean world.<sup>39</sup> It was the end of the "palace economy" as Finley described it.<sup>40</sup> Second, this meant that the Greeks had to start from scratch to rebuild a new society. Third, until at least the late ninth century B.C. there was widespread poverty and low levels of conspicuous wealth when compared with the levels of wealth of the Mycenaean world at its zenith.<sup>41</sup> Fourth, the rise of an aristocratic class,<sup>42</sup> as distinct from the Mycenaean institution of king-ship,<sup>43</sup> was a very gradual process and did not make its presence felt until at least the late ninth and early eighth centuries B.C.. Finally, the expansion of the mainland Greeks to establish colonies throughout the Mediterranean did not get fully underway until the early eighth century<sup>44</sup> and this would seem

39. Cf. the discussion of the Mycenaean world in Chapter 1 above.

40. M. I. Finley, (1957b), p. 134; also his "Homer and Mycenae: Property and Tenure", *Historia*, Volume 6, 1957a, for a discussion of land-holding arrangements in the Mycenaean and Homeric worlds.

41. C. G. Starr, (1962); M. I. Finley, (1970); G. M. Thomson, (1954); J. T. Hooker, (1976).

42. On the appropriateness of the use of the term 'class' as an explanatory category (and its general theoretical superiority over other such categories) see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981), pp. 81 ff.. Ste. Croix's analysis of the political and economic conditions of this period is seminal.

43. The change in the nature of the institution of kingship (as in Mycenaean society) to that centred on an aristocratic class (as in Archaic Greece) is best seen in the demise of the word *wanax* (priest-king) and its replacement with the term *basileus*. In Mycenaean times, *basileus* referred to a village councillor subordinate to the *wanax*. By the late 9th and early 8th centuries *basileis* were autonomous rulers in their own right. See J. Chadwick & M. Ventris, (1973), pp. 120-122. See also J-P. Vernant, *The Origins of Greek Thought*, (Mehtuen & Co., London, 1982) pp. 29-37 and pp. 39-42 for a discussion of this transition. Also C. G. Starr, (1962), pp. 48-49.

44. C. Roebuck, *Economy and Society in the Greek World*, (Aries Publishers, Chicago, 1979) p. 25; R. Jones, (1946).

to suggest that the situation on the mainland was still in a process of consolidation. All of these factors suggest, when considered together, that the class divisions in Greek society in the "dark ages", the period of the oral tradition par excellence, were less pronounced than in later (and earlier) periods.

The oral tradition was thus more homogeneous (despite its flexibility) than would appear to be the case once oral literature became the norm. Moreover, it is doubtful whether palace-oriented songs would have survived in an oral culture if the values it upheld were too far removed from those of its audience.<sup>45</sup> Whilst it may have been the case that *poietai* could increasingly address themselves to aristocratic audiences more exclusively,<sup>46</sup> this cannot be said of the *aidoi* of the "dark ages".

The way in which Homer portrayed the *aidoi* in the *Iliad* and (particularly in) the *Odyssey* has often been interpreted as conclusive evidence for their historical situation. This would not be too far off the mark if such an interpretation were limited to claiming that this was how the *aidoi* operated in Homer's time. However, this interpretation is often stretched to claim that all *aidoi* were associated with palace retinues and nobility.<sup>47</sup> Yet for the Greek *aidoi* of the oral period, such an interpretation would be mis-placed. As Havelock has shown, the society reported by Homer was that of the eighth century.<sup>48</sup> The above interpretation ignores the historical conditions that would have been necessary for the re-establishment of a new aristocracy.

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45. E. A. Havelock, (1963), *passim*.

46. This point is taken up again in Chapter 3.

47. G. Novack, *The Origins of Materialism*, (Pathfinder Press, New York, 1979); S. C. Humphreys, (1978), p. 215.

48. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 94; and his (1978) Chapter 4. See also M. I. Finley, (1957a), p. 147 n. 1.

It also fails to explain how the *aidoi* (and their tradition) managed to survive and prosper if they were preserving values that were antithetical to the experiences of the ordinary people. The survival of orally preserved discourse depended upon the active participation of the whole population. The appeal of the *aidoi* had to be more broadly based, especially if it is kept in mind that they were travellers and were therefore dependent upon the goodwill of the population for their sustenance.

It is true that the oral tradition drew heavily on the heroic images associated with Mycenaean times. However, by casting the songs in heroic garb the *aidoi* served to make the focus larger than life and hence more memorable.<sup>49</sup> More importantly, as was suggested earlier, the heroic past served as an important backdrop against which the present could be emphasised, thereby showing the continuities and "timelessness" of the present. Thus whilst it is possible to use the poems of Homer and Hesiod as models from which reliable inferences can be drawn about the method of the oral mode of discourse, it would nevertheless be erroneous to treat the Homeric and Hesiodic poems as embodying values that were typical for the whole of the "dark ages".

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Each form of discourse presupposes a medium through which it is expressed. The language of orally preserved discourse in ancient Greece was fundamentally artificial.<sup>50</sup> Although it drew on the various

49. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 168.

50. The word 'artificial' is here used in the sense of 'contrived'. The language itself was not actually spoken by the Greeks themselves but was the exclusive domain of the *aidoi*. Here again the evidence comes primarily from Homer and Hesiod and it must be tempered by the fact that it is not necessarily universally valid but indicative of a particular historical period.

dialects for most of its vocabulary it was not exclusive to any one of them, despite the overall dominance of the Ionic dialect.<sup>51</sup> The language was more or less independent of the dialects though it was neither remote nor unintelligible.<sup>52</sup> The language was artificial because it had to be relatively immune from the vagaries and vicissitudes of the various dialects.

Individual linguistic behaviour is such that the stability of a dialect is not guaranteed because it is open to an infinite range of individual responses. In this way language changes to keep pace with the lived experiences of its users. Language use, being essentially free and creative,<sup>53</sup> is not jeopardised but enriched in situations in which it is open to challenge and change through everyday discourse. The Greek dialects were for that reason unsuitable as stable media to store, accurately and reliably, the mores and values of Greek society. The syntactic structure of the vernacular, the domain of everyday discourse, was not adequate as a means to compensate for or delimit the effects of such individuation.<sup>54</sup>

The syntactic structure of a language may be understood as the set of rules or operations that govern the particular arrangement of words in speech or writing.<sup>55</sup> The language used by the *aoidoi*, the

51. Homeric Greek, for example, drew on three main dialects — Ionic, Aeolic, and Arcado-Cyprian. See Milman Parry, (1971), p. 343.

52. As H. Frankel, (1975), p. 25 noted, the language was nevertheless intelligible to any Greek who listened carefully and attentively.

53. 'Free and creative' is here used in the sense that language use and change is not predictable. Certainly, it may be determined in any number of ways but the final outcome remains the prerogative of those who use the language in a virtually spontaneous manner. For some discussion on this see N. Chomsky, *Rules and Representations*, (Basil Blackwell, London, 1980).

54. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 22.

55. N. Chomsky, *Syntactic Structures*, (Mouton Publishers, The Hague, 1978) p. 13.

preserved language of discourse, also had a syntax or set of ordering principles commensurate with its dominant function of storing knowledge and values.<sup>56</sup> However, the syntax of the preserved language of discourse was not the same as the syntax of the dialects, even though both were syntactic structures in that each could be described as having sets of ordering principles for the component parts of its respective domain. Where they differed was in the fact that in ordinary speech the syntax was open to challenge in a (usually) creative way, whereas the syntax of the language of the *aoidoi* was not mutable in the same degree. The *aoidoi* had to store the knowledge in such a way that its organisation in performance did not differ too much from what the audience expected. Hence the syntax of the preserved language of discourse was not open to challenge by all and sundry. Even the *aoidoi*, who were the most likely and most able to make ongoing changes to the syntax, had to stay within the requirements of their medium. The language of the winged word was the *sine qua non* of the oral mode of discourse.<sup>57</sup> It drew its raw materials from the various dialects but the specific arrangements of the words and phrases was constrained by the structural requirements of the oral mode.

This conclusion involves an assumption about the nature of the relationship between the structure and content of the oral mode of discourse which will have to be explicated in due course. The importance, and indeed contentiousness, of this assumption was pointed out by Mary Mackenzie.<sup>58</sup> The necessity to defend this assumption stems

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56. It needs to be understood that the above references to ordering principles does not refer to the determinants of the organisation of meaning. Though such rules will affect the organisation of meaning the latter involves additional considerations which are not being addressed at present. These will be discussed once the structural features of the oral mode of discourse have been delineated.

57. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 142 and his (1978) p. 30.

58. Mary Mackenzie, *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume XX, No. 2, 1982 pp. 197-200 where she reviews Havelock's (1978).

primarily (though not exclusively) from the implications it has for understanding the transition from one mode of discourse to another. While this argument is addressed below, a brief comment here is warranted. A particular syntax and its corresponding semantic fields will also have a corresponding psychological domain.<sup>59</sup> That is, the syntax will affect the discernible manner of perceiving and thus interpreting the world. This will affect the way in which concepts are articulated and subsequently developed. The relationship between structure and content is not a given but a continuously developing process. In the Greek context, this is centrally important for the transition from an oral to a written mode.

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Underlying the specialised language and the structural features of the oral mode of discourse was the human capacity of memory. Memory was both the means and the place of storage for the songs of the *oidoi*.<sup>60</sup> All of the techniques of the oral mode of discourse were directed towards overcoming and extending the physical limitations of human memory. A sharp, retentive memory on the part of the bard had to be worked at in order for the songs to function as an effective encyclopedia. The *oidoi* were highly skilled in the mnemonic arts and it was not uncommon for them to perform feats of memory that far exceeded the capacities of ordinary people (who were generally unskilled in such techniques).<sup>61</sup> How-

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59. Rom Harre, "Rituals, Rhetoric, and Social Cognitions", in J. P. Forgas, (ed.), *Social Cognition*, (Academic Press, London, 1981) p. 215. For some discussion along these lines see B. Snell, *The Discovery of the Mind in Greek Philosophy and Literature*, (Dover Publications, New York, 1982); P. Feyerabend, *Against Method*, (New Left Books, London, 1975).

60. J. A. Notopolous, "Mnemosyne in Oral Literature", *Transactions and Proceedings of the American Philological Association*, Volume 69, 1938. pp. 468-469.

61. *ibid.*, p. 491. See also his (1964) p. 21.

ever, it must be understood that the mnemonic powers of the *aoidoi* were a social rather than an individualistic, biologically given, phenomenon peculiar to the *aoidoi*. Individual memory formed the means by which the *aoidoi's* manifestations of the society's knowledge and values were popularly affirmed or denied, depending upon the nature and quality of the performance.

But it was the special task of the *aoidoi* to remember. The *aoidoi* had to re-member in the sense of reconstituting or putting together the fragments and pieces of that which became Greek social knowledge. The *aoidoi* re-membered this knowledge through their performance. Although performances were never identical in every respect, the knowledge so presented achieved a high degree of constancy, changing only very slowly over time. The task of the *aoidoi* was to preserve and conserve this knowledge in performance. Only then could it be affirmed or denied. The social dimension, the collective or popular memory, was thus absolutely crucial.

The basis for the effective exercise of human memory was repetition, which also implies a social dimension. Repetition when performed by an "isolated" individual,<sup>62</sup> is often not sufficient to guarantee accurate recall of the stored information.<sup>63</sup> When the stored information is invested with social importance, as in the Greek case, the act of repetition requires the presence and participation of the members of the society in question.<sup>64</sup> And this was achieved through the performances of the *aoidoi*. Memory and repetition were thus two different

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62. That is, an individual considered as an abstraction from all other influences and considerations.

63. F. C. Bartlett, *Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1977). p. 255.

64. *ibid.*, p. 234.



aspects of the totality of the oral mode of discourse, the two being related via the actuality of the performance. Repetition made it possible for the *oidoi* to utilise fully the capacities of memory, and memory made it possible for the oral mode of discourse to fulfil its encyclopedic function.

The simplest way in which the memorisation process can be set in train is to use a rhythmical means of preservation; namely verse. This is what the *oidoi* did. Their songs, as far as can be determined, were based on the hexameter verse. The rhythm of this type of verse was achieved through a definite patterning of long and short syllables.<sup>65</sup> The two important units of hexameter verse were the line and the *metron* (metrical foot).<sup>66</sup> It also needs to be stressed that the terms 'line' and 'foot' used to describe the metrics of oral verse are somewhat anachronistic in that they are later, probably fifth century B.C. developments as explanatory concepts.<sup>67</sup> There were six metrical feet to the line and

65. H. Frankel, (1975), p. 29.

66. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 148.

67. B. Peabody, (1975), p. 15. Peabody also noted that the term 'hexameter' was first recorded by Herodotus (c. 484-425 B.C.). Peabody presented an interesting argument for a complete rethinking of the way in which the problem of Greek metrics should be discussed with respect to orally based discourse. He offered many challenging suggestions to traditional interpretations. The specialised arguments, into which his work leads, are beyond the scope of this study. For present purposes, Peabody's analysis serves as a reminder that the terms used to describe oral songs are products of a literate age in which the literate mode of discourse holds sway. Care must therefore be exercised so that such terms are not read back into an oral era and thereby become invested with an unwarranted epistemological and ontological status. To digress a moment longer, Peabody's own words best sum up this problem.

"The western scholastic tradition, dependent on rationalized description and imitation, accepted the written schemata of classical metrics as real and Platonically relegated form to the a priori (the pre-empirical), where material contingencies were not understood as pertinent. Description, accordingly, turned into sufficient explanation." (p. 16).

each foot was either a dactyl (a combination of syllables long-short-short) or a spondee (a combination of syllables long-long). There was generally an upper limit for the number of lines. The last metrical foot in the line was a two syllable foot of long-long or long-short.<sup>68</sup>

It is important to emphasize that the Greeks heard and pronounced the long and short syllables with a high degree of precision.<sup>69</sup> A long syllable took **twice** the amount of time to enunciate that a short syllable did.<sup>70</sup>

The Greek dialects were well suited to the dactylic pattern because so many of their words were made up of short syllables.<sup>71</sup> This made it a little easier for an *oidos* to find the right combination of syllables to fit the schema. However, the fortuitous nature of the dialects did not end the problems for the *oidos*. Since the lines had to be of more or less constant time length,<sup>72</sup> and since the numbers of syllables per line could vary between a minimum of twelve and a maximum of seventeen,<sup>73</sup> the *oidos* had a quite difficult task to ensure that the actual combination of syllables resulted in the required time length.

The *oidos* juxtaposed the long and short syllables into a repetitive pattern such that

the lines are like slow regular undulations, each of which is composed of an internal pattern of ~~ripples~~<sup>74</sup> of two different wavelengths.

There were thus two levels of rhythm generated within the hexameter

68. H. Frankel, (1975), p. 29 n. 12.

69. *ibid.* ., p. 29 n 11.

70. C. R. Beye, (1972), p. 10.

71. *ibid.*, p. 10.

72. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 148.

73. J. A. Notopoulos, (1964), pp. 4-5. See also H. Frankel, (1975).

74. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 148.

verse. The constant and more general rhythm was immediately obvious to the audience. The constant repetition of such lines engendered a relaxed feeling on the part of the audience thereby enhancing the pleasurable and entertainment aspects of the performance.<sup>75</sup> The rhythm of the syllables within each line, however, was less obvious. A large part of the skill of an *aidos* lay in the ease with which this rhythm was made accessible to the audience.

This problem was further compounded by what Frankel described as the problem of "sense articulation",<sup>76</sup> the problem of meaning. That is, the *aidos* could not just make pleasurable noises but had to make such noises meaningful. The *aidos* had to organise meaning. Fitting the syllables together to form a rhythmic whole was one thing; arranging them so that they made sense was quite another. This was because the pauses and divisions between words arranged in a meaningful way were not rhythmically determined<sup>77</sup> and would thus not necessarily coincide with the dactylic rhythm of the hexameter. This problem was overcome by the *aidos* dividing the line into four segments or cola.<sup>78</sup> The first colon was at the beginning of each line and the three succeeding cola at places that brought sense and rhythm into complementation. The intervals between the cola were known as caesurae and their placement in the line did not (necessarily) occur at equal intervals. The following

75. *ibid.* ., pp.150-152.

76. H. Frankel, (1975), p. 30.

77. *ibid.* ., p. 30.

78. *ibid.*, p. 30. Again it must be noted that terms like 'colon' and 'segment' are derived from the metrics of a literate age. The reservations expressed in n. 67 above still apply.

illustration, derived from Frankel's detailed account,<sup>79</sup> clarifies this.

$$\begin{array}{cccccccccccc} \text{"} & \text{---} & \text{/} & \text{---} & \text{/} & \text{---} & \text{/} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} & \text{---} \\ & 1 & 2 & 3 & 4 & & 1 & 2 & & 1 & 2 & & & & & & \\ & (\dots & A & \dots) & & & (\dots & B & \dots) & & & & & & & & & \\ & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & & \end{array}$$

Legend:       "       indicates the beginning of a metrical foot.  
                   —       indicates a long syllable.  
                   -       indicates a short syllable.  
                   /       indicates caesura.

The places at which caesurae were permitted were  $A_1$ ,  $A_2$ ,  $A_3$ , or  $A_4$  for the first;  $B_1$  or  $B_2$  for the second; and  $C_1$  or  $C_2$  for the third.

The *aidos* was thus able to structure the lines so that

As soon as several verses are delivered in their well-articulated flow, according to the caesuras the hearer at once senses the regularity and the harmony between the rhythm of the verse and the rhythm of the meaning. ... the overlaying of the mechanical rhythm of long and short by an audible sense rhythm harmonizing with the mechanical, gave the Greek hexameter more than one additional element of aesthetic satisfaction.<sup>80</sup>

There was thus a degree of flexibility that transcended the apparent mechanical limitations of the hexameter structure. Form and content, to use a later construction,<sup>81</sup> were thus complementary rather than oppositional in the oral mode of discourse.

79. *ibid.*, pp. 30-32. See also his notes 15 and 16 (p. 30) and notes 17 and 18 (p. 31). Note 18 is particularly interesting as it designates the mathematical possibilities of choice open to an *aidos*-in-performance, namely 16 (i.e. 4, 2, and 2) plus the further option of postponing caesurae for dramatic effect. Frankel gave a concrete example on p.32 n.19.

80. *ibid.*, p. 31.

81. B. Peabody, (1975), p. 8. Peabody suggested that the *aidoi* were probably much less self-conscious about form during performances than latter day analysts, and that the problem of a distinction between form and content was more appropriately one of a literate age. Indeed, such a distinction would probably not have occurred to an *aidos*.

While the structural provision of appropriately placed pauses enhanced the rhythmic aspects of sense articulation, the actual arrangement of individual words in meaningful ways involved other techniques. This was mainly achieved through the use of standardised phrases known as formulae or formulaic phrases. Notopolous calculated that approximately 33% of Homer's poems and 23% of Hesiod's poems consisted of formulaic phrases.<sup>82</sup> Parry defined the formulaic phrase as a group of words

regularly employed under the same metrical conditions to express a given essential idea.<sup>83</sup>

Parry also noted that what was the "essential part" of a particular idea or thought was "that which remains after one has counted out everything in the expression which is purely for the sake of style",<sup>84</sup> where it is understood that what Parry meant by 'style' was the metrical requirements of orally composed verse. Usually the formulaic phrase consisted of two or three words but occasionally they could extend to one or more lines.<sup>85</sup> Most formulaic phrases appeared in the last third or so of the line,<sup>86</sup> usually after the last caesura although there was no hard and fast rule that they should be so placed. However, the last colon was favoured because it made it possible for each line to be "rounded off" and hence made into a self-contained unit.<sup>87</sup>

The ending of each line with an appropriate formula certainly went beyond mere aesthetic considerations. This was because the *oidos*

82. J. Notopolous, (1960), p. 180.

83. M. Parry, (1971), p. 272.

84. *ibid.*, p. 272.

85. K. Robb, (1971), p. 17.

86. *ibid.*, p. 17.

87. B. Peabody, (1975), p. 8. See also H. Frankel, (1975), pp.32-33.

was thereby freed from worrying how a line would end because the final words of each line could be drawn from the pool of traditional phrases. It also made it possible for the *aidos* to avoid being stuck for words. This was a distinct hazard for *aidoi* since they composed in performance. With the line endings more or less taken care of, the *aidos* used the rest of the line to expound the story and thus link the formulaic phrases together. That is,

all the poet has to do is to select  
a phrase which fills the length be-  
tween the beginning of the line and  
the caesura with whatever he wants  
to say about the character, and then  
complete the line smoothly and effort-  
lessly by singing the stock epithet.<sup>88</sup>

And it was this process of linking and stitching, the process of oral composition itself, that enabled the skill and creativity of the *aidos* to come to the fore.

The mnemonic benefits of formulaic phrases was considerable. The regular and constant recurrence of such phrases meant that they would be least likely to be forgotten. This was especially so since the use of formulaic phrases effectively reduced the actual volume of words that the *aidoi* needed to store in their memories. Robb noted that Parry had shown that, in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*, the thirty-seven dominating characters each had a corresponding formulaic phrase.<sup>89</sup> Some, like Zeus, Hera, Odysseus, and Achilles had more than one but where the context was not jeopardised the same formulae tended to be used.<sup>90</sup>

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88. K. Robb, (1971), p. 18. Whether the *aidos* actually completed the line "smoothlessly and effortlessly" is perhaps overstated by Robb, but it was at least the case that the *aidos* could concentrate less on the ending of lines and more on the actual themes. See also J. Notopoulos, (1964), p. 58.

89. K. Robb, (1971), p. 18.

90. Occasionally a formulaic phrase might be used in an inappropriate context or place to achieve a heightened dramatic effect.

Working with a finite stock of rhythmically structured formulae helped to reduce the problems of memorisation so that more attention could be devoted to the needs of composition-as-performance.<sup>91</sup> Rarely would the *aidos* be found wanting for words. The formulaic phrases made it possible for the *aidos* to choose the appropriate ordering of words at the appropriate time. The moment of production of oral songs was achieved through the *aidos*-in-performance, and all efforts were directed towards that end.

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Parry's thesis about the manner of oral composition, especially as applied to Homer, has been criticised by a number of scholars because it appears to deny any creativity on the part of the *aidos*.<sup>92</sup> All that Parry claimed, however, was that the conditions for the production of oral performances would set boundaries beyond which an *aidos* had no means of progressing. But Parry was far from advocating that an *aidos* was a mere automaton mechanically stringing together the component parts of a song. The *aidos*

is by no means the servant of his diction: he can put his phrases together in an endless number of ways; but still they set the bounds and forbid him the search of a style which would be altogether his own. For the style which he uses is not his at all: it is the creation of a long line of poets or even of an entire people.<sup>93</sup>

Parry could not have been more explicit in pointing to the structural

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91. K. Robb, (1971), p. 30; E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 150.

92. J. Notopolous, (1964), pp. 61-65 where this dispute is discussed in some depth.

93. M. Parry, (1971), p. 270.

means within and with which an *aoidos* had to work. He was not trying to downgrade the skills of the *aoidoi*; nor was he trying to belittle the creative aspect of their achievements. What he was trying to do, however, was to make clear precisely how those achievements were realised.

Part of the problem with the criticism of Parry is that it generally presents the notion 'creativity' in an uncritical way, simply assuming that its meaning is straightforward. That is, a particular interpretation is assumed based on literate standards and practices. The standards (or at least the descriptive categories appropriate to it) of one mode of discourse (i.e. the literate) are invoked to evaluate and interpret a different mode of discourse (i.e. the oral). The conditions and practices pertaining to the oral mode are conveniently overlooked. When these are taken into consideration it becomes evident that a different sort of creativity is involved. In the oral mode, creativity lies not in producing work that nobody else has (i.e. by being different and original), but rather creativity arises from the ability of an *aoidos* to compose the best possible songs at the moment of performance. The best *aoidoi* were those who most skillfully exploited the techniques and means at their disposal so that the old, traditional material had a vitality and presence to hold the audience spell-bound.

Central to this interpretation of the oral mode, especially as it bears on the question of creativity, is the view that the *aoidos* was a composer-in-performance. Albert Lord has argued quite convincingly that the *aoidoi* composed *in* rather than *for* performance.<sup>94</sup> This distinction is crucial if the nature of the oral mode of discourse is to be correctly understood. Lord's view is stated by one critic and then



scrutinised.

Lord asserts (*Singer*, 13): "For the oral poet the moment of composition is the performance. ...An oral poem is not composed *for* but *in* performance." As well might one say that a dinner is composed when it is served on the table. Every housewife knows differently. Medvedovitch is likely to have been rather in the position of a cook who prepares a series of dishes and puts them in an oven, in this instance his memory, and then brings them out as the occasion demands.

Young's analogy is flawed because he fails to realise that for an *aidos* the moment (and place) of production is also one and the same moment (and place) of dissemination. This need not be the case for a culinary production. In the case of a *poietes* the analogy will hold since the moment of dissemination or distribution can be at some later time than its actual production. For an *aidos* this luxury did not exist. The winged words of oral songs lived only while they were sung and subsequently stored in the individual memories of the population. In a limited sense, one that is far too limited to support the argument proposed by Young,<sup>96</sup> it might be accepted that an older and long-practised *aidos* could bring to performances component parts of songs, formulaic phrases for example, that had been prepared outside of the performance. Nevertheless, for an *aidos*, the stitching together of these parts or fragments happened *in* performance. An *aidos* could not promote their

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95. Douglas Young, "Never Blotted a Line? — Formula and Premeditation in Homer and Hesiod", *Arion*, Volume VI, No. 3, Autumn 1967. p. 301. Medvedovitch is a 20th century oral poet but this in no way alters the thrust of what is being argued here.

96. *ibid.*, p. 299 where Young suggested that oral composers had time when attending to other chores (i.e. shepherding) to reflect on their composing strategies and skills. It needs to be noted, however, that in the oral period the sole task of an *aidos* was as a "singer of songs". It was only after the technology of writing became available that others, for example shepherds, could turn their attention to versification in any serious way. Hesiod is a case in point, as is shown in Chapter 3 below.

storage in any other way. Once it became possible to separate the composition and distribution aspects of the performance in practice, the importance of the performance for the act of composition began to wane.

Young's criticism holds only if one assumes that the *aidos* had some means to store the various bits and pieces of the songs until they could be incorporated into a composition. The human memory is not an oven, nor is it really analogous to one. As has already been suggested, the individual memory of an *aidos* would, on its own, not have been sufficient to ensure the *accurate and reliable* storage of the required information. Such memorisation was a social process requiring both the participation of others and a long and rich tradition of stories or themes to draw on. Performance was a two way street. The *aidos* inspired the audience and the audience spurred the *aidos* on to new heights of composition.

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Although repetition was perhaps the major mnemonic technique in the oral mode of discourse, other techniques were also present which contributed further to the mnemonic powers of the *aidoi*. Moreover, these other techniques were often the means by which repetition could be sustained without becoming boring. Such mnemonic techniques included the use of assonance, alliteration, and onomatopoeia, at the level of sound or acoustics;<sup>97</sup> and at the level of meaning the use of "parallelism, antithesis, and the simpler figures of speech like chiasmus".<sup>98</sup> At both

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97. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 27. See also W. B. Stanford, *The Sound of Greek*, (University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1967) for a detailed analysis of the importance of sound in the structure of Homeric verse.

98. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 27.

the acoustic and semantic levels these mnemonic techniques<sup>99</sup> are best understood as examples of what Havelock has described as the echo-principle.

Echo is something that the ear of the singer and audience is trained to wait for. Its mnemonic usefulness encourages the presence of anticipation. We can say of the second instance that it echoes the first or of the first that it prophesies the second. Oral mythos is continually stretched forward in this way as it is told in order to assist recall in the reciter's mind of how the mythos is to proceed, what the plot is to be. Echo, however, is modified. It is not a duplicate, for a duplicate would say nothing more than had already been said; the tale would degenerate into mindless repetition. The echo must accompany a fresh statement of fresh action, but this cannot be excessively novel or inventive; to accommodate the needs of memory there must be enough likeness to the prior statement to seduce or tempt the mind to make the leap from one to the other, and to tempt the mouth to follow with the appropriate enunciation.<sup>100</sup>

The echo-principle was an active means by which the audience was led into particular interpretations or perceptions and, conversely, away from others. It was not a passive reflection or copy of what went before it. Audiences were actively encouraged to develop particular expectations on various levels; including the expectation that expectations would be fulfilled!

Ideas, images, and themes (ranging from a few words to whole verses) were announced, foreshadowed, repeated and expounded as necessary. The way in which echo was achieved (as either a repeat or herald) was

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99. Again, caution must be exercised with respect to the terms used to describe these techniques because such terms are to some extent imbued with the overtones of the literate framework in which they are normally found.

100. E. A. Havelock, "The Alphabetization of Homer" in E. A. Havelock & J. P. Hershbell, (edd.), (1978), pp. 14-15.

through the use of a pairing arrangement between contrary or oppositional images such as good/evil, tolerance/anger, friend/foe, love/hate, joy/grief, light/dark, hot/cold, etc.. The *aidos* manipulated and counterposed these images in an acoustic way. They were generated through the use of sound. It was how the words sounded, both singly and in combination, that made it possible for the *aidos* to make full use of the echo-principle.<sup>101</sup> The exact nature and timing of the echo was at the discretion of the performer, and often the resolution of the echo would not happen for several lines. In addition, the contrapuntal nature of the rhythm (i.e. the hexametric regularity of long-short-short or long-short) served to reinforce the verbal utterances of the *aidos*.<sup>102</sup> Rhythm, sound, and meaning combined to produce a generally engaging performance for the audience. At the same time this combination served to help the *aidos* re-member the various elements into a coherent whole.

As has already been noted, this re-membering was accomplished by the *aidos*-in-performance, who strung together the words and formulaic phrases. However, the particular way in which this stringing together was achieved is extremely significant. In the oral mode of discourse it was the particular structural feature of parataxis that marked it off from the literate mode. Oral discourse was necessarily paratactic whereas written discourse need not be. In the oral mode there was only one way of arranging the words whereas in the literate mode there developed several from which a writer could choose. The oral versifier had no such choice. As Notopoulos argued, parataxis was the unique and peculiar feature of oral versification.<sup>103</sup> Although a few elements of a non-

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101. *ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

102. The phonological and homophonic aspects of this process are discussed in some depth by W. B. Stanford, (1967), pp. 74-93.

103. J. Notopoulos, (1964), p. 60.

paratactic nature can be discerned in Homer's poems, for example, it nevertheless remains the case that Homer's poems are predominantly paratactical.<sup>104</sup>

A clear definition and example of parataxis can be found in Beye's discussion of oral versification.

Parataxis is the term used by the Greeks to describe a system in which each idea is contained in a separate sentence. These are then juxtaposed with a simple conjunction, or nothing at all. Our own sentence structure appears generally as syntaxis, wherein certain ideas are subordinate to the central idea in clauses of time or cause, or relative clauses.<sup>105</sup>

It needs to be noted that Beye has somewhat anachronistically used the term 'sentence'. In oral versification the ideas would have been contained in the 'phrase' or 'line'. As far as can be ascertained the 'sentence' (or 'period' as the Greeks called it) did not develop in a distinctive way until at least the works of Xenophanes (c. 520 B.C.).<sup>106</sup> Nevertheless, Beye has made plain what is important for parataxis. In a paratactic work, ideas are more or less of equal value or importance whereas in a non-paratactic work ideas are raised (or lowered) at the expense of other ideas.

The example that Beye took from the *Iliad* demonstrates perfectly both the lack of subordination of ideas and the serial-like nature of parataxis.

Straightaway the dark blood flowed from  
the wound. Just as when some woman stains

104. T. B. L. Webster, "Language and Thought in Early Greece", *Memoirs and Proceedings of the Manchester Literary and Philosophical Society*, Volume 94, 1952/53. p. 18. For some further discussion of some non-oral features of Homer's poems see J. Russo, "Homer Against his Tradition", *Arion*, Volume VII, No. 2, 1968.

105. C. R. Beye, (1972), p. 36. Beye's discussion of parataxis was used and quoted at length by K. Robb, (1971), pp. 41-42 n. 19.

106. T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53), p. 22.

a piece of ivory with purple, a Maonian woman or Karian, in order to make a cheekpiece for horses, and it lies in a chamber, and many are the horsemen who long to carry it, but it lies there to be an adornment for some king, both an ornament for the horse and a thing of glory to its rider. Just so, Menelaos, your thighs were stained with blood. (*Iliad* 4.141 ff)<sup>107</sup>

It is quite clear from this passage, as Beye noted, that the language was structured so as to give each experience or idea its full due.<sup>108</sup>

Each was set one against the other without any being necessarily subordinated. What subordination there was, in terms of where in a string of ideas a particular idea was placed, was a function of the composition-in-performance and would vary from performance to performance. Within the framework of oral composition the *aidos* could choose the sequence that would best suit the mood or needs of the particular occasion. However, the *aidos* could not alter the paratactic nature of the sequence.

Parataxis is best understood as an organising feature of orally preserved discourse. It was the particular means with which *aidoi* imparted unity to their compositions. This notion of unity is important because the individual elements of the compositions (i.e. the formulaic phrase, the line, the verse etc.) had no intrinsic unity. That is, these elements had no preformed pattern in relation to the composition as a whole. It was the *aidoi* who imposed unity in the moment of performance, and, when the performance was finished this unity disappeared.<sup>109</sup> The unity of an oral composition had to be constructed anew with each performance.

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107. Cited in C. R. Beye, (1972), pp. 36-37.

108. *ibid.*, p. 37.

109. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 6.

The paratactic nature of this unity has been summarised aptly by Robb.

Formulae each with one focused and functional meaning come together to form whole lines. Lines cluster within a traditional episode; each episode is strung together with others as part of a theme; and the themes are strung together to compose the saga. At every linkage, from formula to line to episode, what binds it all together and permits the swift motion forward is the paratactic genius of the singer who preserves the magic of the spell with "and next ... and next".<sup>110</sup>

The skill and creativeness of the *aidoi* were measured by their ability to re-member these elements into a form that accorded with the general expectations of each audience. The themes that each composition developed in each performance were not determined by the nature of the constitutive elements but by the *aidos* whose performance gave such elements a thematic unity.

It might be objected that the *Iliad*, for example, has an overall theme, the wrath of Achilles, and that the *aidos* was therefore bound to adhere to it. This is true enough as far as it goes. Yet, as a theme, the wrath of Achilles does not provide the central focus to which all other themes and episodes are directed. Many of the episodes in the *Iliad* have little or nothing to do with Achilles' wrath<sup>111</sup> and cannot be seen as directly subserving that particular theme. The real theme of the *Iliad* is the view of human nature, of Greek social reality, that is presented. The presentation of the morals, values, and ideals of the *aidoi's* society was the real point of their compositions.<sup>112</sup> The story

110. K. Robb, (1971), p. 21.

111. For example, Books 3 to 8 of the *Iliad* hardly mention Achilles or his wrath at all. Other characters and episodes move to centre stage. In terms of Achilles' wrath many of these episodes have little or no relevance. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 7.

112. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 17; E. A. Havelock, (1963) and (1978); K. Robb, (1971); H. Frankel, (1975); B. Snell, (1982) all make similar observations though with differing degrees of emphasis.

of the wrath of Achilles provided the occasion for Homer's *Iliad* and served

more in the manner of a pair of loose brackets that hold the diverse parts of the poem together, without giving them organic unity.<sup>113</sup>

But having begun with Achilles' wrath, Homer almost immediately moves further afield to deal with wider issues.<sup>114</sup> And these issues are introduced in a variety of settings to provide the Greeks with their images of themselves and of reality. This overall theme thereby gave the songs an overall unity, but at the same time it was up to the *oidos* to achieve it. Episodes could be added or subtracted without affecting the songs as a whole since the "wholeness" of the songs was a purely arbitrary affair that varied from performance to performance.

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Oral versification, with its paratactic and formulaic structure, reflected and reproduced a view of human nature that attempted to do full justice to the complex panorama of Greek experience without destroying the uniqueness of each individual experience.<sup>115</sup> The Greeks in the "dark ages" interpreted their experiences of the world in terms of a conjunction of the many rather than as the unity of the one.<sup>116</sup> A good illustration of this is the way in which the physical human being was perceived by the Greeks in the "dark ages". A human entity was seen not as a "unique source of action" but rather as "an exchange station of influences".<sup>117</sup> Things happened *to* humans. That is, the source

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113. László Versenyi, (1974), p. 7.

114. Cf. n. 111 *supra*.

115. C. R. Beye, (1972), p. 37.

116. A. W. H. Adkins, *From the Many to the One*, (Constable, London, 1970).

117. P. Feyerabend, (1975), p. 248.



of human action was seen as external to the human organism in as much as the notion that human beings were autonomous, self-directed organisms was alien (or perhaps more correctly, unknown) to Greek thought in the Homeric period.<sup>118</sup> The human body was seen as an assemblage of limbs, clearly distinguished from one another, but the assemblage itself — the body — was not a feature of Greek thought. Snell has shown that the Greek word for body, *soma*, was a later interpretation of what the Greeks in Homer's time understood as limbs.<sup>119</sup> Moreover,

Homer does not even have any words for the arms and legs; he speaks of hands, lower arms, upper arms, feet, calves and thighs. Nor is there a comprehensive term for the trunk.<sup>120</sup>

It was the specific functions and actions of the individual limbs (or parts of limbs) that concerned the Greeks.

A similar situation existed with respect to the intellectual aspects of a human being. The idea that there was a soul or mind that directed human actions was not present in Homer's *Iliad*. The words that Homer used for soul, *psyche*, *thymos*, and *noos* were functionally oriented.<sup>121</sup> They referred to particular concrete situations rather than to abstract, universalising conceptions. That is, such words had meanings that were situationally determined and located in particular concrete experiences. The more universal interpretation of 'soul' or 'mind' as an organising principle of human action was a later conceptual development.<sup>122</sup> The sources of human action, the reasons why things happened

118. B. Snell, (1982), pp. 21 and Chapter 3.

119. *ibid.*, p. 8.

120. *ibid.*, p. 311 n. 7.

121. *ibid.*, p. 8. See also Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 11.

122. For some analysis of this, especially the concept *noos*, see K. von Fritz, "Nous, Noein, and their Derivatives in Presocratic Philosophy" in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (ed.), *The Pre-Socratics*, (Doubleday-Anchor, New York, 1974) pp. 23-85.

as they did, were to be located in factors external to human beings.

However, this did not mean that individual human beings could not be held legally responsible for their actions. On the contrary, humans *were* responsible for their actions. However, it was not a question of intent that was at issue but a question of perpetration that was important because it was the act itself rather than the perpetrator of the act that gave rise to opprobrium and censure.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, the very separation of intent and act was not yet a feature of Greek thought because the causal relationship between any seemingly related real world events was understood as ultimately a result of the will of the gods. Personal volition was a concept that was absent from Homeric thought.<sup>124</sup> Responsibility devolved on individuals as a result of the actions they performed in the sense that they perpetrated the act. Where such actions were contrary to the accepted mores and values of the society the perpetrators were publicly shamed and in some situations liable for damages.

As Dodds<sup>125</sup> and Adkins<sup>126</sup> have argued, Homeric society was essentially a "shame culture" in which *aidos* (i.e. public shame or public loss of face) was to be avoided at all costs. In a society in which a person's deeds were orally preserved, the important thing was what was said, and hence remembered, about the person. The judgements of one's contemporaries were what were remembered by future generations since these judgements lived on via the winged word of song. Greek society in the oral period (and perhaps even before it) was success oriented<sup>127</sup>

123. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 15.

124. B. Snell, (1982), pp. 30-31.

125. E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, (University of California Press, Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1951) especially Chapter 2.

126. A. W. H. Adkins, (1970), pp. 32 ff..

127. *ibid.*, p. 44.

in the sense that it was necessary to be successful in order to achieve public acclamation and hence be remembered by future generations. Without public recognition (whether acclaim or shame) of an individual's acts, those acts would remain invisible, as Versenyi put it,<sup>128</sup> and hence unknown and unsung. There could be no private morality since an individual was only what others said of him or her.<sup>129</sup> That is the mores and values of Homeric society were not the privatised domain that they became in later eras. Homeric morality

is not simply located in the individual but fragmented and divided among all the members of his society, who are its keepers.<sup>130</sup>

It was the *aidos* who made sense of these "fragments" by re-combining them and giving them a sense of unity so that the prevailing mores and morality were preserved. The public domain of oral performance was therefore the only domain. Each and every member of the society contributed to it and gave it its authority.

There was a strong parallel between the characteristics of the way in which human nature and morality were perceived and the characteristic structure of oral versification.<sup>131</sup> This parallel was not accidental. It was central to the oral mode of discourse. Oral versification was the means to preserve what needed to be known and, at the same time, it was also the means whereby what was already preserved was presented again for public scrutiny. Any knowledge so preserved which jarred with the lived experience of the audiences eventually faded

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128. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 16.

129. A. W. H. Adkins, (1970), p. 44.

130. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 16.

131. *ibid.*, p. 16. See also T. B. L. Webster, (1958); P. Feyerabend, (1975); for arguments pointing to the congruence between Homeric poetry, its prevailing views on human nature, and the geometric art-forms (pottery, sculpture etc.) of the Homeric period.

from the preservation process and was, quite literally, forgotten.<sup>132</sup> In this way the songs of the *aoidoi* reflected the lived experiences of the Greeks of the "dark ages" and thereby maintained the sense of truth characteristic of living myth.

Versenyi made the point that living myth was true in the sense of *aletheia* (i.e. true disclosure or true revelation).<sup>133</sup> The winged words made it possible for that which was hidden (i.e. memories) to become visible to all. And in the process of performance, what was made visible became subject to public scrutiny. It was not, however, scrutiny in the sense that each song was minutely analysed and examined. It was scrutiny in the sense that what was expressed in the songs — the values, ideas, sketches of human nature and so on — was felt by the Greeks to be consonant with their own perceptions and experiences; that what was expressed was not so very far removed from their own patterns of existence.

The picture that emerges of the characteristics of human nature and morality is one of aggregated fragments. The fragments appeared in various configurations and were discrete and interchangeable. They could be added to or subtracted from the particular aggregate being articulated. It was an arrangement consistent with the paratactic nature of the preserved language of discourse. The structure of the songs set the limits of what could be expressed in it; and in so doing shaped the nature of the knowledge that was preserved.

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132. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 122.

133. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 2. The senses of *aletheia* are discussed more fully below.

This returns the discussion to the assumption about a relationship between the structure and content of oral forms. Such an assumption was central to Havelock's analysis and was criticised by MacKenzie<sup>134</sup> and praised by Robb.<sup>135</sup> Both paraphrased Havelock's assumption in terms of "the medium is the message", that is, the medium (i.e. hexameter verse) was the message (i.e. the knowledge to be preserved). Whilst Havelock has some sympathy with such a view<sup>136</sup> his actual formulation of the relationship between the structure of the medium and its content was a little more sophisticated than the above cliché derived from McLuhan.<sup>137</sup>

Certainly, in his seminal work, *Preface to Plato*, Havelock's formulations have given some justification for attributing a simplistic and mechanistic view to him. For example,

There are a million things you cannot  
say at all in metrical speech and it  
will follow that you will not think  
them either.<sup>138</sup>

Havelock was suggesting that the structures of the oral mode provided the defining boundaries within which the content became preserved knowledge and outside of which it would have been forgotten. Furthermore, the language of preserved discourse acted as a filter for what could be expressed in the language of everyday speech. Not everything that was expressible in the latter could be preserved within the formulaic structure of metrical speech. Havelock was not arguing that the content was sacrificed in some way to conform to the given structure. Nor was

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134. M. MacKenzie, (1982), p. 198.

135. K. Robb, (1971), p. 33.

136. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 336.

137. M. McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1964).

138. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 149.

he suggesting that the structure was the content as implied by the "medium is the message" reduction.<sup>139</sup>

A defence of Havelock's position in his *The Greek Conception of Justice* is best undertaken by an analysis of the criticisms levelled against it by MacKenzie. As she put it, Havelock's assumption implied that "verbal echoes dominate content", that "literariness prevails over common-sense", and "didactic purpose over joy".<sup>140</sup> The last of these is false because, when one examines Havelock's work closely, it becomes apparent that one of his most basic assumptions was that oral performances, in order to be successfully didactic, had to be pleasurable and joyful.<sup>141</sup> The first view is relatively uncontroversial as far as Havelock's main thesis is concerned because Havelock's view only requires the presupposition that there is some relationship between the structure of a work and its content. Indeed, the very fact that virtually all literary works in the period in question, whether orally composed or not, were intended to be heard rather than read meant that the sound of the words and hence the "verbal echoes" would remain an important feature in the production of such works. "Verbal echoes" need not depend upon the oral techniques of composition-in-performance.

The second view that "literariness prevails over common-sense" is more problematical as it suggests that the content of a work was sacrificed to arbitrary demands of composition in such a way as to go against good sense. That is, the structure of a work would arbitrarily

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139. As suggested by Robb, (1971), p. 33.

140. M. MacKenzie, (1982), pp. 198-199.

141. This is not spelled out in his (1978) as explicitly as it might have been and this may explain why MacKenzie might have overlooked it. Even so, it was spelled out in his (1963) in some detail. Given that the (1978) work was an extension of the work begun in (1963) it is not unreasonable to assume that the position established in the latter was operative in the former as nothing Havelock has written since (1963) has modified or negated it.

preclude ideas that were nevertheless present in the domain of everyday thought for the Greeks. To use a term like "literariness" to refer to the structure of orally preserved discourse is to describe it in terms quite alien to the period, and it makes no allowance for changes to the methods and means of production of works ranging from before Homer to after Plato. Admittedly, the lack of adequate terminology to describe (and explain) unambiguously the nature of works of the oral mode of discourse tempers the above criticism to some extent.<sup>142</sup> Nevertheless, care should be taken when using terminology derived from later historical conditions.<sup>143</sup>

Of far more importance, however, is the term 'common-sense' to describe what is supposed to be in jeopardy. This is a very contested term and its use is never fully explicated by those who invoke it as their authority. MacKenzie's use of the term is clear neither in itself nor in the context of her argument. It would appear that she saw such a term as being applicable to the domain of everyday thought in which there is supposed to exist some understanding of the world that was accepted by all Greeks of the time. 'Common-sense' was therefore the basis out of which thought, understanding, reason and so on grew.<sup>144</sup> Thus for MacKenzie, when "literariness" prevailed over "common-sense", some aspects of the latter were denied thereby distorting the panorama

142. As pointed out earlier in notes 2 and 67 above.

143. It might be argued that since Havelock based his analysis of the oral mode of discourse on the works of Homer and Hesiod who were *poietai* the term 'literariness' is not out of place. However, it is clear that Homer's poems were at the end of a tradition in which such works were composed in and for performance and that Hesiod's were at least composed for performance. The ability to use writing was at that stage a mnemonic aid rather than a normal means of composition. Hence canons of literacy and literacy when applied to oral works are a little anachronistic.

144. This view of 'common-sense' in the sense of Universal Reason is very much in the Enlightenment tradition of the 17th and 18th centuries. For a brief but penetrating critique of this term see G. Nowell-Smith, "Common Sense", *Radical Philosophy*, No. 7, 1974.

of Greek experience. In Havelock's account, content somehow or other suffered because the structure of the oral mode is supposed to have excluded that which otherwise would have been included.

Now this assumes that the term 'common-sense' is applicable as a constant frame of reference. But this inverts Havelock's argument. For Havelock, any notion of common-sense was defined by the boundaries set by the oral mode itself. Common-sense was itself a product of the domain of preserved discourse. To see this it is only necessary to recall the distinction that Havelock made continually between the language of preserved discourse and ordinary spoken language (i.e. the spoken dialects) in a totally oral society.<sup>145</sup> The mnemonic requirements militated against that which could not be expressed rhythmically, thereby imposing an economy of means on what could be preserved. But, more importantly, what was preserved provided the stock of images with which the Greeks interpreted their experiences. The language in which such images was preserved provided the building blocks out of which common sense was constructed. The causal direction was from the preserved language to the everyday languages as far as image construction (i.e. the articulation of meaning) was concerned. Although the words of the language of preserved speech were drawn from the stock of words of everyday speech, the images and meanings that they created when arranged and composed *within* an oral framework became the sources and validations of the images of everyday thought. Thus for Havelock, the domain of "preserved communication" was the domain of maximum linguistic sophistication and was thereby the model for thinking in the domains of everyday dialects.<sup>146</sup>

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145. E. A. Havelock, (1963), pp. 134-136 and also his (1978) pp. 30-34.

146. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 135.



This view of the distinction between the language of the *aidos* (and later the *poietes*) has informed Havelock's two major studies of pre-Platonic thought.<sup>147</sup> Common sense and content were thus not diminished or sacrificed. They were grounded in the very means available for the preservation of socially necessary knowledge of the time.

Havelock saw quite clearly that the development of Greek thought was governed by the tools with which it could be expressed. Hence his assumption that the structure of the oral mode of discourse determined its content. But as has been shown, this did not in any way diminish the range of Greek experience nor the ability to interpret it in a sophisticated manner.<sup>148</sup> It simply prescribed the limits or range of possibilities open to the oral versifiers. The relationship between the structure and content for the oral mode was thus not as mechanical as would first appear but, given that, the means available for oral composition was remarkably flexible.

A further issue needs to be raised concerning the *aidos* as one who re-members the socially necessary ideas. It might be suggested that Plato's notion of *mimesis* rather than the term 're-member' would best describe the activities of the *aidos*-in-performance. As Havelock demonstrated, it was Plato who first used the term *mimesis* to encompass the psychology and experience inherent in the *aidos*-audience relationship.<sup>149</sup> However, the sense in which Plato used *mimesis* differed from the accepted usage of his predecessors. For them, be they poets,

147. Note, however, that Havelock does not draw the same distinction between *aidos* and *poietes* as has been drawn above (p. 50 notes 4 and 5, and p. 51). For Havelock, a *poietes* was an oral producer.

148. The remarks by C. R. Beye, (1972), p. 36 are apposite where he suggested that Homer's *Iliad* was an example of the highest form of realism.

149. E. A. Havelock, (1963), p. 57 n. 22.

dramatists, or philosophers, *mimesis* meant to do as others did or become (or be) like others.<sup>150</sup> But for Plato *mimesis* was the imitation of something original or unique.<sup>151</sup> In Havelock's words, Plato in

*Rep.* Book 10 ... .. attempts a more inclusive description of the whole poetic situation, which he now calls *mimesis*, and which is now defined and damned as systematic *apate*, something too frivolous and immoral to merit serious inclusion in an educational curriculum. The sense of *mimesis* as 'ethical imitation of an original' is built up in the course of this polemic, and is wholly a Platonic creation.<sup>152</sup>

Plato drew a distinction which was not possible, at least with respect to oral versification, in a totally oral society in that he distinguished between an original and its copy.

Whilst it is true that the *aidos* exhorted the audience to adopt acceptable rather than unacceptable forms of behaviour, thereby giving the audience social models to imitate, it was not the case that the *aidos* was copying or imitating some ideal pattern — except in the trivial sense that there were certain structural features common to every performance. The *aidos*-in-performance was not putting forward a copy or imitation of the body of social knowledge in the Platonic sense.<sup>153</sup> There was no *original* body of knowledge to be reproduced by the *aidos*.

150. *ibid.*, p. 57 n. 22.

151. *ibid.*, pp.57-58 n. 22.

152. *ibid.*, p. 58 n. 22. Note that Havelock was a bit harsh on Plato here. Havelock's interpretation misses the substance of Plato's point. It was not that the poetic situation (as familiar to Plato) was too frivolous or immoral but that it was wholly inappropriate as a means to ensure the health of the sorts of values and ideas that Plato deemed suitable for his ideal *polis*. For Plato, the poetic domain was no longer the appropriate domain for the pursuit of knowledge.

153. It could, however, be argued that a *poietes* did imitate or copy a "model" in performance in that a writer had a text to work from.

Such knowledge was not fixed in the sense of axioms or first principles from which all else was derived. Knowledge in an oral society was of a different order. Each and every performance of the *aidos* produced knowledge that was fixed at the point of *aidos*-audience contact. It was not a verbatim reproduction of an "authentic" or "original" 'script' or 'text'. Each performance was an original in its own right; it was unique. The *aidos*, drawing on the various (and changing) component parts of a long tradition, stitched them together to create the actual performance. The *aidos*, by putting the pieces together in each performance, was in fact re-membering.

For an *aidos*, there was no abstract separation of a copy from an original. What eventually emerged in the course of a given performance did not presuppose an idealised entity with which it had to conform. The actual finished product of each performance varied and emerged from the conditions actually prevailing at the time of performance. What was actually presented by the *aidos* also depended upon the skill with which such knowledge was re-membered. The skill was in the telling of the tale that was not permanently fixed and set down prior to the performance.

It might be thought that an alternative to Plato's notion of *mimesis* could be his doctrine of *anamnesis*.<sup>154</sup> According to this doctrine, a person, with the help of a suitable teacher, could recall knowledge because such knowledge existed in the soul. It needed only the appropriate promptings for it to be made fully known to the person concerned. In this way a person brought to light that which they already "knew" but which they had forgotten or lost sight of. At first sight, this appears

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154. A more detailed discussion of Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* and his related theory of the soul is undertaken in Chapter 7 below. No attempt is made here to give an exposition of these theories or, indeed, of his theory of knowledge in general. For present purposes, the above discussion will be sufficient.

to be a promising alternative. However, it is vitiated by the same problems that beset his notion of *mimesis*. For Plato, knowledge was fixed and immutable.<sup>155</sup> It existed in the soul independently of whether an individual acknowledged it. The act of *anamnesis* or recollection was a reproduction of something that was original or authentic. This differed from the sort of knowledge produced by an *oidos* as has already been noted. *Anamnesis* was concerned not with the production of knowledge but with its re-production. In a totally oral situation such re-membering as Plato had in mind was not possible. An *oidos* may well have been recalling what he already knew. However, such recollection was always socially mediated and hence did not presuppose a fixed body of knowledge to be recited at will. The knowledge that emerged at the point of production, in performance, was mutable and hence could not be regarded as being given once and for all. An *oidos* was therefore not engaging in *anamnesis* in Plato's sense.

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The conditions of production and distribution of knowledge in the oral mode of discourse were thus quite distinctive. Of central importance was the *oidos*-audience relationship, and even with the introduction of writing it remained of key significance for several centuries. Holding the performance together and making the preservation of the socially necessary knowledge possible was the role of memory. Guided by Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, the *oidos* was able to preserve and transmit what needed to be known so that it could be appropriated by the population at large. The winged word, activated in performance, was

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155. This oversimplifies Plato's views on knowledge. The appropriate qualifications and distinctions are treated in more depth in Chapter 7.

reinforced and sustained by a variety of mnemonic techniques, of which repetition and rhythm were of key importance. The mnemonic techniques reinforced the sound of what was being sung and thereby placed the main emphasis on the ears of the audiences.<sup>156</sup> Specific techniques like assonance, alliteration, onomatopoeia and so on further underlined those of repetition and rhythm. These techniques were astutely exploited by the *oidoi* to create the vivid images necessary for the didactic effectiveness of the performances.

The *oidoi* unfolded the knowledge of the living myths of the oral tradition. This knowledge was regarded as true in the sense of *aletheia* which, as mentioned earlier, was usually understood as meaning "unhiddenness" or "revealing that which is hidden".<sup>157</sup> Some uneasiness may be felt about interpreting *aletheia* in this fashion because of Friedlander's criticisms of Heidegger's view that *aletheia* was "unhiddenness of being" or more generally simply "unhiddenness".<sup>158</sup>

However, the view to be defended here is quite consistent with Friedlander's critique. Friedlander concluded that the uses of *aletheia* or its cognates in early Greek works indicated that there were three important and intertwined aspects of the concept. These were

- (1) the correctness of speech and belief,
- (2) the reality of being, (3) the genuineness, truthfulness, and conscientiousness of the individual or character.

For Friedlander, *aletheia*, really did mean, contrary to Heidegger, "cor-

156. E. A. Havelock, (1978), *passim*.

157. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 2. See also Drew Hyland, *The Origins of Philosophy: Its Rise in Myth and the Pre-Socratics*, (Capricorn Books, New York, 1973).

158. P. Friedlander, *Plato, Volume I: An Introduction*, of three volumes, trans. by Hans Meyerhoff, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958) pp. 221-229.

159. *ibid.*, p. 224.

rectness of perception" (i.e. seeing things as they really are). When applied to a person it meant that the person was one who

does not forget or neglect, who does not  
lose something out of sight or mind.<sup>160</sup>

*Aoidoi* were just such people. They did not lose sight of what was important because it was up to them to produce this knowledge for everybody else. For most of the ordinary Greeks much of the details of this became blurred or distorted with the passage of time. It was up to the *aoidoi* to render it visible (i.e. make it unhidden) in such a way as to ensure continuity with previous performances. This is quite consistent with Friedlander's analysis in so far as "correctness of perception is concerned".

The *aoidos* was thus the very instrument of *aletheia*.<sup>161</sup> With the aid of the winged word *aletheia* was achieved. That which was hidden or distorted or forgotten was made clear, visible, or re-membered. It was up to the *aoidoi* to make sense of that which was hidden and fragmented. Within the individual memories of the Greeks these fragments were given a unity by the *aoidoi* who thereby provided the stock from which the Greeks drew their intellectual and moral sustenance.

In their actual performances the *aoidoi* were universally regarded as being divinely inspired. The *aoidoi* were guided by the Muses. What was actually sung in their performances, that is, the content of their songs, was not the product of the imaginations of the *aoidoi* but of their guides, the Muses. As Notopolous pointed out,

160. *ibid.*, p. 223.

161. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), p. 2 suggested that "living myth" was the instrument of truth but since living myth lives because the *aoidoi* perpetuate it, nothing is lost by describing the *aoidoi* as the instruments of *aletheia*.

it was not an arbitrary occurrence that Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, was regarded as the mother of the Muses by the Greeks.<sup>162</sup> In the oral mode of discourse memory was the foundation upon which all else was built. By astutely exploiting the various mnemonic techniques the *aidoi* became the instruments through which relevant Greek knowledge and values were preserved and transmitted. Because the *aidoi* were divinely inspired their utterances had the *imprimatur* of the gods, and as such, had an authority that was beyond dispute. It was the *aidos* to whom the Greeks looked for the framework within which their everyday experiences were validated.

In the oral mode of discourse this framework was one in which distinctions and differences between past and present values were not able to be recognised. The songs were cast in the timeless present. The past was continuously being recreated in the light of the present. The specific concerns of the present ensured that discontinuities were smoothed out because knowledge and values that were no longer relevant were forgotten. The *aidos* re-membered only that which was needed.

The very nature of the oral mode of discourse was one of stitching together in a paratactic manner the various fragments, episodes and events. Depending upon the needs of a specific performance, the *aidoi* would include or exclude particular material. The *aidos* could cut and stitch as required. It is in this sense that an *aidos* can be regarded as creating a unity out of the material at hand. This unity did not arise from the material itself in any organic sense.<sup>163</sup> It

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162. J. Notopolous, (1938), pp. 465-466. Notopolous noted that Mnemosyne was one of the earliest Greek deities and that its inclusion with the legendary Titans, the "first generation of the theogony of Earth and Heaven", attests "the primeval importance of memory among pre-literate Greeks". (p. 466).

163. Laszlo Versenyi, (1974), pp. 6-7 ff.

arose from the choices made by the *aidos*-in-performance. These choices were in turn constrained by the particular conditions governing the production of orally preserved discourse.

Since there was no fixed record of past values, except as created by the *aidos*-in-performance, such values could not be brought into confrontation with those of the present. Once past values could be given a permanent form independently of the winged words of orally preserved discourse, the ideas and values of the present could be challenged. But for that to happen required changes to the means available to the *aidoi* for preserving knowledge and values. The crucial change was the re-introduction of a system of writing within the Greek world. The possibilities opened up by this change in the means of production of orally preserved discourse forms the focus of the next chapter.



### Chapter 3

#### Transformations: From Winged Words To Written Words

With the invention of their own system of writing the ancient Greeks had at their disposal the means to transcend the boundaries of the oral mode of discourse. After about 750 B.C. there began to emerge a literate mode of discourse characterised by the use of writing as its central and unifying feature. Memory, so important for orally preserved discourse, began to be supplanted by written words because the latter could exist independently of memory and the traditional means to sustain it. By the time of Aristotle (c. 350 B.C.) the literate mode of discourse was the normal or expected domain for the articulation of knowledge and values. In the intervening four hundred years the sway of the oral mode of discourse had gradually diminished.

The process of transformation from one mode to the other was gradual because the development of an audience attuned to written rather than winged words had to be created. Indeed, the creation of such an audience also presupposed the existence of texts to which people could refer whenever necessary. Literate audiences could be taken for granted by writers only by the end of the fifth century B.C.<sup>1</sup> For two to three hundred years the early Greek writers had to make use of the traditional means for disseminating their works. They still had to compose for public performances even though the process of composition was no longer a necessary part of the performance. As shown in the last chapter the *oidoi* composed in performance; the acts of composition and dissemination were necessarily inseparable. With the advent of writing *oidoi*

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1. See p. 6 n. 11 *supra* for authorities on this development.

gradually became *poietai*, thereby freeing themselves from the necessity of composing in performance. *Poietai* were able to experiment with both the structure and content of their compositions, and it was this that made possible the emergence of new forms of discourse.

This has been described by Bowra as a "literary revolution"<sup>2</sup> and Havelock as "the literate revolution"<sup>3</sup> because it was from that point that the development of literature in ancient Greece can be said to have developed. Poetry, quite literally the writing down of oral songs, moved quickly beyond the hexameter of the oral tradition to encompass new metres and formulations of words thereby marking out new branches within the poetic form of discourse. These can be described as elegy, lyric, iambic, and choral poetry.<sup>4</sup> Building on the poetic form, drama (comedy and tragedy) emerged to become a separate but intimately related form of discourse in its own right. As prose writing began to develop, two other forms of discourse, history and philosophy, were eventually established. All of these forms of discourse owed much to the use of writing.

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2. C. M. Bowra, *Landmarks in Greek Literature*, (Wiedenfeld & Nicolson, 1970) p. 57.

3. E. A. Havelock, (1982).

4. It might be objected that these new developments, particularly elegy and lyric, were entities which themselves had a history, now lost, extending into and perhaps beyond the oral period. This view is suggested by T. A. Sinclair, *A History of Greek Literature from Homer to Aristotle*, (Haskell House Publishers, New York, 1973) pp. 89 ff.. But he also noted that the "Greeks themselves believed that elegaic, iambic, and lyric poetry were all invented about 800 B.C." (p. 89 n.1); a point which he then went on to try and refute by appealing to some of Homer's allusions to (possibly) different metres. However, such an appeal is tenuous because the Homeric epics were not (as far as can be determined) committed to writing until at least the time of the tyrant Pisistratus (c. 560 B.C.) or perhaps even later. It is thus quite likely that such allusions in Homer's poems were the imprint of a later, literate period. It is thus extremely doubtful that such allusions can be regarded as convincing evidence for the types of metre used in the oral period.

Such a basic change to the means of composition brought forth concomitant changes or transformations in the substance of Greek knowledge and values.

Apart from the transformation of *aidoi* into *poietai*, an equally broad though far more gradual change took place. This was the change in discourse from an emphasis on *mythos* to *logos*, and within this transformation were other important changes. Of some significance was the development of what has been described as "the emergence of personality".<sup>5</sup> The person of the poet emerged as a significant feature of written works. Authorship, the identification of a particular work with a particular person, became important. Poets, dramatists, historians, and philosophers became arbiters, rather than mere instruments, of what was accepted as true and immutable. The very nature of what was accepted as "truth" came under challenge and hence became an issue of dispute. *Aletheia*, no longer became a matter of making visible what was hidden from memory but a matter of making visible by re-organising and discovering that which was not comprehended by the unaided memory of orally preserved discourse.

Closely related to this change was the development of what Versenyi described as the development of "historical consciousness".<sup>6</sup> The "forever living present"<sup>7</sup> of oral *mythos* gave way to an awareness of the present being different from the past and, as a corollary, a recognition that the future need not be a repetition of the present. The problem of change (and stability) became an important issue within the diverse streams of Greek thought. The development of historical consciousness, the awareness that the past was different from the present, was

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5. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 54; Bruno Snell, (1982), pp. 44 ff.

6. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 67.

7. *ibid.*, p. 3.

made possible for the Greeks because writing enabled the ideas and values of one generation to be preserved for subsequent generations in a form that could be reviewed and scrutinised. In this way the ideas and values of the present could be contrasted to those of an earlier time. The validity or truth of the ideas of one generation could no longer be taken for granted but had to be accounted for in some way. Each writer, whether implicitly or explicitly, attempted to resolve this problem.

With the development of an historical consciousness other distinctions such as the separation between being and seeming, reality and appearance, began to emerge.<sup>8</sup> Such considerations became central to the development of Greek literature, especially for that form which came to be known as philosophy. In addition, concern for the particular began to give way to an emphasis on the abstract and general. Attempts were made to describe and account for the myriad of particular instances in terms of unifying principles which, by their nature, were abstract rather than concrete. Parataxis gave way to a more synoptic approach in that the writer could approach the work as a whole and hence re-arrange it to suit his or her intentions<sup>9</sup> rather than stringing traditional pre-determined formulae together like undifferentiated links in a chain. Concern with the content, the inter-relationships of the constituent parts and the separate parts to the works as a whole became increasingly important. A preoccupation with bold and splendid images began to recede with the increasing concern for conceptual unity and the eventual definition and defense of the constituent concepts.<sup>10</sup>

With the heightened self-consciousness of the *poietai* came a change in the nature of the relationship between *poietai* and their gods,

8. *ibid.*, pp. 47-48.

9. *ibid.*, p. 66.

10. E. A. Havelock, (1978), *passim*.

particularly Mnemosyne, the goddess of memory, acknowledged by the Greeks as the mother of the Muses. The place and importance of the gods in the affairs of mortals also underwent subtle reinterpretations and redefinitions as the importance of human action and responsibility began to be accentuated. Human beings came to be seen as "unique sources of action", autonomous and increasingly self-directed, who acted and reacted within the parameters established by the gods rather than as "exchange station[s] of influences" determined by the gods.<sup>11</sup>

These transformations attending the introduction of writing in the Greek world give some indication of the effects this new technology of composition had on the articulation of Greek knowledge and values. Several Greek writers and their works will be examined for evidence of the above transformations, but no attempt is made to provide a comprehensive account of the history of the development of Greek literature.<sup>12</sup> Rather, the emphasis is on determining the general trend of these developments as revealed in the works of the writers who can be regarded as typical exponents of the poetry under consideration. Thus Hesiod (epic hexameter), Archilochus (elegy and lyric), Sappho (lyric), and Solon (elegy and hexameter) provide the means to establish the generality of the above transformations. Writers who came to be regarded as philo-

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11. P. Feyerabend, (1975), p. 248; Bruno Snell, (1982), p. 21.

12. More detailed histories can be found in C. M. Bowra, (1970); T. A. Sinclair, (1973); H. Frankel, (1975); H. M. Chadwick & N. K. Chadwick, *The Growth of Literature: The Ancient Literatures of Europe*, Volume I of three volumes, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1932); M. Hadas, *A History of Greek Literature*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1950); F. B. Jevons, *A History of Greek Literature: From the Earliest Period to the Death of Demosthenes*, 3rd ed., (Griffen & Co., London, 1889); A. Lesky, *A History of Greek Literature*, trans. by J. Willis & C. de Heer, (Methuen & Co., London, 1966); H. J. Rose, *A Handbook of Greek Literature: From Homer to the Age of Lucian*, 3rd ed. rev., (Methuen & Co., London, 1948).

sophers, particularly the pre-Socratic philosophers, will be discussed in the next chapter.

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Before turning to these four poets it is necessary to make two background observations. First, the poets between them encompass almost two hundred years of Greek literature. Hesiod can be situated in the mid to late eighth century B.C., Archilochus in the first half of the seventh century B.C., and Solon and Sappho in the early to mid sixth century B.C.. Moreover, each of the four poets came from geographically diverse parts of the Greek world; Hesiod from Boeotia, Archilochus from Paros, Sappho from Lesbos, and Solon from Athens. The art of writing may well have been the prerogative of a relatively small number of people for some time after it was introduced; it was not, however, geographically localised.

The second background observation concerns the nature of the Greek social world itself. As Bowra pointed out, the

literary revolution was accompanied by  
a social revolution which had no less  
influence on literary matters.<sup>13</sup>

Some mention of this has already been made in earlier chapters<sup>14</sup> and only a brief synopsis is necessary here.

By the beginning of the eighth century B.C. the widespread system of local kingships, which had arisen during the "dark ages", was beginning to feel the strains of significant increases in population together with growing shortages of land. Although emigration and colonisation tended to alleviate the social pressures to some degree it did

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13. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 57.

14. See Chapter 1 pp. 33-34; Chapter 2 pp. 59-61 above. For an overview of political and social developments see G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981).

not really redress the underlying causes of the land shortages. This was because land was becoming monopolised by nobles who formed part of the king's power base within such kingships. The result was the growth of an aristocratic class of landowners that began to challenge the powers and privileges of the kings. In many cases, the newly emerging aristocratic classes managed to transform the system of kingships in such a way that the royal powers and privileges devolved on the aristocracy. By the end of the seventh century, rule by the aristocracy had become the norm for many Greek mainland districts and islands. At the same time, the *polis*, as a distinctly Greek type of city, began to be established on the basis of the old village centres.<sup>15</sup> Thriving urban centres, dominated by the power of an aristocratic class and supported by their rural surrounds, provided the setting for the changing social relations for the Greeks. Although the *polis* did not achieve its pinnacle until the late fifth century, it nevertheless began to take its distinctive "classical" form towards the end of the eighth century B.C..<sup>16</sup>

During the eighth century, many of the *aidoi* had established for themselves a more or less permanent presence as members of the palace retinue of individual kings. The function of such *aidoi* was more concerned with the glorification or aggrandisement of particular kings than with the general preservation and transmission of knowledge and values.

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15. It needs to be understood that a *polis* initially denoted nothing more than a naturally occurring stronghold or humanly constructed citadel within a rural village-type society. As Greek society began to expand in the early eighth century so the nature of the *polis* began to be transformed.

16. L. Mumford, (1974), pp. 142 ff.; G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society Volume I: The Prehistoric Aegean*, in two volumes, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1954) pp. 351-352. For more specialised accounts see L. H. Jeffery, *Archaic Greece: The City States c. 700-500 B.C.*, (St. Martin's Press, New York, 1976); R. Sealey, *A History of Greek City-States c. 700-338 B.C.*, (University of California Press, Los Angeles, 1976).

Palace-based *aidoi* had begun to feature in Homer's *Odyssey* and one can assume from that account that the function of the *aidoi* was becoming more localised to specific kingships.<sup>17</sup> As the system of kingship gave way to the newly emerging aristocracy, the aristocrats, flushed with success in their newly acquired power and status, looked to such *aidoi* to provide the chronicle of their exploits. This provided further impetus for the *aidoi* to depart from the traditional content of their songs to ones which dealt specifically with the concerns and exploits of individual aristocrats. Such a change in content, however, could not be achieved, or at least could only be achieved haltingly, until the means to depart from the traditional mode of expressing heroic deeds and exploits was available. The oral mode of paratactically arranged formulae could not be easily adapted to the new conditions.

With the advent of writing in the Greek world and the transformation of *aidoi* into *poietai* it became possible for such story-tellers to take their time in composing their works. It became possible to create new expressions to fit the hexameter form and, eventually, to create different metres more suited to what needed to be expressed. That is, as Bowra put it,

With this aristocratic pride came a new understanding of human worth, not perhaps so splendid as the Homeric cult of honour, but interested in many matters of which Homer was indeed conscious, but thought inappropriate to his heroes. What he had kept for his similes, poets now made matters of central interest as they wrote about the contemporary world with a keen sense of its significance. All this meant

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17. E. A. Havelock, (1978), pp. 56-57, has argued convincingly that the society reported by Homer was of his own time. This was particularly evident in the *Odyssey*.



that poetry was free to advance in new directions and to reflect the actual scene directly without having to shape it into images of the past.<sup>18</sup>

The freedom "to advance in new directions", to dispense with the distant heroic past as a necessary backdrop, could only be achieved once a change in the actual means of composition could be effected.

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There can be little doubt that Hesiod's poems marked a distinctive turning point<sup>19</sup> since it was with his works that the "advance in new directions" was first clearly articulated. Hesiod has been credited with two major works: the *Theogony*, which dealt with the genealogy of the gods and the nature of order in the world; and *The Works and Days*, which dealt, in broad terms, with strife and injustice in the world and how to overcome them. The latter poem was both personal and general. It was personal because it articulated the particular plight of Hesiod himself who felt that he had been unjustly denied his rightful claim to his land by his brother Perses. But it was general in the sense that it echoed the plight of many small landholders who were being denied just treatment by the rapaciousness of the rising aristocracy in land dealings.

Compared with *The Works and Days*, the *Theogony* appears to be more removed from the concerns of everyday affairs because of its pre-

18. C. M. Bowra, (1970), pp. 57-58.

19. It might be thought that this honour belongs to Homer since his poems stand at the end of the oral tradition and at the start of Greek literature generally. Many histories of Greek literature begin with Homer (e.g. H. Frankel, (1975)). In a sense this is correct. But since Homer's works, as far as can be determined, more closely approximate oral songs, it is perhaps more fitting to regard Hesiod as representative of new directions. While a case can be made for Homer (e.g. J. A. Russo, (1968)) the break with tradition is sporadic at best whereas Hesiod's is more or less definitive.

occupation with the affairs of the gods. Yet the *Theogony* shared with *The Works and Days* the common theme of order in the world. In detailing what he saw as the correct genealogy of the gods, Hesiod was also providing an account of the "development of the divine essence from chaos and conflict to intellectual order and harmony".<sup>20</sup> A plea for a recognition of the inherent order in the world would have lost some of its force if the world of the gods was accepted as being disorderly and arbitrary. By showing, in the *Theogony*, how the gods came to be "wise, peaceful, orderly, and just deities under the unified leadership of Zeus",<sup>21</sup> Hesiod was able to set the scene for his central message in *The Works and Days* that there was "due order in nature" guaranteed by the gods and that humans ignored it at their peril.<sup>22</sup> And as both Versenyi and Havelock have argued, Hesiod's approach to the problem of justice marked a change in direction in the way in which such a problem was understood and treated.<sup>23</sup>

While it may be the case, as Sinclair suggested,<sup>24</sup> that the *Theogony* was not as radically innovative as *The Works and Days*, the fact remains that many of the transformations mentioned above were present in

20. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 44.

21. *ibid.*, p. 52.

22. *ibid.*, p. 52 and p. 54.

23. *ibid.*, p. 47. E. A. Havelock, (1978), Chapter 11. In her review of Havelock's (1978), McKenzie (1982) made the claim that Havelock's chapter on Hesiod was a bad case of plagiarism but she failed to mention Havelock's unacknowledged source. Given the strong similarities between Versenyi's and Havelock's respective analyses and that Versenyi's work was published before Havelock's it may have been that she had Versenyi's work in mind when she made the claim. But her claim is weakened to some extent because (1) it is quite possible for two authors working on the same material at the same time to reach similar conclusions independently of each other; and (2) Havelock had foreshadowed some of his views in two earlier works: (1963), Chapter VI, and "Thoughtful Hesiod", *Yale Classical Studies*, Volume XX, 1966, pp. 61-72. (Reprinted in his (1982) pp. 208-219.).

24. T. A. Sinclair, (1973), p. 72.

the *Theogony*, especially in its opening proem.

Let us begin our singing  
from the Helikonian Muses

...

And it was they who once taught Hesiod  
his splendid singing  
As he was shepherding his lambs  
on holy Helikon,  
and these were the first words of all  
the goddesses spoke to me,  
the Muses of Olympia, daughters of Zeus  
of the aegis:  
"You shepherds of the wilderness, poor  
fools, nothing but bellies,  
we know how to say many false things  
that seem like true sayings,  
but we know also how to speak the truth  
when we wish to."  
So they spoke, these mistresses of words,  
daughters of great Zeus,  
and they broke off and handed me a staff  
of strong-growing  
olive shoot, a wonderful thing;  
they breathed a voice into me,  
and the power to sing the story of things  
of the future, and things past.  
They told me to sing the race  
of the blessed gods everlasting,  
but always to put themselves<sup>25</sup>  
at the beginning and end of my singing.

Like Homer, Hesiod continued the tradition of invoking the Muses as his source of inspiration and ultimate authority for his words. And like Homer, he also retained the hexameter verse form (for both poems) as his medium of expression<sup>26</sup> since his audience knew only that song form. Moreover, the specific content of the *Theogony* was well suited to the epic narrative style;<sup>27</sup> although it needs to be understood that the content of *The Works and Days* was much less suited to the epic style.

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25. *Theogony*, l.1 and ll. 22-32. All citations from Hesiod's poetry are from *The Works and Days: Theogony: The Shield of Herakles*, trans. by Richmond Lattimore, (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, 1959) unless otherwise noted.

26. As L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 65 noted, citing T. A. Sinclair, Hesiod "did not use verse because he was writing poetry, but because verse was the only known medium". See also C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 160.

27. C. R. Beye, (1972), pp.89-90.

Unlike Homer, Hesiod made it clear that he was the author of his songs. This became more pronounced in *The Works and Days*, where he became the subject of, and his personal experiences were the occasion for, the poem. While dutifully acknowledging the Muses as his mentors, Hesiod left his audience in no doubt as to who had created his poems. This marked a clear break with the oral tradition because the *oidoi* were, for all intents and purposes, merely the bearers of the songs, and as such, remained anonymous. Once the idea of authorship was established, the individual poet achieved a new importance because his or her work was available not just for their own lifetime but for subsequent generations as well. The poet's potential audience was thus expanded quite radically,<sup>28</sup> and with that shift came the impetus to proclaim "not just the particular but even more the universal and the eternal".<sup>29</sup> This brought with it a new responsibility for poets,<sup>30</sup> particularly Hesiod, in as much as the new poets laid claim to an authority extending beyond that which could be made by the *oidoi*. Hesiod invoked

a distant past when poets were prophets,  
and spoke with the tongues of gods, but  
such a claim was apt enough in his own  
time when the old art of epic was losing  
its supremacy, and yet poetry still had  
a part to play in social life and need-  
ed all the authority that it could summon.<sup>31</sup>

The need for authority became imperative once Hesiod made explicit his view that the gods did not always speak truly.

Within the oral tradition there was no question of the gods

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28. This does not presume the existence of a ready-made reading public, only that a poet's work could now outlive him or her.

29. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 67.

30. *ibid.*, p. 67.

31. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 61.

speaking truly or falsely; they simply spoke. But by attributing to the Helikonian Muses these words,

We know how to say many false things  
that seem like true sayings,  
but we also know how to speak the truth  
when we wish to,<sup>32</sup>

Hesiod introduced a dichotomy that went beyond the issue of the truth and falsity of what could be revealed by the gods. He introduced doubts as to what is. If the gods could make false appear true then it was no longer sufficient to take things at their face value since appearance and reality need not necessarily coincide. It was necessary for people to probe and question what appeared to be the case if they were ever to arrive at reality and truth. Hesiod established the writer as an arbiter of truth,<sup>33</sup> but as Snell pointed out, it was truth as defined by the writer rather than tradition.<sup>34</sup> Hesiod challenged the *mythos* of the oral tradition with the (private) *logos* of his poems.

The theme of speaking truly or well<sup>35</sup> was also central to *The Works and Days*. Thus,

To you, Perses, I would describe<sup>36</sup>  
the true way of existence. ...

Or if you will, I will outline it  
for you in a different story,  
well and knowledgeably ...<sup>37</sup>

I mean you well, Perses, you great idiot,  
and I will tell you. ...<sup>38</sup>

32. *Theogony*, ll. 27-28.

33. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 43-44.

34. Bruno Snell, (1982), p. 139.

35. Hesiod appears to regard speaking truly and speaking well as meaning the same thing.

36. *The Works and Days*, l. 10.

37. *The Works and Days*, ll. 106-107.

38. *The Works and Days*, l. 286.

That man, too, is admirable who follows  
 one who speaks well.  
 He who cannot see the truth for himself, nor,  
 hearing it from others,  
 store it away in his mind,<sup>39</sup> that man  
 is utterly useless. ...

... Do not let appearance<sup>40</sup>  
 confound perception.

From the above it is evident that Hesiod was concerned to emphasise his belief that the truth was open to all who were capable of making the effort to seek it. Throughout the poem Hesiod emphasised his intention to speak truly and, if people heeded his words, would themselves find the truth.

Closely related to Hesiod's concern for what he regarded as being true was his elaboration of an historical awareness. In both poems, Hesiod made explicit the fact that the present differed from past ages. In the *Theogony* his account of the transition of the world of the gods from an existence of strife to one of orderliness and justness demonstrated the existence of historical change. In *The Works and Days*, he was even more explicit. There he recounted the sequence of the Five Ages. Beginning with the Golden Age when people lived a life of plenty and bliss, Hesiod told of the degeneration of humanity down through the Silver, Bronze, and Heroic Ages eventually reaching his own Iron Age which he regarded with loathing.<sup>41</sup> This awareness or sense of history set Hesiod apart from his *oidic* forerunners.

Hesiod gave further evidence of his sense of history in that he offered alternative accounts of the same phenomenon; namely the prevalence of injustice in the world. The first account was of the tale

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39. *The Works and Days*, ll. 295-297.

40. *The Works and Days*, l. 714.

41. *The Works and Days*, ll. 109-180.

of the two Strifes<sup>42</sup> in which one was hateful and thrived on war and slaughter<sup>43</sup> whereas the other Strife was kinder and friendlier towards mortals.<sup>44</sup> In so doing, Hesiod denied the truth conveyed by tradition that "there was only one kind of strife".<sup>45</sup> The other explanation that Hesiod offered was that of the Five Ages. In both accounts Hesiod made it clear that the mortals' refusal or inability to live as the gods had ordained caused their misfortunes. As Versenyi pointed out, by posing alternative explanations Hesiod had changed the role of the audience. They now had to choose between two, often conflicting, accounts.<sup>46</sup> This was a novel approach because it went against the oral tradition of *mythos* in which *aletheia* was simply a matter of surface revelation by an *aoidos*. Hesiod's accounts were of an entirely different order in that whatever truth they contained was "a hidden, underlying truth".<sup>47</sup>

The audiences, when confronted with Hesiod's poems, had to interpret what he was saying. For implicit in Hesiod's accounts was the novel view that moral reform, the realisation of Olympian justice in the world of mortals, was possible. It was that possibility that gave his poems their unity and direction, particularly *The Works and Days*.<sup>48</sup> But it was a different sort of unity to that which obtained in the songs of the oral tradition. Gone was the strictly paratactic structure. In its place was a unity in which each constituent part had to subserve the whole. While this was not strictly true of the *Theogony* it was

42. *The Works and Days*, ll. 11-105.

43. *The Works and Days*, ll. 13-15.

44. *The Works and Days*, ll. 16-24.

45. *The Works and Days*, ll. 11-12.

46. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 45.

47. *ibid.*, p. 45.

48. *ibid.*, p. 47.

nevertheless true of *The Works and Days*, where the diverse elements treated by Hesiod combined to create depths of meaning that had not been possible before. That sort of unity underlined the need for audiences to interpret the poet's ideas and seek out the truths contained within the poems.

Furthermore, as Havelock pointed out, Hesiod addressed himself to particular topics<sup>49</sup> (e.g. justice, the gods, correct living, and so on), thereby diminishing the centrality of the narrative flow so essential to oral songs. What was important for Hesiod was the interconnections and inter-relationships between the various subjects of his poems, particularly *The Works and days*. Versenyi noted that, on the surface, *The Works and Days* appeared to be more paratactic than, for example, the *Iliad*.<sup>50</sup> However, he also noted that this was in reality a superficial parataxis, because Hesiod was really concerned with a search for underlying and unifying principles.<sup>51</sup> This distinguished Hesiod from his *oidic* predecessors because notions of justice, order, morality had, for them, remained "a method, not a principle".<sup>52</sup> Such notions in oral songs were *demonstrated* with vividness and splendour by concrete and particular instances whereas for Hesiod such instances became occasions for generality and universality.

Although Hesiod made use of traditional and formulaic materials, he attempted to extend their accepted meanings beyond particular referents. For example, in his elaboration of the Five Ages, he was concerned with general characterisations that could illuminate each age

49. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 193.

50. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 55.

51. *ibid.*, p. 47 ff..

52. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 217.



and their transition from one to the other. Names and places were introduced to make explicit the race and age rather than for their own intrinsic value.<sup>53</sup> In both the *Theogony* and *The Works and Days* (though perhaps more explicitly in the latter) Hesiod began a process of depersonalising the gods and deities. While still retaining their basic anthropomorphic images, Hesiod attempted to make such images "embodiments of abstract principles".<sup>54</sup> Although the same might be said of the Homeric images, the difference between Homer's and Hesiod's approach was that for Hesiod these images were "expressive of the sameness in all diverse concrete things".<sup>55</sup> That is, for Hesiod, there was a sense of unity in diversity and change. Although there were visible changes in the world, such changes were but evidence for postulating a deeper, more unifying set of relationships or principles.

Thus Hesiod began a tradition followed by many subsequent poets, historians, and philosophers in the Greek world of attempting to reduce the "many" to the "one".<sup>56</sup> Hesiod was one of the first Greek writers to articulate the sense of unity in diversity, of continuity in change.

He did this by focussing on the differences between appearance and reality, between what was true and what was claimed to be true by others. The shift to a more abstract approach exemplified Hesiod's method. This shift

depends not on single words treated as phenomena per se, but on their being placed in a given relationship to one another. ... What is in question is the

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53. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 47.

54. *ibid.*, p. 60.

55. *ibid.*, p. 63.

56. For a general discussion of this process see A. W. H. Adkins, (1970); M. C. Stokes, *One and Many in Pre-Socratic Philosophy*, (Centre for Hellenic Studies, Washington D.C., 1971).

ability of the human mind to create and manipulate theoretic statements as opposed to particular ones, to replace a performative syntax with a logical one.<sup>57</sup>

Although Hesiod cannot be said to have created a totally logical syntax in the sense that his thoughts depended only upon the relationships of abstract logic, he was, nevertheless, the first of the Greek writers to have attempted to focus on a unity that transcended the particular. It was the connections between particulars and the generality of such connections that began to be made explicit in Hesiod's poems.

To some extent Hesiod was successful. He was, however, hampered by the medium of the hexameter. Compared with the style and language of Homer, that of Hesiod has been deemed much terser,<sup>58</sup> or at least far more laboured.<sup>59</sup> Yet despite the limitations, Hesiod succeeded in conveying his shift in emphasis and direction. In particular, Hesiod succeeded in drawing attention to the meaning of what he was trying to say. He thereby established a new form of literary unity in addressing Greek knowledge and values.

In the epic, the meaning of a word or phrase had to be as transparent as possible all at once, and the same formula was used in much the same sense in much the same situation again and again. But Hesiod not only loosens formulaic use by punctuating his poem with pregnant key words (*dike, ergon, metron, etc.*) rather than formulas, with words chosen for their meaning rather than their metrical fitness, he also breaks the strict rigidity of formulaic use by developing and augmenting the meaning of his words through repetition in *different* contexts with *different* antitheses. ... With

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57. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 224.  
 58. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 65.  
 59. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 58.

the emphasis on underlying, conceptual sameness, revelation in Hesiod becomes a process rather than a lightning flash, and growth in meaning takes the place of instant disclosure and subsequent repetition without enrichment.<sup>60</sup>

Hesiod's achievement was thus in his ability to use the traditional medium to convey his particular non-Homeric vision of the world. In so doing, Hesiod's poems marked a definitive break with the oral tradition and the establishment of a new, literary based tradition.

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It was with those poets who came after Hesiod that the epic hexameter verse form, so strained but nevertheless left intact by Hesiod, underwent its transformation into a myriad of new metres and verse forms. Within the broad class of what became known as lyric poetry<sup>61</sup> two verse forms were particularly important: elegy and iambic. Elegy was closest to the epic hexameter in that an elegaic couplet consisted of "an ordinary hexameter line followed by a line of  $2\frac{1}{2} + 2\frac{1}{2}$  feet, each being the beginning of a hexameter line with a strong caesura in the third foot".<sup>62</sup> Iambic was, perhaps, the most removed from the hexameter in that it has come to be regarded as the metre most closely approximating the everyday speech of the Greeks.<sup>63</sup> Archilochus used both the elegy and the iambic in his poems. Sappho wrote in what may be regarded as a

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60. *ibid.*, p. 59. (Emphasis in original).

61. Strictly speaking, lyric poetry was poetry accompanied by the lyre. To use the term 'lyric' to encompass non-lyre based poetry may constitute something of a liberty but poems of this period, whether written for the lyre or not, shared many common characteristics. As such the term 'lyric' remains the best shorthand term for describing such poetry in a general collective fashion. See the prefatory comments in Richmond Lattimore, *Greek Lyrics*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1960) pp. iii-iv.

62. T. A. Sinclair, (1973), p. 92.

63. *ibid.*, p. 103. Sinclair also noted that Archilochus should be regarded as the "father of Iambic" (p. 105).

purist form of lyric,<sup>64</sup> and was regarded by the Greeks as the greatest of all the lyric poets.<sup>65</sup>

Lyric poetry was characterised by an increasing use of the vernacular which brought into the domain of poetry ordinary language in contrast to the heroic tenor of the Homeric epic. This was perhaps aided by the fact that lyric poetry was characteristically brief, exhibiting an economy of style and expression.<sup>66</sup> In addition, lyric poetry, following the precedent set by Hesiod, consolidated the emergence of the individual personality of the poet. The lyric poets unashamedly paraded their commitment to making themselves the subjects of their poems, in articulating their passionate laments. As Snell pointed out, this was "perhaps the most striking difference between the two genres" of epic and lyric.<sup>67</sup>

Subjectivity, in the sense that the poet became his or her own hero, was the hallmark of lyric poetry.<sup>68</sup> The personal feelings of the poets, their lived experiences, provided the fulcrum around which lyric poetry became focussed, inwards rather than outwards. But even though lyric poetry was intensely inner directed, the very nature of the subject matter was bound to strike familiar chords with those who heard or read them. The lyric poet thereby articulated views that transcended the particular occasion for writing them, and opened up the private domain of feelings and emotions to the public realm. The following examples selected from what has survived of Archilochus' and Sappho's

64. R. Lattimore, (1960), p. v.

65. M. Hadas, (1950), p. 44.

66. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 71.

67. B. Snell, (1982), p. 44.

68. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 74.

poems will give some indication of this development.<sup>69</sup>

Some barbarian is waving my shield, since I was obliged to  
leave that perfectly good piece of equipment behind  
under a bush. But I got away, so what does it matter?  
Let the shield go; I can buy another one equally good.

(Archilochus [3])

Heart, my heart, so battered with misfortune far  
beyond your strength,  
up and face the men who hate us. Bare your chest  
to the assault  
of the enemy, and fight them off. Stand fast among  
the beamlike spears.  
Give no ground; and if you beat them, do not brag  
in open show,  
nor, if they beat you, run home and lie down on  
your bed and cry.  
Keep some measure in the joy you take in luck, and  
the degree  
you give way to sorrow. All our life is up-and-down  
like this.

(Archilochus [9])

Nothing will surprise me any more, nor be too wonderful  
for belief, now that the lord upon Olympus, father Zeus,  
dimmed the daylight and made the darkness come upon us  
in the noon  
and the sunshine. So limp terror has descended on  
mankind.  
After this, men can believe in anything. They can expect  
anything. Be not astonished anymore, ...

(Archilochus [10])

I will make nothing better by crying, I will make nothing  
worse by giving myself what entertainment I can.

(Archilochus [11])

slammed by the surf on the beach  
naked at Salymydessos, where the screw-haired men  
of Thrace, taking him in  
will entertain him (he will have much to undergo,  
chewing on slavery's bread)  
stiffened with cold, and loops of seaweed from the slime  
tangling his body about,  
teeth chattering as he lies in abject helplessness  
flat on his face like a dog  
beside the beach-break where the waves come shattering in.  
And let me be there to watch;

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69. All citations for Archilochus are taken from *Greek Lyrics*, trans. by R. Lattimore). The numbers in square brackets refer to the numbering used by Lattimore for the fragments. Citations and translations for Sappho are as indicated.

for he did me wrong and set his heel upon our good faith,  
he who had once been my friend.

(Archilochus [23])

Here I lie mournful with desire,  
feeble in bitterness of the pain gods have inflicted upon me,  
stuck through the bones with love.

(Archilochus [24])

Such is the passion for love that has twisted its way  
beneath my heartstrings  
and closed deep mist across my eyes  
stealing the soft heart inside my body. ...

(Archilochus [26])

No man is respected, no man spoken of, when he is dead  
by his townsmen. All of us, when still alive, will cultivate  
the live man, and thus the dead will always have the  
worst of it.

(Archilochus [32])

One main thing I understand,  
to come back with deadly evil at the man who does me wrong.

(Archilochus [33])

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Immortal Aphrodite of the patterned throne, daughter of  
Zeus, weaver of wiles, I beseech thee, subdue not with  
pangs or sorrows, lady, my heart, but come hither, if  
before at other times thou didst here my voice from afar  
and hearken to it, and leaving thy father's golden house  
didst come yoking thy chariot. Fair swift sparrows brought  
thee over the black earth, fluttering their multitudinous  
wings, from the sky through the air between, and swiftly  
they came. And thou, Blessed One, smiling with immortal  
countenance didst ask what again is the matter with me,  
and why again I call, and what now most of all in my  
frenzied heart I wish to happen: 'Whom now dost thou wish  
Persuasion to lead into thy affection? Who, Sappho, wrongs  
thee? Even if now she flees, soon shall she pursue: if she  
receives not gifts, yet she shall give, and if she loves  
not, soon shall she love, even though she would not.'  
Come to me now also, and deliver me from harsh cares, and  
all that my heart longs to accomplish, do thou accomplish,  
and do thou thyself be my ally.

(Sappho [1])<sup>70</sup>

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70. Cited in B. Snell, (1982), pp. 56-57 (trans. by C. M. Bowra).  
The numbers in square brackets indicates the fragment numbering used by  
most scholars.

That man appears to me to equal the gods who sits before you,  
and by your side hears your sweet speech and your charming  
laughter which has put wings on the heart in my breast.  
When I look at you but once, my speech ceases to obey me.  
My tongue is broken, a subtle fire creeps under my skin,  
my eyes see nothing, my ears begin to ring. Sweat pours  
down over my limbs, a trembling seizes me from head to toe,  
I am paler than grass, and I appear close to death. But one  
can endure all ...

(Sappho [2])<sup>71</sup>

Some say an army of horsemen is the fairest thing on the  
black earth, others an army of footsoldiers, and others a  
navy of ships — but I say the fairest thing is one I love.

(Sappho [27])<sup>72</sup>

Truly I wish I were dead. She cried much when she left me,  
and said: 'Alas, how terrible is our fate. Sappho, very  
much against my will I am leaving you'.  
I answered her: 'Go with good cheer, and remember me;  
you know how much we loved you. ...'

(Sappho [96])<sup>73</sup>

... Eros has shaken my soul  
like a mountain-wind falling upon oaks.

(Sappho [50])<sup>74</sup>

Once more Eros, looser of limbs, drives me about,  
a bitter-sweet creature which puts me at a loss.

(Sappho [137])<sup>75</sup>

It is quite clear from these passages that both poets were offering a personalised view of their experiences. Their own emotions rather than some traditionally held archetypal vision formed the focal point for their interpretation of their respective existential situations.

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71. Cited in B. Snell, (1982), p. 52 (trans. by Snell). Note that the poem is not complete and in Lattimore's rendering, *Greek Lyrics*, pp.39-40, the last five words are omitted.

72. Cited in B. Snell, (1982), p. 47 (trans. by Snell).

73. Cited in B. Snell, (1982), p. 67 (trans. by Snell).

74. Cited in L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 79 (trans. by Versenyi).

75. Cited in B. Snell, (1982), p. 53 (trans. by Snell).

The poets looked to themselves for the "touchstones" to guide their thoughts and shape their values. In particular, the influence of traditional values, as perhaps expressed by Homer, was diminishing. For example Archilochus, who was both warrior and poet,<sup>76</sup> in Fr. [3] offered a view of the relationship between a soldier and his armour that was totally un-Homeric, or at least at odds with the commonly accepted view exhibited in the heroic outlook. There, a warrior was his armour; the armour enhanced the warrior's splendour and symbolised his valour. To abandon one's armour was unthinkable, especially according to the Spartan code where a warrior either returned from battle "carrying his shield or stretched out upon it".<sup>77</sup> Archilochus was more concerned with the preservation of self (which for him was irreplaceable) rather than a piece of armour (which was replaceable). Bowra described this as a "realistic" appraisal of soldiering, "neither exaggerating nor concealing anything".<sup>78</sup> Contrary to the Homeric outlook, Archilochus regarded being as more important than appearance. The surface manifestations of being (i.e. armour, clothes, etc.) were transitory and of little value when compared with the gamut of emotions which arise from one's inner being. Similarly for Sappho the important values centred on the emotions. The values of the wider world paled beside those which reigned (or at least were perceived to reign) within one's being.

The emphasis for both poets was on the universality of emotions

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76. As is revealed in his famous epigram:

I am two things: a fighter who follows the Master of Battles,  
and one who understands the gift of the Muses' love.

(*Greek Lyrics*, Archilochus [1])

77. B. Snell, (1982), p. 49.

78. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 67. See also L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 75; B. Snell, (1982), pp. 49-51.



like love, hate, fear, pleasure, etc.. The separation of being and appearance was taken to radical extremes in such personal poetry. But this was in contrast to Hesiod, who sought for unifying principles in the external world by questioning appearances. If anything can be said to have been a unifying principle for the lyric poets it was a common feeling that the world was arbitrary and contingent, hence one was obliged to savour the moment because only that was real.<sup>79</sup> Versenyi puts this point into perspective.

The lyric self is nothing like the often flat, paratactically gathered, and largely unchanging surface image encountered in the *Iliad*; nor is it the sober, prosaic, pragmatic-rational self of the *Erga*. It is a thoroughly mutable, sensuous and sensual, affective self, abysmally deep yet ephemeral and ungraspable. Its revelation, playful or sorrowful, brings no useful, usable insight. Its discovery solves no problems and provides no cures. Its experience is self-contained: it can only be enjoyed or endured immediately.<sup>80</sup>

The focus on self by the lyric poets revealed a concern for a truth or reality that was mediated, even defined, by a person's experiences.

It needs to be stressed, however, that although the emotions were experienced from within, their source remained external. The gods, particularly Eros, were the source of these emotions, but the emotions then gave rise to a turmoil that was personal.

Only the emotional discord released by unhappy love is truly personal. In spite of the wilfulness of Archilochus, or the profundity of Sappho, they do not lose themselves in the abyss of their own sensations. ... They always address themselves

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79. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 77-78.

80. *ibid.*, p. 83. Similar views have been offered by B. Snell, (1982), p. 65 ff. and C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 64 and p. 93, although it needs to be noted that both Snell and Bowra offered slightly different emphases and lines of argument, both from each other and from Versenyi.

to a partner, either a deity — especially in prayer — or an individual or an entire group of men. Though the individual who detaches himself from his environment severs many old bonds, his discovery of the dimension of the soul once more joins him in the same company with those who have fought their way to the same insight. The isolation of the individual is<sup>81</sup> by the same token, the forging of new bonds.

The gods remained the prime movers of the affairs of the world. In this respect lyric poetry shared some continuity with the earlier Homeric outlook. One had to endure what the gods had ordained. Much of what Archilochus and Sappho had to say revealed a strong sense of resignation (e.g. Archilochus [3], [9], [11], [32]; Sappho [1], [2], [96]) and powerlessness (e.g. Archilochus [9], [10], [24], [26]; Sappho [2], [50], [137]) in the face of the inevitable.<sup>82</sup>

Yet the very act of putting such feelings in writing suggests an attempt to come to terms with them. In so doing, lyric poetry portrayed an image or view of the human body that was quite alien to that to be found in Homer's epics where the body itself was regarded as the passive site of external influences.<sup>83</sup> The lyric poets redefined the body as a unique entity which, through the mediation of the self, could take some responsibility for the emotional turmoil it experienced. Indeed, it was the 'self' which began to emerge as a result of this redefinition of the body. Such a redefinition, however, was not immediately apparent in all lyric poetry but emerged gradually in the unfolding of personal

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81. B. Snell, (1982), p. 65. It is unfortunate that Snell used the word 'men' in the phrase "entire group of men" when delineating possible "addressees" for a lyric poet. While it may have been true that there were few women lyric poets or "addressees" it nevertheless remains the case that there were women lyric poets as the example of Sappho demonstrates. And she most definitely addressed herself primarily to women. Clearly, the intended generic sense of 'men' in the above quote is erroneous and gives a distorted, even man-sided, view of the nature of lyric poetry.

82. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 84-85.

83. Recall the discussion in Chapter 2, pp. 82-86, especially Feyrabend's view that the Homeric body was understood as "an exchange station of influences".

reflections in the wider lyric tradition.

The significant feature of this redefinition was the lyric poets' treatment of the soul as an active site of contradictory feelings. In a very real sense, the soul became identified with the understanding of the 'self'. The soul, and by implication the 'self', became a more abstract conception as compared with the Homeric outlook in which the soul was analagous to other bodily organs.<sup>84</sup> In the Homeric conception, changes to the soul were always separate in time.<sup>85</sup> Such changes occurred singularly and discretely, one change following another. This reflected the paratactic or serial nature of oral versification. But for the lyric poets there grew an awareness that the soul could contain simultaneously contradictory feelings, as revealed in Sappho's characterisation of Eros as "bitter-sweet" (Sappho [137]). As Snell pointed out, this was a "bold neologism" that "bore a clear and fresh design"<sup>86</sup> and it enabled Sappho to articulate a view of the soul as uniquely distinct from other aspects of the body. But this was not due just to "bold neologisms". It was directly related to the new medium of composition used by the lyric poets, namely the written word. The paratactic bonds of orally preserved discourse could be transcended. It became possible to express multi-dimensionality and simultaneity as compared with the more uni-dimensional<sup>87</sup> approach characteristic of Homer's epics. For lyric poets like Sappho and Archilochus, the soul was in a continual state of flux. This paralleled, to some extent at least, the lyric poets' com-

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84. B. Snell, (1982), p. 59.

85. *ibid.*, p. 60.

86. *ibid.*, p. 60. The analysis given by K. von Fritz in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (ed.), (1974), underlines much of the above with respect to the transition of Homeric terms into the more familiar terms of philosophical discourse.

87. Cf. the remarks of Versenyi quoted earlier p. 123 n 80, *supra*.

prehension of reality, a comprehension that could be articulated with some success once writing became available. Within lyric poetry, it became possible to articulate a range of knowledge and values that were more consonant with the lived experiences of those doing the articulating.

Although lyric poetry tended to move in a direction different from that established by Hesiod, it nevertheless contributed significantly to the transformations, spelled out earlier in this chapter, that occurred when a literary-based mode of discourse began to be established. The transformation from oral *mythos* to the *logos* of the written word was still far from complete. However, the developments within lyric poetry provided a substantial move in that direction.<sup>88</sup>

\* \* \* \* \*

Solon too was a lyric poet of some repute, but he pursued a direction more in keeping with that of Hesiod. In many of his poems, Solon concentrated on worldly events using both elegies and hexameters to articulate a vision of how people should order their affairs. Like Hesiod, Solon was concerned with justice and order, but unlike Hesiod, Solon was in the unique position of being able to implement his vision. The following excerpts from his writings give some indication of his views.<sup>89</sup>

Shining daughters of Memory and Zeus on Olympos,  
Muses, Pierides, listen to me in my prayers.  
Grant me, at the hands of the blessed immortals, prosperity,  
and always a high degree in the opinion of men.

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88. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 85 put it too strongly when he suggested that "lyric poetry represents a step from (Homeric) *mythos* not to (Hesiodic) *logos* but to *pathos*". Such a view implies that *pathos* was absent from Homer's songs, a clearly untenable implication. While it is true (as Versenyi acknowledged) that lyric moved in a different direction to Hesiod, its emphasis on *pathos* was hardly new. Rather, the focus of such *pathos* was new in so far as it emphasised the personal sense of *pathos* rather than the social sense that pervaded Homer's treatment of *pathos*.

89. All citations of Solon's writings are from *Greek Lyrics*, (1960). The numbers in square brackets refer to Lattimore's numbering of Solon's poems.

So shall I bring pleasure to friends and pain to my enemies,  
 and my friends look on me in admiration, the others in fear.  
 My desire is to have riches; but win them unjustly  
 I will not, for retribution must then come my way.  
 When it is the gods who are giving it, wealth befalls a man as  
 some solid plant, firm set from base of stock to the crest;  
 but cultivated with violence, it comes against nature,  
 dragged and obedient under direction of crimes,  
 all unwilling it follows, and ruin is there in a moment.  
 The beginning of disaster is not much, as when a fire  
 burns small in its first stages and ends in catastrophe. As  
 fire's course is, such is the course taken by human misdeeds.  
 But Zeus forever is watching the end, and strikes of a sudden,  
 as when a storm in spring abruptly scatters the clouds  
 and dredges up from the depth the open and heaving water  
 where waves roll, and sweeping on across the generous land,  
 leaves in wreckage fair work men have done, till it hits the  
 headlong sky, the gods' home, and the air is shining on  
 every side  
 you look, and the blaze of the sun breaks out on the fertile  
 acres in all its splendor, and there are no more clouds  
 to be seen.  
 Such is the punishment Zeus gives, he does not, like a mortal,  
 fall in a rage over each particular thing, and yet  
 it never escapes him all the way when a man has a sinful  
 spirit; and always, in the end, his judgement is plain.  
 One man has to pay at once, one later, while others  
 altogether escape overtaking by the gods' doom;  
 but then it always comes in aftertime, and the innocent  
 pay, the sons of the sinners or those born long afterward.

(Solon [1])

This city of ours will never be destroyed by the planning  
 of Zeus, nor according to the wish of the immortal gods;  
 such is she who, great hearted, mightily fathered, protects us,  
 Pallas Athene, whose hands are stretched out over our heads.  
 But the citizens themselves in their wildness are bent on de-  
 struction of their great city, and money is the compulsive  
 cause.  
 The leaders of the people are evil-minded. The next stage  
 will be great suffering, recompense for their violent acts,  
 for they do not know enough to restrain their greed and appor-  
 tion orderly shares for all as if at a decorous feast.  
 .....  
 they are tempted into unrighteous acts and grow rich.  
 .....  
 sparing the property neither of the public nor of the gods,  
 they go on stealing, by force or deception, each from the other,  
 nor do the solemn commitments of Justice keep them in check;  
 but she knows well, though silent, what happens and what has  
 been happening, and in her time she returns to extract full  
 revenge;  
 for it comes upon the entire city as a wound beyond healing  
 and quickly it happens that foul slavery is the result,

and slavery wakens internal strife, and sleeping warfare,  
 and this again destroys many in the pride of their youth,  
 for from enemies! devising our much-adored city is afflicted  
 before long by conspiracies so dear to wicked men.

.....  
 So my spirit dictates to me: I must tell the Athenians  
 how many evils a city suffers from Bad Government,  
 and how Good Government displays all neatness and order,  
 and many times she must put shackles on the breakers of laws.  
 She levels up rough places, stops Glut and Greed, takes the  
 force from Violence; she dries up the growing flowers of  
 Despair as they grow;  
 she straightens out crooked judgements given, gentles the swol-  
 len ambitions, and puts an end to acts of divisional strife;  
 she stills the gall of wearisome Hate, and under her influence  
 all life among mankind is harmonious and does well.

(Solon [2])

I gave the people as much privilege as they have a right to:  
 I neither degraded them from rank nor gave them free hand;  
 and for those who already held power and were envied for money;  
 I worked it out that they also should have no cause for  
 complaint.  
 I stood there holding my sturdy shield over both the parties;  
 I would not let either side win a victory that was wrong.

.....  
 Thus would the people be best off, with the leaders they fol-  
 low: neither given excessive freedom nor put to restraint;  
 for Glut gives birth to Greed, when great prosperity suddenly  
 befalls those people who do not have an orderly mind.

.....  
 Acting where issues are great it is hard to please all.

((Solon [3]))

From these three excerpts it is clear that Solon shared Hesiod's view  
 of order and justice in due measure. More importantly, Solon shared  
 Hesiod's view of justice as a universal principle.

As can be seen from the first poem, Solon continued the oral  
 tradition's practice of invoking the Muses to introduce his poem. This  
 established Solon's *bona fide* status as a poet in the eyes of his  
 audience; the gods were his source of poetic inspiration or revelation

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as well as his guides in speaking only what was true. Elsewhere,<sup>90</sup> Solon had made it plain that other poets did not always speak truly but that he, with the help of the gods, could be trusted. Thus Solon asked the gods to grant him "always a high degree in the opinion of men" (Solon [1]), that is, that his authority as a poet should be accepted. Solon saw it as his task to "tell the Athenians how many evils a city suffers from bad Government, and how Good Government displays all neatness and order" (Solon [1]).

Much of Solon's style remained oral in as much as his verses lent themselves to memorisation in the oral manner.<sup>91</sup> Despite the new directions established by almost a century of lyric poetry, Solon wrote in the epic fashion employing hexameters and elegies to convey his ideas. This was not so much because Solon had an aversion to lyric forms but because his intention was undoubtedly to reach as wide an audience as possible. The emphasis had to be not just on conveying his thought but on effectively preserving it in the minds and memories of his audience. Hence a form of poetry which was most easily remembered was a necessity.<sup>92</sup> Although lyric forms were by then commonplace, they remained a predominantly personal form of poetry whereas Solon needed a form of verse which enabled the integration of personal and social views to be expressed with maximum clarity. Since Solon had the use of the technology of writing he was able to bend the hexameter structure to his particular needs.

As with Hesiod, the theme of moral reform pervades Solon's

90. The relevant passages of Solon's verse are cited by B. Snell, (1982), p. 90, and L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 90 who quotes the actual fragment.

91. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 262.

92. This was a slightly different "necessity" from that which restricted Hesiod since for Hesiod there was no alternative to the hexameter form.

writings. But Solon was perhaps more explicit than Hesiod in pointing to the necessity of justice as an overriding principle in ordering the affairs of mortals. With Solon, the folly of predicating an understanding of justice on the particular experiences of individuals was made explicit (Solon [1]). It became axiomatic for Solon that justice transcended individual concerns and remedies. Justice had to apply equally to all parties. Thus "I stood there holding my sturdy shield over both the parties; I would not let either side win a victory that was wrong" (Solon [3]); and in defending his stand, "I have made laws, for the good man and the bad alike, and shaped a rule to suit ..." (Solon [4]).<sup>93</sup> With Solon, the understanding of justice was pushed further in the direction of universality, towards abstract principle.

In Solon's works, justice was conceived as cyclic in the sense that injustice would inevitably bring forth its own retribution, either immediately or at some time in the future. For example, Solon's expressed desire for wealth was tempered by his view that such wealth had to be acquired justly, otherwise "retribution must then come my way" (Solon [1]). Generalising even further, Solon pointed to the universality of Zeus's punishment. Zeus does not "fall into a rage over each particular thing" as mortals are accustomed to do. Rather, Zeus takes a wider, more encompassing overview such that "One man has to pay at once, one later, while others altogether escape overtaking by the gods' doom" leaving the consequences of their actions to be borne by their descendants and heirs (Solon [1]). Injustice was not the result of the whims of the immortals but a direct result of the actions of humans themselves. The

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93. Solon [4] in *Greek Lyrics*, p. 22. The number in square brackets refers to Lattimore's numbering and corresponds to the more commonly accepted numbering of Solon [24] used by Versenyi, (1974); B. Snell, (1982).



"citizens themselves in their wildness are bent on the destruction of their great city" (Solon [2]). To blame the gods for one's misfortunes was to disclaim responsibility for one's actions and, most importantly for Solon, to feign ignorance concerning one's relationships with other human beings and hence with society. Retribution was a consequence of the act itself because it triggered a chain of events in which the inherent balance or harmony re-established itself at the expense of the wrong-doer (Solon [1], [2]).

There was no doubt in Solon's mind that the universe exhibited a basic harmony that was established and maintained by the gods. This harmony or inherent order could and should be understood by mortals. To be sure, Solon's understanding of the orderliness of the universe was not expressed in explicitly formulated laws of nature. Nevertheless, as Versenyi has suggested, "certain inevitable causal sequences — lightning-thunder, wind-waves, fire-destruction — and unbroken regularities — e.g., the order of the seasons — were well enough known"<sup>94</sup> so that such order could be used as a model for events in the domain of mortals. This orderliness was simultaneously natural and divine. It provided a framework for the affairs of human beings.<sup>95</sup> In the same way that transgression and retribution manifested itself in the world of nature, so too did it manifest itself in human affairs. Solon was not postulating a causal connection between "the world of nature and human fate"<sup>96</sup> but rather pointing to a discernible and defensible correspondence. Solon was attempting to demonstrate that the apparent arbitrariness

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94. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 259 n. 1.

95. *ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

96. B. Snell, (1982), p. 212.

of events, their seemingly unrelatedness, could be understood as being "linked" in some way. It was up to humans to apply their powers of intelligence to the problem of perceiving the patterns and correspondences and hence to gain the knowledge to set their own affairs in order.

Like Hesiod, Solon thought that the world of the gods was ordered and hence provided the model for humans to emulate. Solon's understanding of the world of the immortals was important in underpinning his world-view. In his poems, the process of depersonalisation of the gods proceeded even further than in Hesiod's works. Their names became symbols for the operation of forces in the world. While this symbolic, anthropomorphic conception of the gods could be said to be present in Homer's poems, the symbolism in Solon's poems was of a different order.<sup>97</sup> For Hesiod, and even more so for Solon, the symbolism was of a universal rather than particular, individuated kind. That is, the gods are no longer the sources of human actions but the guarantors of the limitations of human conduct.<sup>98</sup> As such, they became abstract universal symbols of the boundaries within which, and according to which, humans must live. As noted above, it was with humans that Solon saw that the responsibility lay for living a just life.

The key to achieving a just life was knowledge.<sup>99</sup> For Solon, ignorance of the true nature of justice and its manifestation in the world prevented people from freeing themselves from strife and turmoil. While he was aware of the limitations of the human powers of intelligence, he was nevertheless confident that knowledge was not beyond the Greeks of his day. His poems were written to convey his own knowledge, and

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97. *ibid.*, especially Chapter 2.

98. *ibid.*, p. 30.

99. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 73.

by writing down his ideas on justice in a form that was familiar, at least on the surface, to his fellow Greeks Solon demonstrated his faith in the written word.

Since Solon was also a legislator and hence was in the unique position of being able to enact his views, his poems served the dual purpose of explaining his actions as well as providing a justification of his beliefs. (This in itself illustrates the potential social roles of the written word.) Implicit in the act of making public his views was the belief that the force of his argument was evident to all who heard and read his poems. In Solon's poems, even more so than with Hesiod, the connections between particular ideas demonstrated the worldly relationships that he was trying to describe and explain.

The greater degrees of abstraction used in describing how the world is and should be, the increased moves away from oral *mythos*, the continued emphasis on the differences between what was true and what was claimed to be true, between what was real and what was thought to be real, between being and appearance, place Solon "on the threshold of philosophy".<sup>100</sup> This threshold must now be crossed so that the transformations outlined at the beginning of this chapter can be discussed in relation to those who have come to be regarded as philosophers rather than poets. That is the task of the next chapter.

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100. B. Snell, (1982), p. 212. See also the view expressed by L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 105 that "Solon still managed to make his thought, life, and work, a more harmonious whole than many a philosopher in later times".

## Chapter 4

### The Philosophical Form of Discourse:

#### Enter the Pre-Socratics

The poetic form of discourse established by the *poietai* emerged as the main means for the articulation of knowledge and values in the two centuries following the introduction of alphabetic writing in the Greek world. Although not all the products of this form of discourse could be so described, those which were primarily concerned with the general problems of knowledge and values have come to be regarded as constituting a tradition known as "wisdom literature". This was defined by Kahn to encompass "the popular tradition of wisdom represented by the poets and by the sages of the early sixth century, including Solon".<sup>1</sup> The roots of this tradition extended into the oral tradition of the *oidoi* as has already been discussed. During this two hundred year period the poetic form of discourse held pride of place as the means to articulate and preserve this tradition.

By the early sixth century, however, other forms of discourse began to emerge. These newer forms were drama, history, and philosophy. During the sixth and fifth centuries, a diverse group of thinkers, commonly referred to as the pre-Socratics,<sup>2</sup> produced numerous works which provided the foundations for the philosophical form of discourse. These

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1. C. H. Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979) p. 9. A discussion of wisdom literature is also given by M. West, *Early Greek Philosophy and the Orient*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1971).

2. They have been deemed 'pre-Socratic' by scholars because of the fact that they predated Socrates of Athens (c. 420 B.C.) who has been traditionally regarded as having provided a distinctive turning point within the history of philosophy.

thinkers included Thales of Miletus (c. 585 B.C.), Anaximander of Miletus (c. 560 B.C.), Anaximenes of Miletus (c. 545 B.C.), Pythagoras of Samos (c. 530 B.C.), Xenophanes of Colophon (c. 520 B.C.), Heraclitus of Ephesus (c. 500 B.C.), Parmenides of Elea (c. 490 B.C.), Zeno of Elea (c. 450 B.C.), Empedocles of Acragas (c. 450 B.C.), Melissus of Samos, (c. 440 B.C.), Anaxagoras of Clazomenae (c. 450 B.C.), Leucippus of Miletus (or even possibly Elea)(c. 440 B.C.), and Democritus of Abdera (c. 430 B.C.).<sup>3</sup>

In this chapter, the works of some of these thinkers will be examined with a view to establishing that a distinctively new form of discourse was in the process of being created. (The specific issue of the relationship between philosophy and alphabetic writing, and whether the former presupposed the latter, will be addressed in the next chapter.) A second point, intimately related to the first, concerns giving a descriptive definition of philosophy as a form of discourse. Yet another point which deserves attention here is the way in which these thinkers articulated their thoughts and made them accessible to others. The development of the philosophical form of discourse has become associated with a shift to a prose style of writing to the extent that, within the literature, it is almost universally assumed that prose was the preferred style of writing used by philosophers. However, such an assumption is not self-evident, as Havelock has suggested,<sup>4</sup> and requires exam-

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3. The above list is not meant to be exclusive of all those in that period who might be regarded as pre-Socratic philosophers. However, they may be regarded as the most important in terms of the development of the philosophical form of discourse. See K. Freeman, (1949) for a more complete collection. Note also that the above dates and places of origin of these thinkers is in some cases a matter of some arbitrariness. For some discussion of these issues see G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: A Critical History with a Selection of Texts*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1966).

4. E. A. Havelock, "Preliteracy and the Pre-Socratics", *Institute of Classical Studies, Bulletin No. 13*, 1966(b). Havelock's objections to the above assumption are considered later in this chapter.

ination.

One final preliminary observation needs to be made concerning the nature of the evidence for the actual writings of these thinkers. A brief survey of their extant works is instructive. Thales was reputed to have written a book but none of his work has survived. His fellow Milesians, Anaximander and Anaximenes, have each had little more than a sentence survive. Pythagoras, who was quite influential, left no written works because he reputedly eschewed the written word completely. Xenophanes has had many fragments, amounting to about 135 lines,<sup>5</sup> preserved. Heraclitus has had about 167 lines of various fragments preserved. About 179 lines of Parmenides' work have survived. His pupil Zeno wrote a defence of Parmenides' views of which about 26 lines have been preserved. A similar defence of Parmenides by Melissus has had about 100 lines preserved. Empedocles wrote two poems in hexameter verse. About 426 lines of the first poem, *On Nature*, and 131 lines of the second, *Katharmoi (Purifications)*, have survived. Anaxagoras wrote a book of which 119 lines still exist.

The point at issue is whether the surviving lines of these thinkers can be reliably accepted as their *ipsissima verba*, that is, their precise words. When considering a particular thinker's relationship to the development of the philosophical form of discourse one must therefore distinguish between what can be accepted as what a thinker actually wrote (and hence the manner in which it was written and arranged) and what a thinker has been reported as having written. Such considerations

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5. The use of the word 'line' to designate the quantity of surviving pre-Socratic writings is a purely arbitrary way of arriving at some common descriptive measure to enable some degree of comparison to be made. The 'lines' in question are those in the collection made by K. Freeman, (1949). It needs to be noted, however, that the length of a line in translation is not necessarily of the same length as that of the original Greek. Nevertheless, for comparative purposes, such a discrepancy is of little import for the above survey.

are especially relevant for the assumption about prose writing mentioned above.

As far as the gist of what these thinkers were trying to say, however, the problem is not so acute. Kirk and Raven have suggested that confidence in what a pre-Socratic thinker actually thought can only be regarded as reliable when reconstructions of it are based on the twin foundations of the doxographical tradition (i.e. the tradition of the later biographers and commentators) and the *ipsissima verba* of the philosophers themselves.<sup>6</sup> There is a potential danger of some degree of circularity here because the *ipsissima verba* of many of the pre-Socratics is, in many respects, derived from reports within the doxographical tradition. Nevertheless, where certain phrases and lines have been reconstructed from a number of diverse or independent sources then some reliability may be assumed as to the veracity of the *ipsissima verba*. The surviving fragments of Xenophanes, Heraclitus, Parmenides, Melissus, Empedocles, and Anaxagoras may be regarded as representative of how they expressed themselves in writing. Zeno is something of a special case since at least one of his fragments, written in question and answer form, cannot be regarded as being in the form that he wrote it.<sup>7</sup> By the above test, the Milesians must remain obscure,<sup>8</sup> and for Pythagoras the issue is moot.

For the three Milesians and Pythagoras, the evidence for their views has to be appropriated or reconstructed from the works of

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6. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 7. It needs to be noted that Kirk & Raven were primarily concerned with the doxographical tradition focussing on Aristotle and his pupil Theophrastus when they made their suggestion. See also note 9 below.

7. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 96.

8. But see below pp. 179 ff.

later philosophers, commentators, historians, and doxographers. Although the opinions of later writers about what the earliest philosophers actually thought varies from reliable to practically useless,<sup>9</sup> it is nevertheless fair to say that

the doxography is not utterly despicable. Acute philological scholarship has established the complicated interrelationships<sup>10</sup> of our surviving sources.

Hence such eminent scholars as Kirk and Raven,<sup>11</sup> Kahn,<sup>12</sup> Guthrie,<sup>13</sup> Cornford,<sup>14</sup> and Burnet<sup>15</sup> to name just a few have produced careful, if varied,

9. For example, Aristotle and Theophrastus both tended to rephrase earlier philosophical thought into Aristotelian terms thereby reading back into the earlier thought, concepts and problems that often belonged to a later time. In the modern era, many commentators seem to have debated this issue, especially with respect to the doxography of Theophrastus and Aristotle. For an overview of this debate see J. B. McDiamird, "Theophrastus on the Pre-Socratic Cause", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 61, 1953; W. K. C. Guthrie, "Aristotle as a Historian of Philosophy: Some Preliminaries", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume LXXVII, 1957; critical of Guthrie was J. G. Stevenson, "Aristotle as Historian of of Philosophy", *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, Volume XCIV, 1974.

10. J. Barnes, *The Pre-Socratic Philosophers: Volume I From Thales to Zeno*, of two volumes, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1974) p. 14.

11. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966).

12. C. H. Kahn, (1979); also his *Anaximander and the Origins of Greek Cosmology*, (Columbia University Press, New York, 1960).

13. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume I The Earlier Pre-Socratics and Pythagoras*, of six volumes, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1962/67); and also his *History of Greek Philosophy: Volume II The Pre-Socratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*, of six volumes, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1965/69).

14. F. M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae: The Origins of Greek Philosophical Thought*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1952).

15. John Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, 4th edition, (Adam & Charles Black, London, 1930).



assessments of the works of the early philosophers. Despite the paucity of the evidence for *ipsissima verba* of some of the pre-Socratics, it is nevertheless the case that modern scholarship has placed confidence in the reconstruction of their thought.

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It is difficult to claim a precise date for the emergence of the philosophical form of discourse. Traditionally, the beginnings of this new form of discourse have been associated with Thales who was also regarded by many in antiquity as one of the Seven Sages.<sup>16</sup> Thus Thales was at least a practitioner of wisdom literature. For the ancient Greeks, any distinction between the various types of wisdom literature and the first few hints of a newer tradition of discourse was barely discernible.<sup>17</sup> However, by the time of Parmenides such a distinction could not be ignored. The ideas of Parmenides represented a distinctive form of discourse, despite the fact that he presented his views in hexameters; and in some respects, because of that fact, the difference in approach was all the more accentuated.

Separating Thales and Parmenides, however, was a century in which a number of distinctive thinkers also contributed to this development. Although it is convenient to mark this development with the names and views of a few thinkers, the evolution of this new form of discourse cannot be regarded as something that happened all of a sudden. The continuities, in terms of form and content, were as important as the emerging discontinuities.

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16. Solon, too, was regarded by the ancient Greeks as having been one of the Seven Sages. Although the composition of this group remains somewhat obscure due to conflicting testimonies, there is no doubt that both Solon and Thales were revered as such by the Greeks since their names are almost always prominent in any such testimony.

17. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 9.

Thales' fame rested on many achievements but two aspects of his thought are useful in discussing his discourse. The first concerns his view that since water was the basis for all life it followed that the Earth itself rested on water.<sup>18</sup> Thales' claim can be likened to an hypothesis in the sense that such a view acted as a unifying principle with which to explain other phenomena.<sup>19</sup>

The second aspect of his thought concerned his views on the perceived properties of the lodestone. According to Aristotle's account,

Thales, too, seems, from what they relate, to have supposed that the soul was kinetic, if he said that the (Magnesian) stone possesses soul because it moves iron.<sup>20</sup>

By Thales' time the Greeks had come to regard the soul (i.e. *psyche*) as the cause of movement for all animated entities.<sup>21</sup> The movement of iron when brought near a Magnesian stone was explained by the fact that the latter had *psyche*. Thales was thus making an inference from one proposition to another of the 'if P then Q' sort.

Interest in this form of reasoning lies not only in its increased explanatory powers, but also in the assumption behind it. The derivation of one state-

18. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 89-93.

19. J. Stannard, "The Pre-Socratic Origin of Explanatory Method", *The Philosophical Quarterly*, Volume 15, No. 60, July 1965. p. 202. But on the issue of "unifying principle" note the cautionary remarks of G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 89 ff.

20. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 93.

21. This was a development that became pronounced in the age of lyric poetry as was mentioned in the last chapter. Prior to that, in the Homeric outlook, the Greeks understood *psyche* as being controlled by the gods. That is, the gods "breathed life into" the *psyche* and thereby animated the beings or entities concerned. Then, the *psyche* was not understood as a unifier of other parts of the body but as just one constituent feature of the body bearing no necessary relation to the others. See B. Snell, (1982), especially Chapters 1 and 2.

ment from another rests on the assumption that the grammatical connection between causal statements represents a causal connection between events in the physical world.<sup>22</sup>

The point to be noted here is that Thales was making one idea dependent upon the prior acceptance of other ideas. An argument, rather than a conjoined, paratactic string of ideas, was being advanced.

Similar remarks can also be made about Thales' fellow Milesians, Anaximander and Anaximenes. Both postulated the existence of a "primary" material as the basis of all else; for Anaximander it was the enigmatic *apeiron*,<sup>23</sup> for Anaximenes it was air. The claims of each of the above thinkers could not be proven empirically but their respective claims rested on a chain of reasoning which was more or less independent of what was actually being claimed. The particulars of their arguments are well attested in the literature and need not be rehearsed here.<sup>24</sup> The important point is that the conclusions were seen to be entailed by prior suppositions. Challenges to or variations in these suppositions predicated each particular thinker's particular view of the world. Thus Anaximander substituted his notion of *apeiron* for Thales' views on water in order to generate his theory of opposites; and Anaximenes rejected *apeiron* in favour of air in order to elaborate his principle

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22. J. Stannard, (1965), p. 197. Stannard may have overstated the case to some extent but he nevertheless pinpointed a distinctive feature of pre-Socratic thought that became a mainstay of philosophical thought in general; namely the connection between language and reality. For some remarks on the latter see T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53).

23. There is no precise definition of *apeiron*. For some it is the Unbounded, for others the Unlimited, or the Infinite (though the last is not as common). See G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966); C. H. Kahn, (1960); F. M. Cornford, (1952); and J. Burnet, (1930); for various interpretations and discussion of what Anaximander meant by such a term.

24. Nevertheless some mention of their respective views will be made in the above discussion. For details see the authorities cited in n. 23 above, and J. Barnes, (1979), Chapters 2 and 3.

of condensation and rarefaction. The concern for establishing coherent unifying principles gave their thought its distinctive features, but in constructing their particular accounts of the world it is important to recognise that these features arose in large part as revisions or critiques of the views of their predecessors and contemporaries.<sup>25</sup>

Like Thales, Anaximander and Anaximenes were concerned with wide-ranging aspects of the physical world. They constructed theories about the order of the world: its genesis, its sustenance and its maintenance. For Anaximander, the *apeiron* was

the original material of existing things; further, the source from which existing things derive their existence is also that to which they return at their destruction, according to necessity, for they give justice and make reparation to one another for their injustice,<sup>26</sup> according to the arrangement of Time.

Anaximander thus established a cyclical model in which "existing things" interacted in a determinate and measured fashion. According to his theory of opposites, the "existing things" were individuated opposites<sup>27</sup> that interacted, each with its other in a mutual fashion, such that over a given time span each opposite exercised its due prerogatives

25. To describe the three Milesians as critical thinkers is not, however, to enter the debate between Popper and Kirk over the nature, extent and/or consequences of such criticisms for what Popper termed, somewhat positivistically, "the growth of knowledge". Popper's position was set out in his "Back to the Pre-Socratics", *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, N. S. 59, 1958/59, which was reprinted, together with a rejoinder to Kirk, in K. Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1976). Kirk's objections to Popper's thesis appeared in "Popper on Science and the Pre-Socratics", *Mind*, N. S. 69, 1960.

26. Anaximander Fr. 1, cited in K. Freeman, (1949), p. 19. Unless otherwise noted all citations for the fragments of the pre-Socratics will be taken from Freeman's collection.

27. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 119 pointed out that care must be taken with the term 'opposites' as used by Anaximander because it is doubtful that his use of such terminology was at the same level of abstraction as later thinkers. With that caveat in mind, it must nevertheless be acknowledged that it is well attested that he couched his theories in terms of opposing forces or entities.

within the domain of the *apeiron*. All activity governed by the *apeiron* was reciprocal.

Anaximander's model accounted for change and yet it portrayed a stable and continuous world over time.<sup>28</sup> This orderly arrangement was in the nature of things<sup>29</sup> (i.e. it was "according to necessity"). Although it could be argued that the gods were "in the nature of things", the significant feature of Anaximander's theory was that the capriciousness of the gods, so characteristic of the Homeric outlook, was excluded. Anaximander's phrase, "according to necessity", did not simply refer to events dictated by the gods but to a world which was the result of a regular configuration of forces. The continuity with Hesiod and Solon is evident. At the same time, however, the articulation of such an outlook had become much more abstractly presented.

In the one extant sentence attributed to Anaximenes, a similar outlook can be adduced.

As our soul, being air, holds our body together, so do breath and air surround the whole universe.<sup>30</sup>

A slightly different wording is given by Kirk and Raven.

As our soul, he says, being air holds us together and controls us, so does wind (or breath) and air enclose the whole world.<sup>31</sup>

The sense of Anaximenes' view was probably best captured by Kirk and Raven's version, but their ensuing discussion was not quite as apposite. They suggested that the "idea of the soul holding the body together has

28. C. H. Kahn, (1960), pp. 162-163.

29. *ibid.*, p. 184 ff. where Kahn suggested that Anaximander was probably the first Greek thinker to postulate something approaching a "natural law". Recall the remarks made earlier in Chapter 3, p. 131.

30. Anaximenes Fr. 2.

31. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 158.

no other parallel in a pre-Socratic source".<sup>32</sup> They also noted that the extant sentence of Anaximenes was not, strictly interpreted, *ipsissima verba*. They concluded that the inference, implicit in the sentence attributed to Anaximenes, "from the known microcosm, man, to the unknown macrocosm, the world as a whole", is not legitimate because an inference of that type was, in all probability, a late fifth century development and would therefore have been most unlikely to have occurred as early as the work of Anaximenes.<sup>33</sup>

However, it is not at all certain that such an inference was invalid. Hesiod and Solon had made similar inferences in the other direction from the world of nature (broadly interpreted) to the world of mortals; and this was paralleled to some extent by the lyric poets who treated human beings as sites of inner turmoil, thereby reflecting the turmoil and conflict they saw around them in the wider world. A number of points tend to confirm this. First, the view that the soul was the motive force of the body, or at least the location of such motivation within the body, had been gaining ground for some time. Second, the soul was thought to possess the body, particularly by the lyric poets, in the sense that no part of the body remained unaffected by its presence. This point is conceded by Kirk and Raven.<sup>34</sup>

Third, since air or breath meant life for the body<sup>35</sup> it was

32. *ibid.*, p. 160.

33. *ibid.*, p. 161.

34. *ibid.*, p. 160.

35. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 311 n. 113 where he pointed out that the view of air as the life of the soul was

"as old as Anaximenes and, in a sense, as old as Homer, for whom the psyche is the breath of life which a man 'expires'".

not unreasonable for Anaximenes to suggest that it performed an analogous function for the physical world, especially when this is considered in conjunction with his principle of condensation and rarefaction. This principle postulated a continuum of density (from less dense to more dense and *vice versa*) to be applied to a single substance: air. Meteorological phenomena, for example, could thus be classified according to criteria of rare and dense and hence explained in terms of their rarity and density. The conjunction of the basic assumption about air as the material substrate with the principle of rarefaction and condensation was described by Theophrastus in the following way.

Anaximenes ... also says that the underlying nature is one and infinite ..., but not undefined as Anaximander said but definite, for he identifies it as air; and it differs in its substantial nature by rarity and density. Being made finer it becomes fire, being made thicker it becomes wind, then cloud, (when thickened still more) water, then earth, then stones; and the rest come into being from these. He too makes motion eternal, and says that change, also, comes about through it. <sup>36</sup>

Anaximenes' achievement went beyond merely classifying things according to their relative density since his very process of classification constituted an explanation of their genesis and nature. <sup>37</sup> The condensation rarefaction principle served as a unifying hypothesis with which seemingly disparate entities could be linked up or grouped together and at the same time explained. <sup>38</sup> The analogy that Anaximenes made between the "microcosm and macrocosm" was thus not so unlikely.

This brief survey of the three Milesian thinkers, spanning the first fifty years of so of the sixth century B.C., should be suffic-

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36. Cited in G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 144.

37. J. Stannard, (1965), p. 201.

38. *ibid.*, p. 201.

ient to establish that a new approach to knowledge was beginning to gain ground. The postulation of unifying principles from which inferences or deductions were made signalled a new method in the Greek world with respect to understanding and explaining complex phenomena. Yet the Milesians remained primarily concerned with natural phenomena and cosmological speculation. By the end of the sixth century, the domain of cosmological speculations<sup>39</sup> of the Milesians began to expand. More importantly, the very foundations of knowledge, that is, the nature of knowledge itself, began to be questioned. With increasing perspicacity, a new generation of thinkers began to question not just what existed and how it existed, but more significantly, they began to question the way that knowledge (of whatever sort) came to be expressed, the reliability of such accounts, and the appropriate means to acquire certain knowledge. The problem of the certainty of one's knowledge began to loom especially large on the horizon of Greek knowledge and values. By the time of Parmenides, this had crystallised into the question of *logos*,<sup>40</sup> and the transformation from oral *mythos* to written *logos* was almost complete.

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Xenophanes was a poet who composed elegies and hexameters. He

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39. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 17 noted that Heraclitus had very little interest in cosmological speculation. But see G. S. Kirk, *Heraclitus: The Cosmic Fragments*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1954).

40. The term *logos* has been subject to a variety of interpretations and meanings. E. L. Minar Jr., "The Logos of Heraclitus", *Classical Philology*, Volume 34, Jan.-Oct. 1939 p. 329 offered six meanings of *logos*. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), pp. 420-424 listed eleven meanings. Despite the wide number of meanings they are all united by one common thread. That is, that *logos* means 'word'. As far as the early pre-Socratic thinkers were concerned there were three meanings of note: (1) discourse (i.e. anything spoken, debated, or thought), (2) reason (i.e. cause, account, or argument), and (3) ratio (i.e. measure, relationship, or proportion). See G. Thomson, *Studies in Ancient Greek Society: Volume II The First Philosophers*, (Lawrence & Wishart, London, 1955) p. 275. Clearly, the roots of these three sets of meanings can be seen in the basic correlation between *logos* and 'word'.



was a sage in the tradition of wisdom literature who sang his own songs. While some have suggested that Xenophanes was a Homeric rhapsode,<sup>41</sup> Kirk and Raven have argued convincingly that this was unlikely.<sup>42</sup> The content of his extant fragments suggests that his thought was a radical reworking of that of his contemporaries and predecessors. With Xenophanes, the target of criticism became identified with specific poets rather than with the general poetic tradition. He was not content simply to distinguish himself from that tradition by asserting his readiness to speak truly as Hesiod and Solon had done. On the contrary, he named those whom he felt were mistaken and then he went on to offer corrections of their errors. In so doing, Xenophanes set the precedent for examining what, in later times, became known as epistemological questions by encouraging his listeners to question the nature and basis of their preconceptions.

One of Xenophanes' most radical contributions to Greek thought was his reformulation of the polytheistic view of divinity into a single, non-anthropomorphic deity. Xenophanes claimed that there was one god "not at all like mortals in body or mind" (Fr. 23).

He sees as a whole, thinks as a whole, and hears as a whole. (Fr. 24).

But without toil he sets everything in motion, by the thought of his mind." (Fr. 25).

And he always remains in the same place, not moving at all, nor is it fitting for him to change his position at different times. (Fr. 26).

Compared with the Homeric pantheon of the gods in which each divinity

41. B. Snell, (1982), p. 140.

42. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p.164.

was described in splendid bodily images, the unitary conception postulated by Xenophanes was a significant departure. Yet in many ways it was the completion of a movement in thought that had been begun by Hesiod and Solon.<sup>43</sup> Xenophanes created a view of the divine that was almost totally abstract in that he had removed the last vestiges of anthropomorphism<sup>44</sup> and bodily attributes.

His conception of the "One-god" did not rest on mere assertion. It was the result of a critique of the prevailing views about the gods. Both Homer and Hesiod recounted tales of the gods in which all manner of impious behaviour was accepted.<sup>45</sup> Such behaviour, for Xenophanes, was not consistent with a view of the gods being responsible for order in the world; one must always "have respect for the gods" (Fr. 1-23). If the gods behaved as humans did, with all the attendant faults, vices, and virtues, intermingled indiscriminately, then one could not really respect the gods because their morality would be as arbitrary as that of humans. At the very least one should only praise the gods with "decent stories and pure words". (Fr. 1.13).

However, Xenophanes was not content with just advocating that only good things should be said about the gods because any account of the gods was bound to be fatally flawed if it remained dependent on anthropomorphic considerations. He demonstrated this by pointing out that different races represent their gods in accordance with their own particular characteristics. Thus he recorded that Ethiopians por-

43. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 133.

44. E. Zeller, *Outlines of the History of Greek Philosophy*, 13th edition, rev. by Dr. W. Nestle, trans. by L. R. Palmer, (Dover Books, New York, 1980) p. 44.

45. This does not negate the view of Hesiod presented earlier (in which Hesiod was credited with articulating a more abstract view of the gods) because in his *Theogony* he gave an account of how the gods came to be just.

trayed their gods with snub noses and black hair, whereas the Thracians portrayed their gods with grey eyes and red hair (Fr. 16). But he went one step further to show the absurdity of conceiving the gods in this fashion.

But if oxen (and horses) and lions had hands or could draw with hands and create works of art like those made by men, horses would draw pictures of gods like horses, and oxen gods like oxen, and they would make the bodies (of their gods) in accordance with the form that each species itself possesses. (Fr. 15).

As Kirk and Raven have suggested, this critique amounted to a *reductio ad absurdum* argument which led to only one conclusion; that the anthropomorphic conception of the gods had to be abandoned.<sup>46</sup>

Underlying his critique was the view that the world of nature, in which people lived, and the world of the divine were an inseparable unity. As such, all partook of the same basic order. Yet there was some discrepancy here because the temporal world was one of change, but the "One-god" was unchanging, motionless, eternal. Xenophanes attempted to get around this by treating temporal change as cyclical<sup>47</sup> and hence having a stable framework in which to manifest itself. This framework was provided by the "One-god" but not in the embodied form in the Homeric sense. This raises the question of the nature of its presence. Did it have a body, and was it co-extensive with the temporal world? Guthrie concluded that the "One-god" had a body on the grounds

46. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 169.

47. This was strongly implied by Xenophanes in Frr. 27, 29, and 30. For some discussion see H. Frankel, "Xenophanes' Empiricism and his Critique of Knowledge", in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1974); see also J. M. Robinson, *An Introduction to Early Greek Philosophy: The Chief Fragments and Ancient Testimony, with Connecting Commentary*, (Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, 1974).

that the notion of an incorporeal being was not of Xenophanes' time.<sup>48</sup> Kirk and Raven also concluded that it "had a body of sorts because totally incorporeal existence was inconceivable".<sup>49</sup> Yet their conclusion was a bit more ambivalent than Guthrie's since they advanced the view that Xenophanes was to some extent echoing the Milesian view of "a divine substance" which "was regarded as somehow permeating objects in the world and giving them life and movement".<sup>50</sup> Versenyi, on the other hand, argued against it having a body because Xenophanes only had negative things to say about the gods and their bodies.<sup>51</sup> It could be that such comments by Xenophanes were directed only at the Homeric conception. However, Xenophanes was quite explicit that his "One-god" was "not at all like mortals in body or mind" (Fr. 23). His "One-god" worked by "intelle-  
ction alone" and hence was a more "metaphysical than physical entity".<sup>52</sup>

For Versenyi, Xenophanes' "One-god" constituted a "pure intellect presiding over or identical with the intelligible order of the world".<sup>53</sup> This accords with the Milesian influence with respect to "a divine substance ... permeating objects in the world" as suggested by Kirk and Raven. Despite their ambivalence over the "One-god's" body they too emphasised the importance of its "perceptual-intellectual activity".<sup>54</sup> Xenophanes regarded order as the manifestation of intelligence and his conception of the "One-god" symbolised this intelligence,<sup>55</sup>

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48. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 376.

49. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 172.

50. *ibid.*, p. 172.

51. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 262-263 n. 2.

52. *ibid.*, p. 263 n. 2.

53. *ibid.*, p. 134. The phrase 'presiding over' is understood in the sense of governing or regulating rather than implying externality of such an order.

54. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 172.

as Robinson suggested.<sup>55</sup> It was Xenophanes' way of postulating the divine as a universal which could encompass change in the temporal world and yet transcend it so that the eternal-ness of its influence could be asserted. The "One-god" was thus able to retain "identity in change, unity in diversity, and endurance in time"<sup>56</sup> thereby enabling the world of the divine and the temporal world to be understood as a whole.<sup>57</sup> With Xenophanes, the power of the intellect emerged in its own right as a central feature of the unfolding panorama of Greek thought.

This development was brought into sharp relief by Xenophanes' approach to the problem of knowledge in general. He suggested that no mortal could ever have certain knowledge in any absolute sense because only the "One-god" had that sort of knowledge (Fr. 34). Such knowledge could really only be approximated by mortals. Human knowledge should be "stated as conjectural only, similar to reality" (Fr. 35) because "Opinion (seeming) is fixed by fate upon all things" (Fr. 34). Even though direct sense perception was the appropriate way to gain knowledge<sup>58</sup> it was not certain because it remained relative to the particular perspective of the observer.<sup>59</sup> That is, "If God had not created yellow honey, they would say that figs were far sweeter" (Fr. 38). With the aid of one's intellect to mediate the careful collation and collection of one's empirical observations, Xenophanes thought that one could gain a better understanding of reality.<sup>60</sup> On this Xenophanes was most explic-

55. J. M. Robinson, (1974), pp. 54-55.

56. L. Versenyi, (1974), p.134.

57. But see H. Frankel, (1974), p. 130 for a slightly different interpretation.

58. *ibid.*, p. 118; H. A. T. Rieche, "Empirical Aspects of Xenophanes' Theology", in J. P. Anton & G. L. Kustas, (edd.), *Essays in Ancient Greek Philosophy*, (State Uni. of New York Press, Albany, 1971) pp. 88-89.

59. H. A. T. Rieche, (1971), p. 88.

60. *ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

it.

Truly the gods have not revealed to  
mortals all things from the beginning;  
but mortals by long seeking discover  
what is better. (Fr. 18).

The state of knowledge for mortals could thus be improved but not perfected. Therefore it had to remain at the level of conjecture because it was always open to re-examination and critical reflection (i.e. "long seeking"). Human knowledge could thus be brought closer to reality but it could never become identical with it.

Although Xenophanes challenged the propensity for humans to have knowledge in an absolute sense, he did not deny the possibility of knowledge itself. Had he done so the very foundation for his would have collapsed because it was the operation of the intellect that made possible the realisation of order in the world. Knowledge was the object for the exercise of the intellect as far as Xenophanes was concerned, and without it humans would not have the means to arrive at an ordered view of the world, let alone make that order manifest. Xenophanes' scepticism was of a limited form<sup>61</sup> to counteract the dogmatic and unsubstantiated claims of his contemporaries and predecessors.

With the work of Xenophanes the appeal to *logos* was explicit in all but name. His treatment of the gods as an abstract universal, together with his advocacy of critical reflection as an appropriate method of arriving at knowledge of existing phenomena, provided the spring-board for the rapid expansion of the emerging philosophical form of discourse. Although his articulation of the limits of human knowledge was in line with traditional views,<sup>62</sup> his emphasis on the possibility

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61. J. Barnes, (1979), p. 143.

62. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 181.

that humans could improve the state of their knowledge through their own efforts,<sup>63</sup> was innovative since it implied that tradition need no longer be regarded as immutable. The sages and poets could be challenged and their views subjected to critical scrutiny. Xenophanes had shown the way and others were quick to move in similar directions.

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One such thinker was Heraclitus of Ephesus. He wrote in an oracular style that cannot be classified as purely prose or poetry but rather took the form of gnomic utterances pregnant with meaning.<sup>64</sup> In later times this earned him the epithet of "the obscure".<sup>65</sup> The very style of his language was as important as its content. The two were inextricably bound together, as each informed the other.<sup>66</sup>

With Heraclitus' writings, the notion *logos* emerged as an explicit feature for the first time. It was not so much that the word was unknown before Heraclitus, but that in his work it achieved a status that remained more or less constant in subsequent developments within the philosophical form of discourse. The three key clusters of meanings for *logos* that were mentioned earlier<sup>67</sup> — concerning discourse (i.e. anything spoken, debated, or thought), reason (i.e. cause, account,

63. H. Frankel, (1974), p. 121 regarded this aspect of Xenophanes' doctrine as constituting the first instance of the notion of 'progress' in Greek philosophy.

64. There is some doubt as to whether Heraclitus actually wrote a book in the traditional sense. See the comments by G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 184-185. C. H. Kahn, (1979), pp. 3-9 gives a slightly different explanation.

65. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 184.

66. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 146 ff. See also Uvo Hölscher, "Paradox, Simile, and Gnostic Utterance in Heraclitus" in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (ed.), (1974), p. 238.

67. See p. 146 n. 40 above.

or argument) and ratio (i.e. measure, relationship, or proportion) — were all manifest in Heraclitus' use of the term. As Kahn pointed out, Heraclitus' use of *logos* demonstrated

the fundamental ambiguity of the term: on the one hand, a specific utterance, on the other hand an orderly relationship between things which is reflected in discourse, including the quantitative relationship reflected in a calculation or ratio.<sup>68</sup>

The following three fragments give some indication of both the nature and scope of Heraclitus' treatment of *logos*.<sup>69</sup>

Of the *Logos* which as I describe it men always prove to be uncomprehending, both before they have heard it and when once they have heard it. For although all things happen according to this *Logos* men are like people of no experience, even when they experience such words and deeds as I explain, when I distinguish each thing according to its constitution and declare how it is; but the rest of men fail to notice what they do after they wake up just as they forget what they do when asleep. (Fr. 1).

Therefore it is necessary to follow the common; but although the *Logos* is common the many live as though they had a private understanding. (Fr. 2).

Listening not to me but to the *Logos* it is wise to agree that all things are one. (Fr. 50).

Quite clearly, Heraclitus fully exploited the inherent ambiguities in *logos* to frame his ideas.

68. C. H. Kahn, "A New Look at Heraclitus", *American Philosophical Journal*, Volume 1, No. 3, July 1964, p. 192.

69. Heraclitus' fragments are cited according to the numbering in K. Freeman, (1949). However, the above translations are taken from G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 187-188 because they retain the specific use of the word '*logos*' whereas Freeman rendered it as 'Law'. Freeman appended a note to make it clear that 'Law' denoted "*Logos*, the intelligible Law of the universe, and its reasoned statement by Heraclitus" (p. 24 n. 1). In addition, the Kirk & Raven translation appears to capture better the oracular style of Heraclitus whereas the Freeman translation has a more prose feel to it. For that reason, the Kirk & Raven translation has been used whenever Heraclitus' has been quoted (unless noted otherwise).



More significantly, however, Heraclitus' treatment of *logos* went beyond mere word-play and deliberate ambiguity. For Heraclitus, *logos* signified the fundamental feature of the universe and all it contained. That is, *logos* was the unitary and unifying principle or "law-like" paradigm that enabled the processes of the sensible world to become intelligible to humans;<sup>70</sup> and once intelligible, provided the appropriate guide for human conduct in the world. Heraclitus' vision of the world emphasised its basic unity but at the same time his concept of unity was predicated on the manifold individuation within it.<sup>71</sup>

For Heraclitus, everything in the world, including humans, was constituted by its own particular *logos*. (Frr. 1, 2, 30, 45, 72, 89, 115.) At the same time each particular *logos* was but a microcosm of the *logos* which gave the world of particulars its unity or wholeness. (Frr. 1, 2, 8, 10, 30, 32, 41, 50, 102, 114.) Heraclitus was attempting to articulate that everything in the universe had its own set of relationships which defined its presence in the world as a particular. These relationships were specific and measured. Simultaneously, the particulars received their particularity precisely because they stood in relation to other particulars. These relationships were also specific and measured but they were not necessarily visible on the surface. Relationships within or between particulars remain hidden (Fr. 123) and must be sought out. The simultaneous universality and particularity of *logos* was, for Heraclitus, what gave rise to *harmonia*, not in the Pythagorean sense,<sup>72</sup>

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70. C. J. Emelyn-Jones, "Heraclitus and the Identity of Opposites", *Phronesis*, Volume 21, No. 6, 1976. p. 96.

71. L. Versenyi, (1974), *passim*. See also C. H. Kahn, (1979) for some very perceptive commentary on Heraclitus' views.

72. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), pp. 435 ff gives a useful summary of the differences between Heraclitus' and Pythagoras' respective views on *harmonia*. The issue is addressed a bit later in this chapter.

but in the sense of a unity of opposites in which the constituents were in constant tension with each other.

Heraclitus' emphasis on the unity of opposites and the tensions inherent in such unities (Frr. 8, 10, 36, 51) led him to regard the world as being in constant motion, and yet through this motion it achieved its permanence or stability. The important thing for Heraclitus was not that either all was in a state of flux or that permanence predominated.<sup>73</sup> Both were equally important because his conception of *logos* required an understanding of both. Stability (or permanence) could not be understood without change (or motion) or *vice versa* since one without the other was absurd; knowledge of the one presupposed knowledge of the other (Frr. 23, 111). What was important, according to Heraclitus, was that each (opposite) existed in relationship with the other according to their *logos*.

This is borne out by his emphasis on measure as the hallmark of such relationships.

This world-order [the same of all] did none of gods or men make, but it always was and is and shall be: an everliving fire, kindling in measures and going out in measures. (Fr. 30).

Fire's turnings: first sea, and of sea the half is earth, the half 'burner' [i.e. lightning of fire]...(earth) is dispersed

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73. Traditionally, Heraclitus was regarded by his successors as the exponent of the doctrine that "all was in flux" and hence many came to regard that as being what was of importance for him. In the past century a number of commentators have argued for the pre-eminence of his views on permanence. J. Burnet, (1930), p. 146 played down the flux doctrine; M. Heidegger, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*, cited in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (ed.), (1974) pp. 10-11 dismissed it as "unhistorical"; and G. S. Kirk, (1954), asserted the priority of permanence over flux. G. Vlastos, "On Heraclitus", *American Journal of Philology*, No. 76, 1955, defended the more traditional approach. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), Chapter VII, though leaning a bit to the traditional view, offered a balanced appraisal of the issues. But G. H. Kahn, (1979), pp. 147-153 suggests that, because of Heraclitus' use of paradoxes and antitheses, and his emphasis on measure or ratio, the priority of flux over permanence (or *vice versa*) is not in keeping with his approach. On this, Kahn's view is probably the most accurate.

as sea, and is measured so as to form the same proportion as existed before it became earth. (Fr. 31).

All things are an equal exchange for fire and fire for all things, as goods are for gold and gold for goods. (Fr. 90).

The introduction of the notion 'fire' complicated the issue to some extent, because it led some to treat it as an elemental substrate of the physical world in the same sense as predominated in the views of the Milesian thinkers. Whether this was Heraclitus' intention is not certain.<sup>74</sup> It is, however, more than likely, as Versenyi argued,<sup>75</sup> that 'fire' was Heraclitus' way of expressing the operation of *logos* in terms which were more familiar for his contemporaries. The term 'fire' functioned more as a metaphor than as a literal description of what existed. It was an appropriate choice because fire was both beneficial and destructive, and therefore symbolised what he meant by his conception of *logos*.<sup>76</sup> Moreover, fire symbolised energy and motion and had long been a symbol in Greek thought for the soul.<sup>77</sup>

The soul was difficult for humans to know in all its detail, "so deep a measure does it have" (Fr. 45), but it was that very "measure" (i.e. *logos*) that made it possible for humans to reach some understanding of it (and consequently of their basic human-ness) and hence to create order in their lives (Fr. 114). The *logos* for humans was the fundamental *logos* that obtained for everything else in the sense that measure relationships were common to all. The *logos* of the *cosmos*

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74. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 199-202 for some discussion. Kirk & Raven treated Heraclitus' view of 'fire' in a more literal way and hence give the impression that it was "the very constituent of things" (p. 200). See also the useful discussion in W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), and also C. H. Kahn, (1979), pp. 132-153.

75. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 138-139.

76. C. H. Kahn, (1979), pp. 132-153.

77. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 46.

was not separate and different in kind from that of humans but was the universal form of which the *logos* for humans was a particular. It was the "ultimate ground for all",<sup>78</sup> and as such made possible a genuine correspondence between human reality and cosmic reality.<sup>79</sup> This correspondence was not self-evident to all because many do not acknowledge their *logos* but rather prefer their own "private understanding" (Fr. 2) and hence cut themselves off from what is common to all (Frr. 1, 2, 72).

As Guthrie suggested, Heraclitus equated "the common" with right-thinking,<sup>80</sup> that is, being in touch with one's *logos* (Frr. 113, 114). Heraclitus thought that individuals were capable of recognising their *logos* if they so chose. Particularly pertinent here is Fr. [119] in which, in a few pregnant words, Heraclitus expressed one of his most basic postulates concerning the nature of human beings: "Man's character is his *daimon*".<sup>81</sup> '*Daimon*' is the determinant of Heraclitus' meaning here, and Kahn discusses its three related senses.<sup>82</sup> First, there

78. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 141.

79. *ibid.*, p. 141. See also C. H. Kahn, (1979), pp. 132-134.

80. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 426. See also Guthrie's notes 1 and 2 on the same page where Guthrie discussed some of G. S. Kirk's (1954) objections to such a view. Also G. Vlastos, (1955) gave some of Kirk's readings and appraisals a detailed scrutiny in which the issue of "the common" was also discussed. See also L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 140-141, whose general interpretation was in agreement with that of Guthrie's.

81. As has already been noted, the translations for Heraclitus' writings have been taken from G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966). Others have rendered Fr. [119] slightly differently and these are worth noting in passing. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 81: "Man's character is his fate"; W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 482: "A man's individuality is his *daimon*"; K. Freeman, (1949), p. 32: "Character for man is destiny"; and somewhat more liberally, L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 141: "the essential nature of man is the Divine, the *logos*, the Common". Clearly what stands out here is Heraclitus' intention to convey what he thought was the definitive feature of being human.

82. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 260.

was the "simplest" sense in which '*daimon*' signified "one's destiny, one's prosperity or misfortune"; second, there was the more literal sense signifying a god or divinity; and third, it could be understood as "a special case of the other two" in which '*daimon*' signified a "guardian spirit" that was "identified with the best and wisest souls".<sup>83</sup> Heraclitus attributed to human beings far more responsibility for their actions than his predecessors. A person's fate or lot in life was a result of the kinds of choices one made and the consequences of those choices. Fate was no longer conceived to be in the hands of the gods as had been and, in Heraclitus' time, was still believed to be the case.

In this Heraclitus clearly departed from the traditional view, the history of which went back at least as far as Homer.<sup>84</sup> At the same time, he considered that human beings were intimately connected with the all-embracing *logos* of the *cosmos*. To be in tune with one's *logos* meant that one would thereby partake of the wider cosmic *harmonia*. Thus people must look to themselves (as Heraclitus did (Fr. 101)) and search their own souls. Heraclitus did not regard this as an easy task (Fr. 45), but if people searched with open eyes rather than "as if asleep" (Fr. 1) they could not help but arrive at the all-embracing *logos*.

*Logos* was thus the basis of ethical and just behaviour because it laid bare the nature of *harmonia*.

Listening to the *logos* not only lifts man  
above the privacy and relativity of opinions

83. *ibid.*, p. 261. This third sense was an allusion to "Hesiod's use of *daimones* for the spirits of the golden race" who "become watchmen of justice after death" (*ibid.*, p. 261). The same point was also made by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 482.

84. Heraclitus' view of the *daimon* as the source of one's character reached its apotheosis with Socrates almost a century later. Socrates attributed his pursuit of knowledge to the guidance of his "inner *daimon*". Note also, however, that the meaning of '*daimon*' had undergone a further shift to refer to intermediate beings, neither fully divine nor fully humanised, but which nevertheless corresponded to Heraclitus' basic view of inner direction. See W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 318 for details.

and makes him harmonious with nature. It also lifts him above the isolation of a merely private existence, which divides him from his fellow men, and brings him, politically as well as intellectually, into harmony with others. By using what is common — his *logos* — man enters into the community.

*Logos* also led to *harmonia* in the *cosmos*. *Harmonia* was not a blending of opposites but a unity in which each element remained separate and distinct in a relationship of constant tension, in ratio, determined by *logos*. This theme was brought out most vividly in two particularly paradoxical statements.

War is the father of all and king of all,  
and some he shows as gods, others as men;  
some he makes slaves, others free. (Fr. 53).

It is necessary to know that war is common  
and right is strife and that all things  
happen by strife and necessity. (Fr. 80).

These fragments are actually indicative of, rather than exceptions to, his particular view of the world. His general principle is stated in Fr. [80], where 'war' served as a metaphor<sup>86</sup> to signify the cosmic *logos*.<sup>87</sup> Here also he rejected the "familiar thought that the fortunes of war", victory and destruction, would eventually befall both sides and instead he sees war as a structure embodying the "shifting but reciprocal balance between opposites in human life and in the natural world".<sup>88</sup> Moreover, Heraclitus further rebuked the traditional lament that called for strife to be banished from the world with his equation of strife with right

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85. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 141.

86. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 195. See also L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 144 on the general principle, and p. 149 and p. 263 n. 11 for some comments on Heraclitus' use of metaphors. See also U. Hölischer, (1974), for an illuminating discussion of Heraclitus' use of similes.

87. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 447.

88. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 205.

or justice.<sup>89</sup> As opposed to the view of justice that had been developing since Hesiod, Heraclitus was pointing to the universal, to the common, in making such an equation. Without strife justice would not be known (Fr. 23). For Heraclitus, both justice and strife were necessary aspects of the cosmic order and both needed to be present if the balance of the *cosmos* was to be retained.

Fragment [53] was a vivid restatement of Fr. [80]. The first part, "War is the father of all and the king of all", established the universal aspect of opposition. The rest of the fragment conveyed his views on the human condition generally.

The human condition is defined by a double set of oppositions: the internal antithesis between free and servile status (the most radical contrast conceivable in ancient society); and the external contrast between men and gods, as in the traditional conception of human beings as mortal earthlings. The parallel may suggest that just as freedom and slavery are alternative, sometimes successive, conditions for the same beings, so humanity and divinity are alternative, even alternating states which — like day and night, war and peace, life and death — define by their opposition and succession<sup>90</sup> the full dimensions of human existence.

In both fragments, Heraclitus drew out the underlying *harmonia* to illuminate the apparent surface meaning. Opposition was universal but it was measured and reciprocal, animating the universe according to *logos* rather than the particular proclivities of any single aspect.

Heraclitus' linking of justice and strife as necessarily co-terminous entities, although contradicting the Hesiodic and Solonic conception of justice, in fact radically redefined their positions. Both

89. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), pp. 446-447.

90. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 209. L. Versenyi's (1974), analysis of Heraclitus also gives a similar interpretation.

Hesiod and Solon had understood injustice as resulting from the excesses of the more powerful and quarrelsome. Justice resulted from redressing such excesses. A just order would prevent excesses arising in the first place. Anaximander had argued that there was a just order in the natural world in which conflicting opposites would pay or be punished for their encroachments on each other. For Anaximander, injustice occurred when one of the opposites overstepped its measure. Justice was the necessary correction of such a situation, because there had to be a balance of opposing elements for the *cosmos* to continue undisturbed.<sup>91</sup> Heraclitus accepted Anaximander's basic view that there was a cosmic pattern but the nature of this pattern was differently conceived. For Heraclitus, justice existed because there was strife between opposites; but each opposite could not overstep its due measure as this would mean the destruction of *logos* in the *cosmos*. *Logos* signified the nature of the relationships between opposites. Heraclitus' view of a just order was as a "total pattern that includes both punishment and crime itself, as necessary ingredients of the world order".<sup>92</sup> Thus Heraclitus went beyond Anaximander's conception of justice<sup>93</sup> by affirming an equation of justice with strife.

*Harmonia* in Heraclitus' theory emphasised the duality<sup>94</sup> of all relationships but it was a duality of inseparable unities. Justice was inconceivable without strife, light without dark, night without day, life without death, and so on. Thus *harmonia* signified the paradigmatic relationship of measure and proportion for *logos*. Without

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91. See above pp. 142-143. See also C. H. Kahn, (1960) for a comprehensive analysis of Anaximander's theory of justice.

92. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 207.

93. *ibid.*, p. 207. See also G. Vlastos, (1955).

94. Indeed, one might even say that Heraclitus' approach emphasised not just the duality but, for want of a better expression, the multidimensionality of all relationships.



some form of regulation to contain opposing aspects the tension between them would collapse, one aspect would be eliminated and the eventual result would be the end of the *cosmos*.<sup>95</sup> But since the *cosmos* was self-made and self-organised (Fr. 30)<sup>96</sup> it could not cease to be, hence Heraclitus' insistence on the inseparability and concurrence of related opposites.

The style of Heraclitus' writing was as important as its content. The deliberate ambiguities, the puns, the all-pervading antitheses of his sayings were important means of making his words carry more impact both for the eye and the ear. His style was an attempt, and in most respects a successful attempt, to create in his words the structure of the reality that he was attempting to make known.<sup>97</sup> In Heraclitus' words nothing is quite what it seems to be on the surface, just as nothing in the sensible world is quite as it appears to be.

Since the function of the *logos* is not only to reveal the particular in all its concreteness but also to gather all particulars together and carry us beyond immediate distinction and paratactic fragmentation to an all embracing vision, one cannot stop with immediate presentation but has to go beyond: one has to speak and think metaphysically — going beyond the particular to its universal ground — and metaphorically — diffusing the disparate particulars into a deeper unity without, however, robbing them of their particularity.

What was hidden was stronger or better than what was visible (Fr. 54) because nature, reality, liked to remain hidden (Fr. 123).

95. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 487.

96. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 134.

97. *ibid.*, p. 209. See also U. Hölischer, (1974) and L. Versenyi, (1974) pp. 146-150.

98. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 149.

Although the surface paradoxes generated by his words were obvious, they were a foil to provoke a search for deeper meanings and interconnections. Heraclitus required of his audience the perspicacity to "grasp the *harmonie* [*sic.*] binding them together"<sup>99</sup> so that the very bonds of reality could thereby be grasped. The fact that his successors found his writing so difficult would suggest that his manner of presentation prevented rather than facilitated his thought. Nevertheless, Heraclitus' views could not be ignored by subsequent thinkers because of the challenge it posed to traditional ways of looking at the world.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, despite the manner of his presentation (or perhaps because of it, as Versenyi suggested)<sup>101</sup> Heraclitus marked out new directions. He widened the distinction between appearance and reality, emphasised the centrality of *logos* as both the means to comprehend reality and the means to mediate between reality and appearances, and highlighted in a novel way the importance of words and their meanings.

Heraclitus' thought exhibited a unity which hitherto had been only partially realised in previous thinkers' works. Despite the style and the apparently self-contained isolation of his sayings, they were united by the common thread of his conception of *logos*. As Hölscher emphasised, Heraclitean thought had a distinctly revelatory character.<sup>102</sup> Yet its style was such that everything and nothing was revealed; its insights had to be searched for within and beneath the surface utterances. Heraclitus' thought exhibited an "organic unity"<sup>103</sup> that signified the

99. C. H. Kahn, (1979), p. 209.

100. Although this aspect of his work has received little attention in the above exposition of Heraclitus' work, Heraclitus was scathingly critical of contemporary and previous thinkers( e.g. Frr. 40, 42, 57, 104).

101. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 149.

102. U. Hölscher, (1974), p. 238.

103. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 155.

new directions in which Greek thought was developing. Yet such "organic unity" in Heraclitus' writings, though further removed from the paratactic unity of orally produced discourse than anything which had preceded it, was only implicit since the style of presentation gave the appearance of disunity. In this regard, Versenyi has perhaps overstated the case for the "organic unity" of Heraclitus' writings because it depended to a large extent on the ability of the audiences to perceive it. It remained for subsequent thinkers to make this unity explicit.

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It was with Parmenides of Elea that this development came into its own. Parmenides' extant work is written in hexameter verse form and consists of a poem which can be divided into three basic sections: an introductory proem or prologue, the Way of Truth, and the Way of Opinion (or Seeming). The latter two parts were foreshadowed in the opening proem. Although Parmenides used hexameter verse, his subject-matter and diction were anything but poetical in the epic sense.<sup>104</sup> The poem as a whole, but particularly the second section, exhibited a form of reasoning that can be legitimately understood as an exemplary form of logical deduction. It marked a radical break with his predecessors in the sense that the merit of his argument is identified with its basis of strict logical unity. *Logos*, in the sense of reason, alone was to provide the means for explicating his words<sup>105</sup> because Parmenides

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104. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 265. A. P. D. Mourelatos, *The Route of Parmenides: A Study of Word, Image, and Argument in the Fragments*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1970) pp. 14 ff. has a more sympathetic appraisal of Parmenides' style as a poet.

105. J. M. Robinson, (1968), p. 112.

was presenting a proof rather than a series of dogmatic claims. He made this explicit in Fr. [7] with his uncompromising distinction between sense-data (i.e. knowledge gained by the senses) and *logos* as arbiters of what was real:

but judge by reason (*logos*) the much-<sup>106</sup>  
contested refutation spoken by me.

In the proem, Parmenides recounted how he came to arrive at his knowledge. He had been blessed by an unnamed goddess to undertake a journey "on the far-famed road of the god [i.e. the sun], which bears the man of knowledge over all cities" to pass beyond "the gates of the paths of Night and Day ... of which avenging Justice holds the alternate keys" and reach the house of the goddess. He was then assured that it was "No evil lot ... but Right and Justice" that had set him on the road "far from the footsteps of men" on which he would "learn all things, both the unshaken heart of well-rounded truth and also what seems to mortals, in which is no true conviction".<sup>107</sup> Parmenides had journeyed from darkness into light (a familiar theme for early Greek thinkers, and indeed later ones as well) to be given knowledge of all things, of what was true and what seemed to be true. Where all was light "the goddess welcomed me graciously, took my right hand in hers, and addressed me with these words:..."<sup>108</sup> From that point on, Parmenides' poem (i.e. the rest of the proem, the Way of Truth, and the Way of Opinion) consisted of the words of the goddess.

These introductory remarks by Parmenides are significant

106. Cited in W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 21. Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations from Parmenides' fragments are taken from the translations made by Guthrie in his exposition in (1965/69).

107. Quoted excerpts from Fr. [1] cited in *ibid.*, pp. 7-9.

108. Fr. [1] cited in *ibid.*, p. 9.

for two reasons. First, Parmenides was keeping within the tradition of invoking the Muses as the source of his knowledge and hence establishing his authority.<sup>109</sup> While doing so, he employed the distinction first made by Hesiod that the gods did not necessarily speak truly, but could speak of both truth and falsity as they saw fit. Unlike Hesiod and others, however, Parmenides was to learn everything so "that no judgement of mortals may outrun thee" (Fr. [1]). His status with respect to knowledge was to be all encompassing.

Secondly, in quoting the goddess directly, Parmenides became a representer of knowledge. Unlike the *aidoi* of the oral period he was not re-presenting in their special manner.<sup>110</sup> The *aidoi* continuously reworked oral knowledge by re-presenting the gods in ways which were in keeping with their audiences' expectations. Parmenides was not doing that. He was representing his words, to his audience, as the words of the goddess. That is, he was identifying his words with her words and hers with his, thereby claiming a fidelity which the *aidoi* could not conceive because they did not and could not presuppose an original text but rather gave voice to an amorphous tradition in which every performance was itself the "original". While others (e.g. Hesiod, Solon, Xenophanes, Heraclitus) had gone some way towards articulating a view of true knowledge as fixed and unchanging, Parmenides had taken a giant step by representing, in his words, that true knowledge was fixed and eternal, while also representing with the meaning of his words that true knowledge was an absolute.

The poem's importance was further enhanced by the fact that,

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109. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 10; J. M. Robinson, (1968), pp. 109-110; B. Snell, (1982), p. 148. See also L. Taran, *Parmenides: A Text with Translation, Commentary, and Critical Essays*, (Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 1965) p. 31, but also pp. 22-29 for some comments concerning Parmenides and his predecessors.

110. Cf. Chapter 2 above.

in recounting how he first came to be on the road of truth (as revealed by the goddess), Parmenides felt that he was still on it. Although his work was being presented to mere mortals, Parmenides himself, or at least his views<sup>111</sup> as preserved by his words,<sup>112</sup> gave the impression that he had not departed from the road of truth. This is suggested by his opening words, "The mares that carry me as far as my heart ever aspires me sped me on" (Fr. [1]). Parmenides began in the present tense (i.e. "carry") with an allusion to an ongoing state of being (i.e. "as far as my heart ever aspires me") before moving into the (correct) past tense (i.e. "sped") to recount his initial journey. The phrase "the mares that carry me" coupled by the word 'that' (or 'which' in some translations)<sup>113</sup> serves to link 'mares' with the subject of the sentence (i.e. Parmenides) in such a way as to imply (strongly) that Parmenides remained borne by them (i.e. the mares) long after he had left the goddess and returned to convey what he had learnt to other mortals.<sup>114</sup> Parmenides' manipulation of grammatical tenses was intentional<sup>115</sup> to indicate the generality and repetition of his journey.<sup>116</sup> Parmenides was thus acknowledging that, even in recounting his story, he remained on the one true road.

Also in the proem Parmenides established his most basic princ-

111. An ongoing reference to a distinction between Parmenides' views and the goddesses' views need not be continued with as it is abundantly clear that once he had set the stage in the proem, he himself drew no distinction between them. Parmenides was at one with the goddess as he was using his words as a representation of hers.

112. Even a distinction between Parmenides and his thoughts (as written) is a bit superfluous since he regarded being and thought as inseparable. (Cf. Fr. [3] and Fr. [8.38-40].

113. E.g. B. Snell, (1982), p. 148; L. Taran, (1965), p. 9.

114. L. Taran, (1965), p. 9.

115. Recall that the hexameter verse of epic poetry was cast in the "timeless present".

116. L. Taran, (1965), pp. 12-13.

iple, namely the dichotomy between Being and Not-Being (and the impossibility of the latter).

Come now, and I will tell you (and you, when you have heard my speech shall bear it away with you) the ways of inquiry which alone exist for thought. The one is the way of how it is, and how it is not possible for it not to be; this is the way of persuasion, for it attends Truth. The other is the way of how it is not, and how it is necessary for it not to be; this I tell you, is a way wholly unknowable. For you could not know what is not — that is impossible<sup>117</sup> — nor could you express it. (Fr. [2]).

This is usually appended with Fr. [3]; "for it is the same thing that can be thought and can be".<sup>118</sup> Together these formed the core of Parmenides' thought. Being, that which is and that which can be thought of, constituted what was true. Not-Being, that which is not and which thus cannot be thought of, was necessarily false and as such constituted the wrong way. As Mourelatos showed, the two were mutually exclusive.<sup>119</sup>

However, the second "way" was not necessarily the Way of Opinion (or Seeming), the way followed by ordinary mortals.<sup>120</sup> The

117. Cited in J. M. Robinson, (1968), p. 110.

118. Cited in W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 14. Guthrie's translation of Fr. [3] is preferred to Robinson's version which was "For thought and being are the same"(p. 110). Compared with Guthrie's and other versions, Robinson's can be misleading.

119. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), p. 71.

120. There is some debate in the literature as to whether Parmenides was postulating two or three "ways". The issue is canvassed by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), pp. 22-23. This issue is blurred by talk of "ways" and Guthrie's discussion does not necessarily clarify it. However, it can be resolved since the mutual exclusivity above does not refer to *aletheia* (the Way of Truth) and *doxa* (the Way of Opinion) but to Being (which is, and hence, for Parmenides, true) and Not-Being (which is not, and hence false). The Way of Opinion referred to a fusion of Being and Not-Being (as noted by Guthrie) and hence was not true since it postulated the being of Not-Being which, for Parmenides, was *ex hypothesi*, impossible. The Way of Opinion was the wrong way, and while it was not necessarily false in that it might resemble the Way of Truth, it could never *be* truth. L. Tarran, (1965), Chapter 2, discusses the relationship between the Way of Truth and the Way of *Doxa*. Since *doxa* can never be truth it is illusory and amounts to the way of Not-Being (*ibid.*, p. 230).

Way of Opinion involved both Being and Not-Being. On such a path

mortals, knowing nothing, wander two-headed; for helplessness in their own breasts guides their erring mind. They are borne along, both deaf and blind, mazed, hordes with no judgement, who believe that to be and not to be are the same and not the same, and the path of everything is one that turns back upon itself. (Fr. [6]).<sup>121</sup>

Immediately following this passage, Parmenides warned his audience not to follow this course of experience drawn from the senses but to follow *logos* (Fr. [7]). The implication was that if experience and *logos* should clash then such a clash should always be resolved in favour of *logos* because *logos* (i.e. reason) was thought and being, and only they truly existed for Parmenides.<sup>122</sup> No other Greek thinker prior to Parmenides had posed such a radical denial of sense experience.<sup>123</sup> Even Xenophanes, who had posed something like a "pure intellect" as supreme, did not deny sense experience but suggested that the latter had to be mediated by the intellect. Parmenides' appeal to pure reason, to the *logos* of Being, was absolute.

The nature of Parmenides' logic can be seen from Fr. [8] where he outlined the Way of Truth. His aim was to demonstrate that *Being is* and that it was therefore eternal (i.e. involving neither birth nor decay), that it was whole, indivisible, motionless and without limit.

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121. There is also some debate over the object of Parmenides' attack in Fr. [6]. Again, this debate has been well canvassed by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), pp. 23-25. There Guthrie made it clear that although Heraclitus might have been Parmenides' target (as advocated, for example by E. Zeller, (1980), p. 49) it was more than likely that Parmenides was directing his critique at any who maintained a belief in "genesis, the process of coming into being" (W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 25), and hence was aiming at mortals in general since such beliefs had informed Greek thought for generations. For example, Anaximander's views on how human life came to be have been ably reconstructed by C. H. Kahn, (1960). See also G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), *passim*.

122. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 158.

123. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 20.



The argument began:

(6) For what birth of it wilt thou seek? How and from what did it grow? I shall not allow thee to say or think 'from what is not', for it is not to be said of thought that 'it is not'. (9) And what need would have prompted it to grow later or sooner, beginning from nothing? Thus it must either fully be or else not be. (12) Nor will the force of evidence suffer anything besides itself to arise from what is not. Therefore Justice does not relax her fetters and allow it to come into being or perish, but holds it fast. (16) The verdict on this lies here: It is or it is not. But this verdict has already been given, as it had to be, that the one path should be left alone as unthinkable, unnammed, for it is no true path, and that the other exists and is real. (19) How could what is afterwards perish? And how could it come into being? (20) For if it came into being, it *is* not, nor yet if it is going to be at some future time. Thus becoming is extinguished, and perishing not to be heard of.

...

(8. 22-5) Nor is it divisible, since it all equally is. It does not exist more fully in one direction, which would prevent it from holding together, nor more weakly in another, but all is full of what is. Therefore it is all continuous, for what is is close to what is.

...

(8. 26-33) But unmoved, in the grip of mighty bonds, it *is* without beginning or ceasing, since coming into being and perishing have been driven afar off and true conviction has rejected them. (29) Remaining the same in the same place it rests by itself and so remains firmly where it is; for powerful Necessity holds it in the bonds of a chain that hems it in all round, (32) because it is not allowed that what is should be incomplete; for it is not lacking, but by not being it would lack everything.

A detailed analysis of Fr. [8] is beyond the scope of this study especially in the light of those made by Mourelatos<sup>124</sup> and Guthrie,<sup>125</sup> whose respective analyses differ in some respects but nevertheless provide a good basis for a summary of the overall proof.

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124. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), Chapters 4 and 5.

125. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), pp. 26-57.

In Fr. [8.6-21], Parmenides presented his proof that Being (i.e. what is) was eternal and not subject to change. Parmenides' basic assumption was that either Being (it is) or Non-Being (it is not). The latter disjunct, for Parmenides, meant nothing; Not-Being denoted nothing, a void. Out of nothing could come nothing because there was no basis for growth. As Guthrie pointed out, the view that "out of nothing nothing comes" was an axiom of thought for all Greek thinkers; creation of anything *ex nihilo* was regarded as impossible.<sup>126</sup> Whatever involved change had to come from or go to something else. This gave Parmenides his opening. If something ( $x$ ) was becoming something else ( $y$ ) then it was in the process of change from  $x$  to  $y$ , and could be neither  $x$  nor  $y$ . It must be something else or nothing. But it cannot be the latter because nothing comes from nothing. It must be the former (say  $z$ ). But if  $z$  is to become  $y$  the same problem arises as for  $x$  becoming  $y$ . The problem keeps arising because each step requires that something is. Parmenides was thus positing what later logicians would call an infinite regress which arose from assuming that what-is, is not or *vice versa*.<sup>127</sup> Parmenides' argument in this section was thus a proof in the form *reductio ad absurdum*.<sup>128</sup> The only way of undermining Parmenides' argument was to refute his hypothesis of the mutual exclusivity of Being and Not-Being. But since Not-Being meant positing nothing as an existential category, that strategy, at least for Parmenides, was an absurdity, and as such was pointless.

The proof in Fr. [8.6-21] established the basis for the proof in Fr. [8:22-25] that Being is indivisible and hence continuous. Again,

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126. *ibid.*, p. 29.

127. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), pp. 99-100.

128. *ibid.*, p. 99.

Parmenides' initial hypothesis admitted no intermediate position. There could be no degrees of Being, since Being either is or it is not. In order to demonstrate that, Parmenides assumed the opposite of what he wanted to prove. He assumed that there were degrees of Being and treated them as degrees of density.<sup>129</sup> If there were differing degrees of density there was no guarantee that reality (i.e. what-is) would remain as it is. This would invoke change and hence Not-Being as a meaningful category. But since this was impossible there could be no degrees of Being and hence no divisibility or discontinuities for Being.

This conclusion, together with his earlier proofs, became the basis for the argument in Fr. [8.26-33] that what-is lacked motion; it was immovable. Because what-is was a single and indivisible whole, "there is nowhere for it to move as a whole, nor has it any parts which could change places internally".<sup>130</sup> Moreover, Being was complete because to be incomplete would involve claiming that Being lacked something. For Parmenides, such an absence would be equivalent to Not-Being (i.e. is-not).<sup>131</sup> But this would re-introduce Not-Being which was, *ex hypothesi*, impossible. In addition, since Being was complete it could not be limited because that would mean that some things were excluded from within its bounds and it would thus be incomplete. Since it was complete it was also unlimited.<sup>132</sup>

Undoubtedly, then, Parmenides had produced a work of immense power based on a rigorous type of logic. As Guthrie pointed out, Parmen-

129. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 33.

130. *ibid.*, p. 36. Note also his discussion in note 1. See also A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), Chapter 5 especially p. 116 n. 6.

131. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 38.

132. *ibid.*, pp. 45-46. See also A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), Chapter 5 for a detailed discussion of this.

ides' arguments left the views based on human experiences in tatters with cosmological speculations relegated to impossibilities since they contradicted the strictures of reason.<sup>133</sup> This was a considerable revolution within the history of Greek thought and its influence was significant for all subsequent Greek thinkers. After Parmenides, no Greek thinker could ignore the problems and dilemmas that he raised. To be sure, the weight of Parmenides' thesis rested upon his treatment of Being and his use of the word 'is'. As numerous people have pointed out, the distinction between 'is' denoting a copulative function between subject and predicate and 'is' denoting existence was not made during Parmenides' time.<sup>134</sup> It was only after such a distinction had become common-place that Parmenides' successors could counter some of his arguments and hence overcome some of the boundaries set by his logic.

Much more could be said about Parmenides' views, for example, his cosmology as presented in the last part of the poem, and what remains as a central problem of Parmenidean thought, the relationship between the Way of Truth and the Way of Opinion in terms of both his fundamental principle and the structure of his poem as a whole. However, the above sketch of his views is sufficient to show the nature of his thought and the radical challenge it presented. Parmenides' poem exhibited a structure in which all the constituent parts fused together to form a coherent deductive argument. As Versenyi noted, it was "a carefully elaborated heirarchical plan" which exhibited a strongly hypotactical structure.<sup>135</sup>

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133. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 38.

134. M. Furth, "Elements of Eleatic Ontology" in A. P. D. Mourelatos, (ed.), (1974), pp. 242-243. See also W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69); A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970); C. H. Kahn, "The Greek Verb 'To Be' and the Concept of Being", *Foundations of Language*, Volume 2, No. 3, 1966.

135. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 157.

This was further evidenced by the fact that the "causal, syllogistic, argumentative *gar* — for, since, as" was used by Parmenides in the Way of Truth approximately twenty-one times and "*epei*, a similar argumentative conjunction" appeared six times.<sup>136</sup> As Guthrie cautioned, however, Parmenides' use of *gar* was sometimes a means of repeating a statement rather than always constituting a means of making clauses sequentially dependent on each other.<sup>137</sup> Nevertheless, it remains the case that Parmenides had, more than anyone before him, made explicit a form of reasoning that became the paradigm for the philosophical form of discourse.

His choice of the hexameter form to present his views was partly because hexameter verse remained a universally recognised means for articulating one's views for public presentation, and partly because he was able to make use of some epic echoes and motifs to accentuate his views. Particularly in the proem and the Way of Opinion, such a strategy gave his words added grandeur. But even in the Way of Truth some epic motifs and echoes were to be found.<sup>138</sup> The significant thing about his use of hexameter verse was that he was not bound to use it but could choose from a variety of poetic metres; or even have used a more prose-like medium.<sup>139</sup> That he chose deliberately to use hexameter verse indicated its importance as an appropriate medium for reaching a wide audience.<sup>140</sup> However, by adopting the hexameter form he had

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136. *ibid.*, p. 264 n. 14. Note also Versenyi's contrast of Parmenides' use of *gar* and *epei* with Homer's use of them in the first seventy-six lines of the *Iliad* (roughly the same number of lines as Parmenides' Way of Truth) where *gar* appeared four times and *epei* once.

137. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1965/69), p. 44.

138. *ibid.*, p. 10 and pp. 35-37; A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), Chapter 1 and also Chapters 4 and 5; L. Taran, (1965).

139. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), pp. 45-46.

140. *ibid.*, p. 46 where Mourelatos suggested that prose would have been unsuitable for the sorts of imagery (e.g. the theme of 'journey') that Parmenides wanted to achieve. The imagery of 'journey' was, however, well established within the epic medium and provided a ready-made source.

to stretch its structure beyond its normally paratactic style. It was a visibly recognisable shell within which Parmenides created and presented a different (from normal epic) way of comprehending the world.<sup>141</sup>

Parmenides' poem marked the point at which the philosophical form of discourse had differentiated itself from the more general poetic form. Ironically, this was achieved within the very paradigm of the poetic form, the epic hexameter. Versenyi described Parmenides' achievements in the following terms.

His Way of Truth is at once an admirable exercise in logical deduction and a philosophical monstrosity; its creation marks both the invention of a purely philosophical argument and its most incredible abuse.<sup>142</sup>

In making his comments about Parmenides, Versenyi had in mind the "richness and manifoldness" of Heraclitus' "reflective yet imaginative thought", and thus may have been unduly over-critical of Parmenides' views in comparison.<sup>143</sup>

Nevertheless, the thrust of Versenyi's criticism is well taken. Parmenides relegated all knowledge based on sense experience to the domain of illusion and opinion. At best such a domain could only approximate truth; it could never be truth. Parmenides radical separation of knowledge based solely on *logos*: from that derived from the senses, his radical rejection of what human beings usually understood as reality, and his substitution of a view of reality which was one, continuous, indivisible, immobile, unlimited whole, set traditional Greek

141. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 159 suggested that the distance between Homeric language and contemporary (i.e. Parmenidean) language was so great as to enable Parmenides to produce a "kind of shock effect" with his audience. (By 'Parmenidean language' is meant the language of every-day discourse normally used by Parmenides and his contemporaries.)

142. *ibid.*, p. 158

143. But note Versenyi's subsequent comments in *ibid.*, p. 158 which leave no doubt as to his very negative attitude to Parmenides' thought. It is equally clear that Versenyi has exaggerated the case against Parmenides when the latter's views are treated from a cosmological perspective.

thought on its head. If it is fair to say that his predecessors had succeeded only in prising open the door, behind which lay the possibilities of the philosophical form of discourse, then Parmenides had succeeded in blasting the door off its hinges. His successors had little choice but to pass through where he had entered and come to terms with what he had begun.

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Recounting the views of Thales, Anaximander, Anaximenes, Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides has provided the basis for establishing the claim that their writings constituted a form of discourse which could no longer be treated as part of the poetic form. Rather it had to be recognised as a distinctive and legitimate form for the articulation of knowledge and values. That recognition was not always forthcoming nor was it necessarily shared by all writers, as can be seen from Aristophanes' satirical treatment, in his play *Clouds*, of those who called themselves philosophers. Nevertheless, the presence of this new form of discourse could not be ignored as it embraced a way of framing knowledge and values that was no longer compatible with the poetic form.

The philosophical form of discourse now eschewed the characterisation of appropriate behaviour by the concrete actions of divine and/or legendary figures. In its place emerged attempts to explain the world in terms which, though evocative of divine forces, began to de-personalise the power and influence of the gods. Such attempts posited accounts of universal forces which could be explained in terms of a few unifying concepts. The concrete singularities characteristic of orally preserved discourse began to be replaced by terms that provided a common denominator for them. Greater and greater degrees of abstraction became the norm and embodied concepts of increasing generality or uni-

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versality. Moreover, accounts by different writers began to focus on the relations between various postulated universals and less on the particular instances that may have been denoted by such universal concepts. Increasingly, such accounts began to show how each postulated concept could be placed in orderly relationships so that particular dependency relations could be exhibited thereby enabling the derivation of some concepts from other, perhaps more basic, concepts to be articulated with increasing clarity. As a result, patterns of inference began to gain in importance as the content of a writer's work came to be seen as less dependent on the whim of the writer and more a function of the ordering arrangements within the form of discourse.

These ordering arrangements came to be regarded as *logos* and constituted the mainstay of the burgeoning philosophical form of discourse. Each writer subjected his or her predecessors' views to scrutiny (either directly or indirectly) by showing how and why his or her own account was superior. By demonstrating how each conclusion was derived and by articulating the assumptions supporting them an element of critical reflection also became a feature of the new form of discourse. While it is admitted that such critical reflection was often rudimentary (e.g. Xenophanes) it is nevertheless the case that it became an increasingly integral part of the works of the pre-Socratic writers.

One final problem remaining to be considered is the manner in which the pre-Socratics actually articulated their views. Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides (and after them Empedocles) presented their views as poems or, in the case of Heraclitus, as oracular statements which must be regarded as predominantly poetic.<sup>144</sup> None of them could

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144. The case for Heraclitus' writings as poetic in style is convincingly made by E. A. Havelock, (1966b), p. 56 ff.. See also U. Hölscher, (1974), for a detailed discussion of Heraclitus' style.



be said to have used prose as a formal medium of expression. Yet, as Havelock pointed out, it has generally been assumed by many historians of early Greek thought that prose was the appropriate or normal medium for the writing of philosophy.<sup>145</sup> Havelock cited Snell's view that Xenophanes, Parmenides, and Empedocles used hexameter verse to express their views "despite the fact that the time had long gone by when it would have been necessary to render an idea of literary significance in verse form".<sup>146</sup> Havelock questioned this view and asked rhetorically where the evidence was for such a body of prose which could be regarded as having preceded their works. He claimed that such prose was non-existent but had been merely presumed to exist on the basis of the nature (again presumed) of the works of the Milesian philosophers.<sup>147</sup>

Havelock noted that evidence for the nature of the Milesians' works was wholly dependent on the later doxographical traditions and secondly, that their work was not available as *ipsissima verba*.<sup>148</sup> He concluded that the "Milesians must be discarded" as constituting evidence for the way in which early philosophers actually expressed their views.<sup>149</sup> Yet can this conclusion be justified? Certainly, the two points concerning the evidence for the Milesians' works are undoubtedly correct. The reliance on the doxographical tradition has been well established in the literature<sup>150</sup> and the point about the *ipsissima verba* is therefore

145. E. A. Havelock, (1966b), p. 44.

146. B. Snell, "Die Ausdrücke für den Begriff des Wissens in der vor-Platonischen Philosophie", *Philol. Untersuch.*, 29, Berlin, 1924 cited in *ibid.*, pp. 44-45 and n. 2 p. 63.

147. E. A. Havelock, (1966b), p. 44.

148. *ibid.*, p. 51.

149. *ibid.*, p. 51.

150. Recall the earlier discussion pp. 136-139 above.

a necessary corollary. Aristotle and his pupil Theophrastus began the doxographical tradition and they were often the main source of information for later commentators and historians. The view that the Milesians produced written material (i.e. books) can be dated from their time but whether such works were written in prose remains pure conjecture. Yet this has not prevented the presumption of the Milesians' use of prose writing from attaining the status of established fact. By examining Havelock's summary conclusion it may be possible to shed some light on this problem and hence reach a more reliable basis for claims about the nature of the writing used in the actual presentation of philosophical ideas by the early practitioners of this form of discourse.

This is not an idle problem because it bears upon the central question of the relationship between the conditions governing the production or composition of philosophical works and the conditions for their dissemination. As has been noted in preceding chapters, the conditions underlying public dissemination remained predominantly non-literate in so far as literacy was not common until the late fifth century B.C.. Hence the question of how the early philosophers expressed themselves in a basically oral culture is a vital one. Admittedly, the discussion below focusses on the conjectures and supporting arguments of modern historians and hence appears to be merely speculating on speculations. To some extent this cannot be avoided. Given the absence of the necessary evidence (i.e. the *ipsissima verba* of the Milesian philosophers), one must turn to a less direct route to arrive at the most plausible account of how these thinkers actually presented their ideas.

For Thales, there were conflicting accounts of whether he actually wrote anything. Guthrie<sup>151</sup> and Kirk & Raven<sup>152</sup> briefly sur-

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151. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 54 n. 1.

152. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), pp. 84-86.

veyed these accounts. Of these, only two made any reference to the style of writing of Thales; Plutarch<sup>153</sup> suggested it was verse and Hesychius<sup>154</sup> said that it was epic verse. Yet while these two accounts are suggestive they cannot be regarded as conclusive because of the existence of numerous other reports which either deny that Thales produced written works or, if they accept that Thales did write books, make no mention of the nature of the style of writing. Anaximander reputedly wrote at least one work, perhaps more,<sup>155</sup> but no direct evidence of its style has been attested. Guthrie cited Theophrastus' view that Anaximander's language was "somewhat poetical" in comparison with the language of Anaximenes.<sup>156</sup> Kirk & Raven noted that Anaximander's style may have been of an "apophthegmatic nature".<sup>157</sup> That is, it may have been in the form of terse or pithy sayings.<sup>158</sup> If so, that would have been consistent with an oral form of dissemination. No firm conclusion can, however, be drawn concerning Anaximander's style of writing. As for Anaximenes, he reputedly wrote in "a simple and economical Ionian style"<sup>159</sup> but whether this meant he wrote in prose is indeterminate. Certainly, he has been described as having had a "prosaic style"<sup>160</sup> but then Hesiod's style has been similarly described<sup>161</sup> and he was indisputably

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153. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 54 n. 1.

154. Cited in G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 85.

155. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), pp. 72-73.

156. *ibid.* p. 115. Also G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 144. C. H. Kahn, (1960), pp. 168 ff. has a slightly different interpretation.

157. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 101. Kirk & Raven also note (p. 86) that the nature of the wisdom of the Seven Sages was also apophthegmatic.

158. This would suggest some continuity between Heraclitus' style and that of the Seven Sages. (cf. n. 157 above).

159. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 115.

160. *ibid.* p. 115.

161. L. Versenyi, (1974), p. 65.

a poet. The nature of the style of writing in Anaximenes' works remains in doubt although, given the comments made by Theophrastus when comparing Anaximenes with Anaximander, the possibility that he wrote in a prose-like style gains some credibility.

One possibility which merits consideration is that the writings of the Milesian philosophers were not necessarily intended for publication (in the sense of being presented before a public audience or a readership) but rather served as notes for the individual philosophers. That is, that the 'writings' of the Milesian philosophers were not published works but work notes. This supposition is consistent with the generally accepted view that the written word was primarily an aid, at least in its early use, within the still dominant oral mode of discourse.

The written book was a record of the spoken or sung word and subordinate to it. It was primarily valuable to the author himself, as an aide-memoire, a way of fixing his liquid thoughts, or just as a pleasing visible token of his creativity.<sup>162</sup>

West was referring specifically to a younger contemporary of Anaximander, Pherecydes of Syros (c. 560/550 B.C.), but his observation has some general relevance to the other Ionian thinkers.<sup>163</sup> The written word was not then the primary medium for disseminating one's views because of the lack of a reading public.

The point here turns on the interpretation of 'writings' or 'written works'. That is, whether such notes or "aide-memoires" constituted books in the sense in which Aristotle (writing in the mid to late fourth century B.C.) and later doxographers understood the notion 'books' is open to question. Certainly, the words *biblos* or *bibloi* (book

162. M. West, (1971), p. 5.

163. See for example H. Frankel, (1975), p. 257 n. 9.

or books respectively) were probably current in the mid-sixth century B.C. However, they may well have denoted something different from *biblos* or *bibloi* as understood in the late fourth century when written works were books that were published.<sup>164</sup> Given that the Greek languages did not remain constant, with many words undergoing substantial changes in meaning, it is reasonable to suppose that the meaning of *biblos* did not remain fixed.<sup>165</sup> Indeed, its meaning would only have gained currency after the introduction of writing into Greek culture and hence it would have taken some considerable time for its meaning to have become more or less stabilised. Only with the advent of a reading public, the rise of publishing concerns in which the conventions of publication for a readership became standardised, and the existence of libraries (particularly in the homes of the wealthier citizens) as a social phenomenon together with the libraries of the various Academies can one take the meaning of the word 'books' for granted. By Aristotle's time, all of the above were normal features of Greek life. Hence, in the case of the Milesian philosophers, what Aristotle and others regarded as "books" or "writings" may well have been merely collections of notes which served to buttress rather than supplant their oral presentations.

This suggestion gains more weight if one considers the works of Pherecydes. For some Pherecydes was the first writer of prose,<sup>166</sup> for others that honour belonged to Anaximander,<sup>167</sup> while for others he was

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164. The evidence for this can be seen from the growth of libraries in the Greek cities from about the close of the fifth century B.C.. See the references given in n. 11 p. 6 above.

165. This follows from the point raised by E. A. Havelock, (1966b), pp. 45 -46 where he noted that modern scholars have tended to assume that the Greek language provided a more or less constant semantic field from Homer to Aristotle. See also, B. Snell, (1982); K. von Fritz, (1974).

166. H. Frankel, (1975), p. 245.

167. C. H. Kahn, (1960), page not numbered, following p. 239.

ranked more or less equal with Anaximander.<sup>168</sup> It is uncertain whether his extant fragments constitute *ipsissima verba*,<sup>169</sup> but some comments can still be made. According to West's interpretation, Pherecydes

told his tale easily and artistically, in an unaffected style that was content with the simplest syntax and connectives, the informal present tense (strictly avoided in epic narrative), and such carefree repetition ... characteristic of speech, but soon eliminated from literary prose.<sup>170</sup>

Pherecydes' language was thus very close to the language of everyday speech and paralleled the trend towards use of the vernacular by the lyric poets. Frankel also pointed out that it was similar to the language used for inscriptions and treaties of the period.<sup>171</sup> The latter were not intended for memorisation (and hence "public consumption" in the oral sense) but as records of the nature of the transaction and consequent obligations.<sup>172</sup> Works intended for "public consumption" were, as West himself pointed out, framed in verse (particularly hexameters) which was

the standard medium for any formal composition, anything intended to be preserved,<sup>173</sup>

pertaining to knowledge and values. Verse was the "recognised means for displaying cosmologies" because it was "an established form, and it was natural to turn it to formulate matters of intellectual enquiry".<sup>174</sup>

168. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 50.

169. It was so assumed by H. Frankel, (1975) and M. West (1971).

170. M. West, (1971), p. 6.

171. H. Frankel, (1975), p. 245.

172. *ibid.*, pp. 245-246 for some examples.

173. M. West, (1971), p. 4. West made this statement in response to the question of why Pherecydes wrote in prose. He also noted that Pherecydes' "subject-matter was not unsuited for hexameters" (p. 4).

174. C. M. Bowra, (1970), p. 160.

Poetry preceded prose,<sup>175</sup> and the development of the latter may well have made it easier for the early Ionian thinkers to overcome some of the restraints of the poetic form. However, these thinkers, in disseminating their views on a wider basis cannot be assumed to have treated prose as the chosen medium. If it can be granted that these thinkers did attempt to disseminate their views to a larger public than their immediate circle of friends, then the use of prose must be understood as an adjunct to their oral presentation. The use of prose was more restricted than has been assumed by those against whom Havelock was aiming his criticisms. Nevertheless, Havelock's conclusion that the Milesians' works must be dismissed was only justified to the extent that it argued against the presumption that they wrote in prose as a matter of course. However, Havelock was not justified in dismissing their work so cavalierly because, in so doing, he left unexamined the very assumption he was questioning, and replaced it implicitly with the opposite assumption that they must therefore have used verse.<sup>176</sup>

Havelock's general point, that prose was not sufficiently developed for the Ionian thinkers to have relied on it as a means of expression suitable for widespread dissemination because of the limited amount of readers, retains its force. On that basis he went on to demonstrate how the absence of a readership influenced the choices of literary composition made by Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides, and that their use of verse, contrary to the view expressed by Snell, must be regarded as significant. From the styles of these three thinkers, discussed

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175. That poetry preceded prose can be taken as axiomatic for literary developments in the Greek world.

176. Havelock does not state this directly but leaves the question more or less open. Yet the tenor of his analysis in (1966b) was strongly suggestive that verse should be regarded as the presumed medium for the writings of the Milesians.

above, it can be seen that the choice of hexameter by Xenophanes and Parmenides was governed by considerations of the memorability of their words by their audiences. Heraclitus' style was less obviously mnemonic, at least on the surface. His words were arranged in short, pithy sayings. Aphoristic or apophthegmatic utterances were well established, as Havelock noted.<sup>177</sup> The Seven Sages, among whom Solon and Thales were counted, were renowned for their aphorisms.<sup>178</sup> The use of aphorisms and oracular pronouncements were therefore familiar to Heraclitus' audiences. The memorability of these utterances rested in their brevity, ensuring a longevity beyond their moment of pronouncement.<sup>179</sup> At the same time the content often militated against immediate understanding by his audiences, and this possibly enhanced their impact. But as Versenyi pointed out, this also may have contributed to the fact that his audiences may have been less receptive to his work compared with that of Xenophanes and Parmenides.<sup>180</sup> Nevertheless, his style mirrored his content in so far as the audiences had to go beyond the surface of his words to unravel his ideas. Heraclitus' style was as much orally based as Xenophanes or Parmenides, or Hesiod for that matter.

For all three thinkers, however, the attempt to go beyond the bounds of oral presentation was evident. Their particular ideas and views were at odds with the traditional views associated with the oral mode of discourse. Moreover, their ideas exhibited a hypotactic approach that stretched the limits of oral means of presentation. Not

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177. E. A. Havelock, (1966b), p. 57. See also K. Robb, (1978), p. 30 where it was noted that "the Heraclitean *logoi* were framed to be carried in the hearer's memory".

178. G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966), p. 74 n. 1. Recall also that Anaximander was reputed by some to have favoured aphoristic means of expression. Cf. n. 157 p. 182 above.

179. E. A. Havelock, (1966b), p. 58.

180. L. Versenyi, (1974), pp. 149-150.



content with merely stringing their thoughts together in a paratactic fashion, they adapted the traditional verse form to emphasise the unity and interrelationships of differing ideas, as well as articulating criticisms of the mistakes of their predecessors. The effect of these efforts was to help establish the authority of these thinkers as both persons of knowledge and as purveyors of knowledge. The early Greek thinkers were able to do this because, with the technique of writing, they were not bound by oral constraints when formulating their ideas. When it came to disseminating these ideas, these thinkers had to ensure that the technology of writing conformed to the requirements of an oral culture even as that technology simultaneously undermined its foundation.

## Chapter 5

### The Technology of Writing and the Emergence of the Philosophical Form of Discourse

The intellectual endeavours of thinkers from Thales to Parmenides constituted the beginnings of a new and distinctive form of discourse for the ancient Greeks. Although many of the themes developed within the oral mode of discourse, such as justice, morality, human nature, the relationships between mortals and the gods, and so forth, remained of central importance, a different way of formulating and handling these themes had emerged. This new approach resulted in a range of understandings which challenged the received wisdom of the oral tradition.

The general characteristics of this new form of discourse have already been discussed. In it the gods began to lose their anthropomorphic character as causal agents in the world. The arbitrary and capricious activities of the traditional gods began to be replaced by terms which were more impersonal, such as necessity and reason. The semi-mundane deities of the oral mode of discourse yielded to greater abstraction. Explanatory terms became more conceptual in approach, in that they served to unify, in an explicit fashion, the myriad of seemingly unrelated experiences. The development of higher degrees of abstraction in turn led to an emphasis on relationships between the abstract concepts. Such discourse began to exhibit a hypotactic approach (as compared with the parataxis of orally preserved discourse) in which conceptual statements were arranged more or less hierarchically. Conclusions were articulated as being dependent on, and derived from, earlier statements. Patterns of inference gained in importance as these thinkers began to make distinctions between the structure and content of their

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views. An element of critical reflection thus emerged in the criticism of received authorities as well as in justifications of one's accounts. While it was the case that ideas were sometimes dogmatically presented (as compared with later practitioners of this form of discourse),<sup>1</sup> it was nevertheless true that each thinker was concerned to justify his or her own account by appealing to its inner logic. That is, they appealed to the fact that their conclusions were derived by a method that was felt to be independent of the content. Their views were guided by *logos* (i.e. reason) and hence were not mere whims or assertions but arguments.

This was most evident in the works of Heraclitus and Parmenides, and a bit less so for Xenophanes. It was less apparent in the case of the Milesian thinkers mainly because evidence of the nature of their arguments rests mainly on reconstruction from other sources. Nevertheless, their views have been well attested as taking the form of novel hypotheses which they proceeded to demonstrate at the conceptual level by showing the necessary links between explanatory concepts. Their views exhibited a hypotactic rather than a paratactic approach. It was an approach predicated on argument rather than naked assertion. The emphasis was on explaining the "facts" at issue rather than simply asserting them.

By the time of Thales and Anaximander, the "truths" or "facts" of the oral period were steadily losing their coherency and unity. Consequently, any thinker who ventured to state the "facts" had to state why the "facts" were as claimed, and at the same time, explain why his or her particular account should be accepted as correct. These two requirements became fused within the philosophical form of discourse such that the one could not be undertaken without the other.<sup>2</sup> This

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1. Of course, this does not mean that later practitioners of the philosophical form of discourse were any the less prone to making dogmatic claims and assertions.

2. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p.234 where a similar characterisation of Greek philosophy is given.

served to distinguish this form of discourse from others such as poetry and history. The Greek phenomenon of philosophy would thus appear to be closely connected with the broader literate revolution which had begun over a century earlier. However, it needs to be asked what the precise nature of this connection was, and what bearing it had on the emergence of philosophical discourse. By examining a number of arguments that purport to explain (either individually or in combination) the emergence of philosophy in the ancient Greek world, it will be possible to make the nature of this connection more explicit.

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One line of reasoning which has been advanced to explain the emergence of philosophy concerns the alleged superiority of the Greek mind. By dint of superior psychological and intellectual qualities the Greeks were able to invent philosophy; they performed the "Greek miracle", to borrow a phrase used by Lloyd.<sup>3</sup> The nineteenth century historian, Eduard Zeller, has provided what must be the definitive statement of this position.

Thus we find an explanation for the rise of Greek philosophy primarily in the peculiar gifts of the Greek people, in which understanding and imagination, rational and intuitive forces were united in a fruitful combination. The enthusiastic element, which was undeniably present in the Greek character was tempered by a feeling for truth and clarity. Their passionate disposition was held in check by a sense of order and a love for moderation and restrained by law, both in the realm of politics and formal art. The Greeks themselves connected their mental character with the climate of their sunny land, which however was not so rich that work was unnecessary: for poverty is the mother of virtue.

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3. G. E. R. Lloyd, *Early Greek Science: Thales to Aristotle*, (Chatto & Windus, London, 1970) p. 12. It must be emphasised that Lloyd did not subscribe to the view that the rise of philosophy could be explained in terms like 'miracle' or those of Zeller's above.

At the same time their land pointed to the sea and traffic with foreign peoples. From there they received various stimulations; but what they borrowed they made their own and developed in their own way. Their philosophy is their own peculiar creation which was bound to well up from the depths of their nature, as soon as the progress of mental development had brought them beyond the childhood stage of myth and the Logos boldly spread its pinions in quest of knowledge and truth.<sup>4</sup>

Quite clearly, Zeller's explanation turned on a notion of the (alleged) innateness of the Greek genius. The Greeks of the Archaic and Classical periods certainly established some remarkable achievements, and for many of their successors, particularly in the post-Renaissance era, it may well have seemed as if some sort of miracle had been wrought. However, this explanation is extremely suspect for two reasons, either of which would be sufficient to refute it.

First, the appeal to the "peculiar gifts of the Greek people", that is, to some innate qualities enjoyed only by the Greeks (qualities that were not to be found in the Egyptians, Phoenicians, Persians or any other ancient peoples) predicates the explanation on racial foundations. This implies that the Greeks were superior human beings, and it follows that their intellectual powers were also superior, thus explaining why they alone were able to conceive philosophy. This view not only reflects the ancient Greeks' self-appraisal, with its explicit distinction between Greek and Barbarian,<sup>5</sup> but accorded well with the

4. E. Zeller, (1980), p. 19.

5. It must be understood that this distinction between Greek and Barbarian was more finely developed during the age of Athenian hegemony in the fifth century B.C.. Nevertheless, traces of it were visible in the earlier centuries as is evidenced by various passages in the *Odyssey*. For example, the Cyclops incident where Polyphemus broke all the accepted rules of hospitality (as upheld by the Greeks) with his treatment of Odysseus and his companions. Even the description of Polyphemus' physical appearance and habits served to underline his barbarism.

Euro-centric values of some nineteenth century (and later) historians.<sup>6</sup> Even if the racial hypothesis could be sustained,<sup>7</sup> it fails to explain why philosophy emerged when it did. If the Greeks were capable of conceiving philosophy simply by virtue of being Greek, then why did philosophy not originate sooner. Why the sixth century for its debut?

The second reason for objecting to Zeller's approach is the circular nature of its reasoning. It is the very "miracle" itself that needs explaining. Quite clearly, by any criteria for an adequate explanation, the question (i.e. why did the miracle occur?) cannot be its own answer (i.e. because it was a miracle). Moreover, how was it possible for the Greeks to go beyond the "childhood stage of myth"<sup>8</sup> and what made it possible for "Logos [to] boldly spread its pinions"? If the Greeks were so superior, why and for what purpose did they need "myth", and, more significantly, why did they need to wait for the "progress of [their] mental development" and what constituted such a development? These questions are begged in Zeller's explanation.

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A more plausible approach might be to characterise Greek philosophy as emerging from a search for order. That is, that philosophy

occurred when the conviction began to take shape in men's minds that the apparent chaos of events must conceal an underlying order, and that this order

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6. The issue of Euro-centric values is addressed briefly by E. Wood, "Marxism and Ancient Greece", *History Workshop Journal*, Issue 11, Spring 1981. pp. 4-6.

7. E. A. Havelock, (1976), p. 36 where he noted that such an hypothesis lacks any credible foundation whatsoever.

8. Recall the discussion in Chapter 2 above about oral *mythos* and its place in the Greek world in the oral period.

is the product of impersonal forces.<sup>9</sup>

In a general sense, this may well have been the case as the works of Hesiod, Solon, and other Greek thinkers would seem to bear out. Their works all exhibited a belief in the underlying order of the *cosmos* (universe). Yet there is a deeper sense in which Guthrie has begged the question at issue. That is, why did this conviction take place at that particular time (indeed, what particular time?), and most important of all, how was such a realisation made possible? The Homeric worldview, which had long preceded the emergence of the pre-Socratics, saw events in the world as arbitrary, the result of the capricious whims of the gods. What made it possible for post-Homeric Greeks to realise alternative accounts to those that Homer and his predecessors had, for so long, provided?

A number of historians have attempted to get around these questions by suggesting that such a search for order was prompted in some way by the ordered nature of the *polis*. Thus Burnet claimed that the ordered nature of Greek society provided the model for understanding nature.<sup>10</sup> V. G. Childe suggested that the order of society provided the Greeks with a model of reality.<sup>11</sup> William McNeill described early Greek philosophy as a naive attempt to project the ordered existence

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9. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 26. See also C. J. Schneer, *The Search for Order: The Development of the Major Ideas in the Physical Sciences from the Earliest Times to the Present*, (English Universities Press, London, 1960) p. 13 where he stated:

"Science begins with the concepts of order and regularity and the belief that the universe is not arbitrary but governed."

Note that for the Greeks, there was no distinction between 'science' and 'philosophy'. That was a much later separation by thinkers of another age.

10. J. Burnet, (1930), p. 9.

11. V. G. Childe, *What Happened in History*, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1978) pp. 223-224.

of the *polis* onto the world at large.<sup>12</sup> A similar view was also held by Cornford.<sup>13</sup> Such views imply a direction of analogy from *polis* to *cosmos*. Moreover, such views assume a conception of the *polis* as an ordered, well-regulated entity which may well be misplaced when considered from an historical perspective.

As Kahn noted, the *polis/cosmos* analogy may have been made consciously by various Greek thinkers,<sup>14</sup> (e.g. Anaximenes),<sup>15</sup> but he also noted that such an analogy was explicit from Plato onwards and that its use by the pre-Socratics was patchy.<sup>16</sup> Kahn made no explicit comment on the presumed direction of this analogy, leaving open the possibility that it may have been from nature to society. Indeed, his analysis of Anaximander's views strongly suggests that this was the more likely possibility given Anaximander's emphasis on cosmic justice.

The use of the word *cosmos* can be traced back to at least Homer where it referred to "any arrangement or disposition of parts where it is appropriate, well disposed, and effective" and embraced the general meanings of "neat arrangement" and "finery, rich adornment".<sup>17</sup> For the pre-Socratics it came to be more specifically applied to mean a unified arrangement in which everything had its assigned place.<sup>18</sup> It did not lose its pre-philosophical overtones but rather had them enhanced to give the word a more technical sense within philosophical

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12. William McNeill, *The Rise of the West*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1963) p. 116.

13. F. M. Cornford, *From Religion to Philosophy*, (Edward Arnold, London, 1912).

14. C. H. Kahn, (1960), pp. 223-224.

15. See Chapter 4 pp. 144-145 for a discussion on this aspect of Anaximenes' work. The above discussion does not contradict what was said about Anaximenes since it is accepted that he was one of the few to do so.

16. C. H. Kahn, (1960), p. 223 and n. 1.

17. *ibid.*, pp. 220-221.

18. *ibid.*, p. 222.



discourse.<sup>19</sup> In so doing, the pre-Socratics began to make explicit a relationship between nature and society.

To say that the *polis* served as a model for an understanding of nature implies a nature/society distinction which was only coming to be explicit from the works of Anaximander onwards. As Kahn has demonstrated, Anaximander was probably the first Greek thinker to make such a radical distinction.<sup>20</sup> Lloyd pointed to the prevalence of legal and political images or terms in the works of various thinkers to substantiate the view that society was the model for postulating an orderly universe.<sup>21</sup> The use of such terminology is certainly evident, yet they merely denote the order which was supposed to apply within society or the *polis*, not that which actually obtained. Hesiod's *Works and Days* described a situation in which lawful and ordered behaviour was anything but the norm, and justice still remained a rather capricious element. Solon's reformulation of Greek laws (itself an attempt to bring order to Athenian society) was based not on the fact that the *polis* was inherently well ordered, but on the assumption that the universe as a whole (including the domain of humans) was subject to regularly interacting forces. Justice for mortals would become a reality by bringing the world of mortals into line with that of the wider world because, for Solon, injustice and conflict between mortals arose from an imbalance between the two "worlds". Both Solon and Hesiod used the notion of an ordered and hence just *cosmos* to substantiate their views on justice for the society of mortals.

This does not mean that either Hesiod or Solon saw the world

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19. *ibid.*, pp. 223-224.

20. *ibid.*, pp. 188-192.

21. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp.247-248.

of nature and the world of mortals as separate entities. For both Hesiod and Solon, it was the powers of the gods which confronted humans, not the power of nature.<sup>22</sup> Hesiod brought order to the power of the gods which applied to all things, human and non-human alike. Solon extended Hesiod's treatment to further de-personalise the power of the gods. As these powers became more impersonal they nevertheless applied to the workings of all things in the universe. It was with Anaximander that the beginnings of a separation between human and non-human powers began to be articulated. However, this did not really become fully explicit until the late fifth century controversies of the sophists concerning *physis* (i.e. nature) and *nomos* (i.e. convention).<sup>23</sup> (This was also the time when the *polis* reached its classical form, of which more below.)

Between Anaximander and the sophists, however, this dichotomy was only a gradual development. It presupposed a notion of *cosmos* which remained, for at least a hundred years after Anaximander, a term embracing human and non-human entities and forces. The point is that for Hesiod, Solon, Anaximander, and other early pre-Socratics the articulation of the inherent order in the *cosmos* provided the paradigm for justifying changes to human social relations. That is, cosmic justice was conceived in a way in which capriciousness and arbitrariness were no longer present but replaced by impersonal, regularised powers that acted as a

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22. C. H. Kahn, (1960), p. 192. As Kahn demonstrated, 'natural' and 'social' order remained undistinguished in ancient thought for the earliest civilisations, including that of the Greeks.

23. *ibid.*, pp. 192-193. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 247-248 n. 1 makes the same point but says that Solon had emphasised *nomos* in respect to the responsibility of humans rather than the gods in framing their laws. True, Solon did emphasise human responsibility for their laws. But it was to illustrate that the responsibility lay primarily in humans ensuring that their laws were consistent with the principles of cosmic justice. Recall the discussion in Chapter 3 above concerning Solon and the context of his views.

basis for justifying how social relationships should be ordered. The direction of the *polis/cosmos* analogy would thus appear to be from *cosmos* to *polis* rather than the reverse.

This view is reinforced when one considers the historical development of the *polis*. The *polis* in its classical form (late fifth early fourth century B.C.) coincided with the intense controversies over *physis* and *nomos*. But the *polis*, too, had a history.<sup>24</sup> In earlier times, from at least the Mycenaean period to the ninth century, a *polis* was usually a natural or built-up fortification for a basically rural village. As the Greek world began to re-establish itself in the late ninth century B.C., the nature of the *polis* began to change. It began to be transformed from a rural to a pre-dominantly urban environment. By the early fourth century B.C. the typical *polis* was a thriving urban centre supported by its rural surrounds. For the Greek citizen of the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C., the centre of activity was the urban environment, the *agora* (market-place), and the Assembly. The *polis* provided the marketing and trading outlets for the rural produce, primarily the result of the labour of the slaves and metics, but also of the poorer citizens including wage-labourers and artisans,<sup>25</sup> and as a result a sharper distinction between town and country arose. This was all the more noticeable as the wealthier people tended to live on their estates whereas the rest of the citizenry lived in the urban area itself. These developments both paralleled and typified the controversy

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24. See the references cited in n. 16 p. 105 above. See also J. L. Myres, *The Political Ideas of the Greeks*, ed. by D. Gray, (Edward Arnold, London, 1927) Ch. 2; E. & N. Wood, *Class Ideology and Ancient Political Theory: Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in Political Context*, (Oxford University Press, New York, 1978) Ch. 2; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981).

25. G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981), Ch. IV provides a seminal discussion of the economic and social conditions of the period. Note also his analysis of the extent of wage-labour in ancient Greece which contrasts with that offered by E. Wood, (1981), pp. 8-12. See also M. I. Finley, (1973).

surrounding the *physis/nomos* debate. In fact, such controversies were engendered by the developments leading to the classical *polis*. It was the view of this particular form of *polis* which appears to provide or inform the use of the term '*polis*' in the arguments of those who have suggested that it provided a model for the emergence of philosophical discourse. But the above analysis suggests that the alleged order of the *polis* was not innate but one which gradually evolved. The working out of this order presupposed an understanding of the notion of *cosmos* which was only just starting to emerge in the works of Anaximander and his contemporaries. Clearly, an ahistorical conception of the ordered nature of the *polis* cannot provide an adequate explanation for the emergence of the philosophical form of discourse.

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In attempting to explain why the philosophical form of discourse emerged when it did, Lloyd examined a number of hypotheses:<sup>26</sup> (1) the level of technological development (and consequent technological expertise) in the ancient world and its effects on traditional or magical beliefs;<sup>27</sup> (2) an exclusively economic interpretation resting on a view of abundant surplus and the existence of a leisured class;<sup>28</sup> (3) knowledge and contact with other societies;<sup>29</sup> (4) the development of literacy;<sup>30</sup> and (5) the rise of the *polis* and the concomitant growth of

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26. It needs to be noted that Lloyd, in presenting his analysis, often treated the terms 'philosophy' and 'critical inquiry' as interchangeable. This may be acceptable but it needs to be argued rather than assumed.

27. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 235-236.

28. *ibid.*, p. 236.

29. *ibid.*, pp. 236-239.

30. *ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

of the Greek tradition of political debate and disputation.<sup>31</sup> The first three hypotheses will be considered in this section and the other two will be dealt with in more detail separately. In considering Lloyd's arguments, it needs to be noted that he compared the conditions which obtained in ancient Greece with those of the Greek's Near Eastern neighbours (i.e. Persia, Phoenicia, Egypt etc.) in the same historical period. The neighbouring societies became a sort of control for his analysis. Proceeding on the assumption that philosophy was a distinctively Greek phenomenon<sup>32</sup> and was therefore not a feature of the other societies, Lloyd suggested that conditions which were present in the Greek world but not elsewhere must be responsible for its emergence. He thus established a basis for ruling out those hypotheses (outlined above) which could be said to be applicable to the Greeks as well as their neighbours.

The first of the hypotheses examined by Lloyd was that "the criticism of magical beliefs" can be associated with increases in technological expertise which presuppose explanations that strip away traditional means of explaining phenomena. This hypothesis gathers some weight from the fact that early philosophical discourse made use of many technological analogies and images.<sup>33</sup> However, the issue was decided for Lloyd by the fact that the Mediterranean and Near Eastern

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31. *ibid.*, pp. 240-264. This last hypothesis bears some resemblance to the previously discussed view that it was the order inherent in the *polis* which provided a model for philosophical thought. But Lloyd is arguing something slightly different and more substantive. For Lloyd, it was the growth of the political traditions embodied by the *polis* (rather than some imprecise notion of 'order') which gave rise to the uniquely Greek form of discourse that came to be known as 'philosophy'.

32. Such an assumption on Lloyd's part is not an unreasonable one. A similar assumption has been made in this study as has already been discussed. See *supra*. pp.3-5.

33. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 235. Note the parallel between explanations invoking technological or political imagery as justifications and evidence for their respective claims.

regions were generally characterised by a more or less constant level of technological development.<sup>34</sup> On this basis Lloyd concluded that, in the period under consideration,

there is no important technological advance *in Greece* that can be held responsible for, or even be connected with, its distinctive intellectual developments.<sup>35</sup>

On the general level of technological developments Lloyd's interpretation is undoubtedly correct. However, one needs to ask whether the particular case of the Greek alphabet should not be regarded as technological development. In so far as alphabetic writing constituted a new means with which to articulate and disseminate knowledge and values it must surely be counted as a new technology.<sup>36</sup> The fact that Greece was not alone in its possession of a technology of writing meant, for Lloyd, that this was not what demarcated the Greeks from their neighbours in terms of the development of philosophy in the ancient Greek world. Yet surely the key issue is not the technology of a writing system as such, but the particular form which this technology took within each society and whether such a technology was a new departure for that society. This point will be taken up below in relation to the hypothesis about literacy. Within the criteria used by Lloyd, however, the explanation from technology is found wanting.

The second hypothesis focussed on the level of economic dev-

34. M. I. Finley, (1965), pp. 29-45.

35. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 236. (Emphasis in original.)

36. In his "Introduction" to J. Goody, (ed.), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975), Goody described the Greek alphabet as a "technology of the intellect" (p. 1). Although Goody has subsequently refined his views with respect to the Greek origins of the alphabet and, to some extent, its "revolutionary" impact, the view that it constituted a technology has not been rejected. See J. Goody, (1981) for his revised opinions concerning the origin and nature of the alphabet. See also the brief discussion in G. E. R. Lloyd, (1983), p. 115 on Goody's views concerning the implications of literacy.

elopment and the extent to which a society was capable of producing wealth in excess of its immediate needs. The existence of an economic surplus thereby makes it possible for a class of people to emerge who have the necessary leisure to indulge in speculative thought. This hypothesis derives from Aristotle who suggested that it was only after the immediate necessities of life have been met can the search for intellectual satisfaction be undertaken.<sup>37</sup> However, the economic hypothesis breaks down because several of the Near Eastern societies produced economic surpluses which far surpassed the Greeks until at least the end of the sixth century B.C..<sup>38</sup> In addition, this hypothesis takes no account of what is to be regarded as 'philosophy'. Aristotle was referring specifically to mathematics in making his generalisation about speculative thought.<sup>39</sup> This begs the question as to whether speculative thought, as such, can be regarded as identical with the philosophical form of discourse. Were they both cut from the same cloth, or did they each have distinctive characteristics such that they were merely analogous activities?<sup>40</sup> Moreover, the hypothesis in question remains silent

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37. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 236. See also W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), pp. 30-31; Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981 b 17-24, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. and introduced by R. McKeon, (Rabdom House, New York, 1941).

38. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 236. On the level of economic development see M. I. Finley, (1965) and (1973); G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981); G. Thomson, (1954); R. M. Jones, (1946); C. Roebuck, (1979).

39. Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, 981 b 20-24.

40. While it may be possible to regard philosophy and mathematics as speculative forms of thought, it does not necessarily follow that they were the same form of discourse. The Pythagoreans, among the first Greek mathematicians, did not use writing to articulate or disseminate their views on mathematics. Even if their ethical sayings were expressed in writing (but not by purist Pythagoreans since Pythagoras disavowed the use of writing), these took the form of maxims and proverbs characteristic of oral wisdom literature. To a large extent, the Pythagorean views took the form of religious doctrine and as such was somewhere between philosophy (as understood in this study) and religion. For some discussion of the Pythagoreans see W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), Ch. IV. Also, much of early Greek mathematics was based on advances made by some of their Near Eastern neighbours (e.g. Egypt and Persia).

as to the means required to express each. It is simply assumed that the requisite conditions of economic surplus and leisure will enable philosophy to spring forth. That such a form of discourse failed to do so in the Near Eastern societies would suggest that the economic hypothesis requires some additional supporting assumptions before it can be considered as an adequate explanation for the emergence of philosophy.

The third hypothesis concerns knowledge of and contact with other societies. There can be no doubt that many Greeks had extensive contact with other societies and hence access to different ideas. But the same can also be said of the societies with whom the Greeks were in contact. Lloyd reviewed the evidence of cultural interaction and concluded that this was not an exclusively Greek experience, and cannot be held responsible for the emergence of the philosophical form of discourse.<sup>41</sup> This does not deny that the content of Greek thought drew on some of the ideas and themes present in their neighbours' respective cosmologies.<sup>42</sup> It only denies that the Greeks learned how to frame such ideas from their neighbours.

Moreover, this hypothesis is flawed because it assumes what it claims to prove, namely that new, different, and challenging ways of doing things (and interpreting them) will cause those coming into contact with them to be more open-minded. Against this one could note the Greeks' generally chauvinistic attitude to foreign languages. Horton,

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41. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 238-239.

42. That the Greeks did in fact borrow various themes and cosmological ideas from their neighbours has been well established by F. M. Cornford, (1952). Also, the comments made about the development of mathematics in ancient Greece (*supra.* n. 40) is relevant here. For some brief comments on this see also E. T. Bell, *Men of Mathematics*, (Simon & Schuster, New York, 1937) p. 20. See also J. D. Bernal, *Science in History, Volume I: The Emergence of Science*, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1969) p. 159, p. 162, pp. 171-181. Note, however, that Bernal treats the terms 'philosophy' and 'philosophers' somewhat uncritically and ahistorically.



whom Lloyd cited as an authority on this sort of interchange,<sup>43</sup> went on to suggest that contact with different and challenging ways of doing and understanding things may well have the opposite effect, reinforcing traditional habits and customs.<sup>44</sup>

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Lloyd accepted the fifth hypothesis<sup>45</sup> that the specifically Greek form of political association, the *polis*, provided the appropriate conditions for the emergence of philosophy.

Ancient Greece is marked not just by exceptional intellectual developments, but also by what is in certain respects an exceptional political situation: and the two appear to be connected. In four fundamental ways aspects of Greek political experience may be thought either to have directly influenced, or to be closely mirrored in, key features of the intellectual developments we are concerned with. First there is the possibility of radical innovation, second the openness of access to the forum of debate, third the habit of scrutiny, and fourth the expectation of justification — of giving an account — and the premium set on rational methods of doing so.<sup>46</sup>

This is a clear statement of the hypothesis as well as the cardinal

43. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 236 n 32. There is ambiguity in his account as to whether Horton can be said to have provided support for this third hypothesis. Lloyd states the hypothesis and then cites Horton's work as applicable to the point Lloyd is making. Lloyd also comments on Horton's alleged indebtedness to the theoretical framework outlined in K. Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volumes I and II*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1969), with respect to the dichotomy between open and closed societies. If anything, it is Lloyd's analysis of Greek conditions (cf. n. 46 *infra*.) that appears to be following Popper's lead; especially with respect to the sorts of things Popper intended to convey with the term 'open society'. The theoretical adequacy of that term is another matter and need not be debated here.

44. R. Horton, "African Traditional Thought and Western Science" in B. Wilson, (ed.), *Rationality*, (Basil Blackwell, Oxford, 1974) pp. 153-155 ff. Note also his redefinition of Popper's terminology rather than his alleged co-opting of them (esp. n. 1 p. 155) as Lloyd appears to suggest.

45. The fourth hypothesis has not been forgotten but will be examined after Lloyd's own position has been examined.

46. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 258.

features of the Greek political experience which Lloyd thought were inextricably bound up with Greek intellectual achievements. The purported correspondence between the political and the intellectual can be examined from the historical dimension of this correspondence and a theoretical dimension in which Lloyd identifies his four noteworthy aspects.<sup>47</sup>

By the late fifth century B.C. the *polis* had achieved its classical form in which the four features listed by Lloyd were well to the fore. Where the late fifth century *polis* differed from its earlier versions was in the status of its indigenous, non-slave male inhabitants.<sup>48</sup> For the first time in the Greek world, the notion of a free, autonomous citizen became a central feature of Greek society.<sup>49</sup> No longer did legal codes dwell solely on matters of property relations, sanctions for transgressions, and hierarchical definitions of status.<sup>50</sup>

A new dimension was added to Greek life with the innovative legal codes of Solon (c. 500 B.C.) and Cleisthenes (c. 513 B.C.) in that constitutional questions became increasingly prominent. In particular, political rights such as the right to speak (as opposed to the right to be heard or to be granted an audience with the "powers that be"), the right to vote and participate in assemblies, the right to serve on juries, and

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47. For the moment the theoretical dimension of these four aspects will be treated as unproblematic while the historical dimension is examined. That is, it will be assumed that such features are self-evident characteristics of the *polis* until such time as they must be called to account.

48. For an overview of the status of women in ancient Greece see Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, (Schocken Books, New York, 1975); David M. Schaps, *Economic Rights of Women in Ancient Greece*, (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 1979); G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981).

49. E. & N. Wood, (1978), pp. 27 ff..

50. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 243-244 ff..

the right to criticise authority and tradition became enshrined in the legal codes as applying to all citizens of the *polis*.<sup>51</sup> The proliferation of different and wideranging constitutional forms throughout the Greek worlds in the late Archaic and Classical periods gave evidence of a new understanding of the ways in which political power could be constituted and exercised.<sup>52</sup> What occurred in the fifth century was a codification of practices that had long been embedded in the fabric of Greek society as the privilege of the well to do and powerful. In principle, at least, such practices became the legally enforceable rights of every Greek citizen. The broad transformation of political practices into rights (effectively a transformation from the empirical to the abstract) signalled the emergence of the classical *polis* in the late fifth century.

But the central question remains. Did this set of political rights (i.e. the right to speak out, the right to vote, the right to serve in assemblies and on juries, etc.) provide the basis for the emergence of philosophy? The short answer to this question is no because they were a mid to late fifth century development leading up to and forming a proper part of the political life of the classical *polis*. Nearly all of Lloyd's evidence concerning these political rights is drawn from examples taken from the late fifth and early fourth centuries B.C.. Taking Thales as a convenient reference for the first inklings of a new form of discourse (i.e. philosophy) it is clear that such rights postdate the emergence of philosophical discourse. The most that can be claimed for such rights is that they were concomitant with the subsequent development

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51. This does not mean that the legal codes of Solon or Cleisthenes, for example, established these rights all at once. Rather, it means that such rights could begin to be claimed and established on the basis of the substantial innovations that the aforementioned codes had set into motion. The codes of Solon and Cleisthenes opened up the possibilities which nevertheless had to be pursued and brought to a more democratic fruition by the Greeks of a later time.

52. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 242 n. 60.

of the philosophical form of discourse once that form of discourse had already begun to make its presence felt. What is thus in jeopardy is the causal status<sup>53</sup> that Lloyd attributed to such political developments with respect to the intellectual developments. The causal status of the general political developments is undermined even further when it is considered that the specific characteristics of the intellectual domain (i.e. "radical innovation", "openness of access to the forum of debate", the "habit of scrutiny", and the "expectation of giving an account") put forward by Lloyd, may well have been present in the Greek world much earlier than even the sixth century B.C..

Some support for the view that these allegedly unique intellectual characteristics pre-dated the sixth century can be found in Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. In both poems, much emphasis was placed upon the role of open discussion and the deliberation of alternative (and often conflicting) courses of action. Such discussions were described by Homer as *agora*. This term had a dual meaning in that it could refer either to the location of a meeting or to the meeting itself. In later times (i.e. post-Homeric) times, *agora* often meant market-place, but since this was often the traditional scene of meetings or assemblies the later meaning can be seen as an extension of the earlier one.

The important role of the *agora* within Homeric society (and its role within the epics themselves) has been discussed convincingly by Havelock.<sup>54</sup> The habits of public discussion, public scrutiny and justifying one's actions before one's peers were integral features of the world described by Homer. This world was, as Havelock argued, the

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53. There is no doubt that Lloyd attributed causal status to these conditions. His analysis was framed in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions in which the hypothesis about political conditions was both necessary and sufficient for the emergence of philosophy whereas the other hypotheses were perhaps necessary but certainly not sufficient conditions.

54. E. A. Havelock, (1978), pp. 139-149.

Greek society of the late ninth and early eighth centuries B.C.. The *agora* was "a vehicle for the resolution of... [a] ...dispute".<sup>55</sup> It should be noted that the participants in these public discussions were usually the nobles and leaders. However, such discussions were nevertheless public<sup>56</sup> and the emphasis was on demonstrating the correctness or justice (and hence viability) of one's position.

The *agora* described by Homer exhibited a candour and flexibility characteristic of the intellectual qualities suggested by Lloyd. It involved an evaluation of the pros and cons of a given problem (and its possible solutions) in which contending or disputing parties vied for support in which each attempted to justify claims and counter-claims.<sup>57</sup> Even the aspect of radical innovation can be discerned to some extent in the *Odyssey* where Odysseus, for example, is portrayed as a wily and resourceful person. Such resourcefulness is an indication of a propensity to innovate and not shy away from the new and different. Quite clearly, such activities are in keeping with the requirements that Lloyd attributes to the sixth and later centuries.

In an essay tracing the roots of Plato's dialogues in ritual performances, Desmonde has suggested, from a slightly different perspective from that being argued here, that the practice of challenging the views of one's peers through verbal contests was common in Greek society

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55. *Ibid.*, p. 147. Note also that the passage of Havelock's text from which this quotation is drawn is in this instance demonstrating the *agora's* failure to resolve the dispute.

56. For example, the debate in Book 2 of the *Odyssey* in which Telemachus argues for the necessity to go abroad in search of his father gives a good indication of both the nature and purpose of such discussions. See E. A. Havelock, *passim*, for more details.

57. Andrew J. Karp, "The Homeric Origins of Ancient Rhetoric", *Arthusa*, Volume 10, No. 2, 1977. pp. 237-258. It should be noted that Karp tends towards some anachronistic claims in that some of his definitions and categories of rhetoric in Homer reflect later intellectual developments. Cf. the discussion of B. Peabody, (1975), in Ch. 2 above. On Homeric rhetoric see also E. A. Havelock, (1978).

society well before the sixth century.<sup>58</sup> In Desmonde's view, the need to settle disputes in a more satisfactory way than by force of arms led to verbal contests. In his view, the struggle for power, at least between inhabitants of the same tribal or village locale, became increasingly a struggle of words rather than one of arms.<sup>59</sup> Although it is necessary to dissent from some of the assumptions implicit in Desmonde's analysis,<sup>60</sup> his account is nevertheless useful because it highlights a tradition of verbal disputation.<sup>61</sup>

These verbal contests took the form of public performances that required the presence of an audience to mediate or judge the outcome. Such contests required the public affirmation or denial of their course and outcome because in an oral society<sup>62</sup> this constituted

58. William H. Desmonde, "The Ritual Origins of Plato's Dialogues: a Study of Argumentation and Conversation among Intellectuals", *American Imago*, Volume 17, No. 4, 1960. pp. 389-406.

59. *ibid.*, pp. 390-391.

60. It is too much of a digression to discuss Desmonde's assumptions in detail but they can at least be highlighted to indicate their contentiousness. He assumes that the Greeks were at some stage primitive barbarians in the Hobbesian sense that life for them was "nasty, brutish and short". This betrays a Euro-centric view of the process of "civilisation" in that he assumes that "being civilised" is to be equated with a preference for the manipulation of words. But this is not a self-evident proposition. Moreover, it is assumed that the sequence of development was from physical to verbal contests. However, it is quite possible that the verbal formed a proper part of the physical clashes, and even that verbal clashes were prior to physical ones. Indeed, any such sequence of development must be argued rather than simply asserted. He also assumes that Plato's dialogues can be accepted as identical with philosophy in so far as he treats the two as interchangeable terms of reference. This may be true at some point in the development and history of philosophy but it is doubtful whether it holds as a general proposition independent of time or place. Finally, he makes no attempt to explicate what he means by the term 'intellectual' but simply assumes that its meaning is clear-cut and historically applicable to the period in question.

61. On this verbal tradition see P. L. Entralgo, *The Therapy of the Word in Classical Antiquity*, ed. and trans. by L. J. Rather & J. M. Sharp, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1970).

62. It is quite clear from Desmonde's analysis that he is situating it within the period of the oral mode of discourse since the discussion presented there is concerned with events in the 8th century and before.

the record of proceedings. The audience bore witness to the events and could, if necessary, attest at a later time to what took place.<sup>63</sup>

The rhetorical (or more appropriately argumentative) abilities of the contestants became more sophisticated as the emphasis on verbal persuasion became paramount. This does not mean that these contests caused (in Lloyd's sense) the emergence of philosophy, but it does mean that as they increased in complexity,<sup>64</sup> the participants had to become more flexible, adaptable and novel in their approach. In short, the participants had to exhibit some of the qualities with the intellectual aspects suggested by Lloyd. Hence these developments were present in some degree well before the sixth century. Consequently, it can be concluded that the developments in the political domain could not be the cause of the emergence of philosophical discourse in the sense suggested by Lloyd. On the historical dimension, Lloyd's case is not as strong as it might at first have appeared.

The theoretical dimension is even weaker. That is, Lloyd's formulation of the uniquely intellectual qualities leaves something to desired. One must ask, what was innovative (and indeed, in what sense of radical), what was being scrutinised and debated, and what was being justified? Such practices need to be specified with much more precision. Political debates in an oral society were constructed far differently in an oral society than they were in the Greek societies of the sixth and later centuries. The debates in the oral period, as can be seen from Homer's epics, were characterised by a propensity to focus on the myriad of concrete, singular instances. Debates in the sixth and later

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63. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 76.

64. Note also that by the mid-eighth century these contests took many forms as is evidenced by Hesiod's boast about his prowess as a poet in relation to such contests.

centuries were characterised by attempts to articulate arguments in terms of universal or unifying principles which were abstract rather than concrete. This development remains unexplained by the uncritical emphasis on political developments alone because it provides no explanation for how the shift occurred. What made this shift possible? Moreover, how does one explain the simultaneous occurrence of this development in both the political and intellectual domains during the sixth and later centuries?

Lloyd also claimed that in giving a justification of one's account there was a "premium set on rational methods of doing so".<sup>65</sup> But what constitutes "rational methods"? What are the criteria of rationality and how are they to be specified? If this meant that one had to give some proof of one's views in a manner that was not determined by the content then how were such proofs constructed? How was it possible for the paratactic statements of orally preserved discourse to be transformed into hypotactic statements of philosophical discourse. One could perhaps point to Pythagoras, a non-writer, who is generally regarded as having established the method of proof for geometrical and mathematical problems and thereby laid the foundations for Greek mathematics,<sup>66</sup> as an example of hypotactic thinking. Yet such an appeal is not really open to Lloyd because Pythagoras was a sixth century thinker and hence pre-dates the very political conditions required by Lloyd's hypothesis.

Once the questions suggested above are raised the explanatory power of Lloyd's fifth hypothesis must be rejected. The habits of politics cannot be accepted as the necessary and sufficient conditions (Lloyd's

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65. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 258.

66. See J. D. Bernal, (1969), pp. 177 ff.; E. T. Bell, (1937), pp. 20-21; W. & M. Kneale, *The Development of Logic*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1966) pp. 3-6.



terms) for the emergence of philosophy.<sup>67</sup> This is not to deny that the two processes may have been inter-related, and perhaps inter-dependent. But it cannot be accepted that the political was the sole determinant of the intellectual.

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The fourth hypothesis concerning "the development of literacy" which had earlier been deferred must now be considered. By "development of literacy" Lloyd meant that a system of writing had been re-introduced into the Greek world. He acknowledged that "changes in the technical means by which ideas can be communicated and recorded" would have significant effects on the nature of what is recorded, and that the creation of written texts would make it possible for a more "critical attitude" to the body of social knowledge to be developed.<sup>68</sup> He went

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67. It should be stressed that Lloyd attempted to meet what he thought would be possible objections to his argument. These objections were: (1) his thesis might imply that philosophy was a phenomenon of democracies instead of being widespread and occurring in *poleis* of varying political character; (2) that philosophy antedates the full development of the institutions of the *polis*; and (3) that it proves too much in that it leaves unexplicated the presence of irrational beliefs and practices in an alleged age of rationality (G.E.R. Lloyd, (1979), pp. 260-261 ff.). On the first he points (quite rightly) to the fact that deliberation was not the sole prerogative of democracies. But this does not meet the full import of the objection that his analysis rests on a classical conception of the *polis* (whether democratic or otherwise). On the second point he cites Solon's poems as evidence of open-ness etc. but this does not explain how Solon came to achieve such openness especially with respect to the specific form of his views. On the third point he suggests that the power of rational argument is limited and provoked counter-reactions and that such debates remained the preserve of male Greeks. Hence the inroads on irrational ideas would have remained uneven though significant. As he acknowledged, all that he was claiming was that such rational critiques gained "some purchase" (p. 264 his emphasis). But what about the notion of 'rational'? This term remains unexamined in his accounts. Indeed, his discussion of (3) tempers his whole hypothesis and limits the full causal generality that he wished to attribute to it.

68. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 239.

on to argue:

Although we can hardly doubt that the spread of critical thought depended *in part* on the availability of texts and of people to read them, we have emphasised before that in the fifth and fourth centuries — and long after — the communication of ideas was still mediated principally through the spoken, rather than the written, word, even though written texts were there to be consulted. Neither the degree nor the relevances of literacy in classical Greece should be exaggerated: nor, correspondingly, should the contrast between Greece and other ancient civilisations. Like coinage, the alphabet is not a Greek invention, nor was its use by any means confined to Greece.<sup>69</sup>

Since, according to Lloyd, the Greek alphabet was not an exclusively Greek phenomenon, in that it was present in some Near Eastern countries like Phoenicia, it violated his comparative criteria mentioned earlier. He thus concluded that changes to the means of communication of ideas could do no more than provide a partial explanation for the "rise of the particular kind of radical and critical investigations undertaken by the Greeks" (i.e. philosophy).<sup>70</sup>

The first point to note is that the issue does not turn on changes to the means of communication as such. It can be agreed with Lloyd that the "communication of ideas was still mediated principally through the spoken, rather than the written, word", as shown in Chapter 4. Indeed, oral mediation constituted a powerful constraint upon the specific ways in which works within the emerging philosophical form of discourse were articulated and expressed. The point to be stressed is not so much the changes in the means of communication but the changes in the means of composition and storage of what was expressed. The introduction

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69. *ibid.*, p. 240 (Emphasis in original).

70. *ibid.*, p. 240. Lloyd has reiterated his negative view on the significance of this development in his (1983), pp. 115–116.

of a system of writing enabled the Greeks to employ a new technology for the purpose of encoding and storing their range of knowledge and values.

A key issue with respect to this hypothesis concerns Lloyd's view that the Greek alphabet was "not a Greek invention". However, as was argued in detail in Chapter 1 of this study, such a view is not tenable. The system of writing developed by the Greeks, though derived from that of the Phoenicians, was nevertheless a specifically Greek innovation because it was adapted to suit the Greek language. The syllabary base of the Phoenician script was transformed to provide for the full signification of both syllables and vowels of the Greek language. The script developed by the Greeks made possible

a complete coverage of all possible phonemes while keeping the required letter signs under a total of thirty. A combination of two to five of these, forming diphthongs and double consonants, could identify with precision any linguistic noise that the mouth chose to make.<sup>71</sup>

The Greek script was both simpler and more abstract than its ancestors or counterparts in the Mediterranean world because it went beyond syllabary symbols by breaking complex sounds (i.e. morphemes) into their constituent parts (i.e. phonemes). This was its major advance over previously existing scripts, and constituted the key difference between it and scripts in the Near Eastern societies. This difference is marked by describing the Greek script as an 'alphabet' and as such is eminently justified.<sup>72</sup> By failing to be more discerning in his use of the term 'alphabet' in describing systems of linguistic signs, Lloyd obscured the fact that the script that emerged in the Greek world was very much

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71. E. A. Havelock, (1976), p. 43.

72. *ibid.*, pp. 22-32 where this issue is discussed at some length.

their own construction. Lloyd's view concerning the Greek alphabet is thus mistaken. His analysis of the significance of literacy (as an hypothesis to explain the emergence of philosophy), predicated as it is on such a view, is thus also mistaken. It can, however, be agreed with Lloyd that such an hypothesis still only constitutes a partial explanation of the phenomenon in question.<sup>73</sup>

It is now necessary to distinguish between two points which on first glance appear to amount to the same thing, but have divergent and opposed implications. The first is that the development of alphabetic writing in the ancient Greek world (and its eventual concomitant of literacy) *caused* the emergence of philosophy.<sup>74</sup> The second is that without the prior condition of writing (and at least some people capable of manipulating it) philosophy as developed by the Greeks would not have been possible. It is the second point that is to be advanced here.

The first point implies that writing (i.e. the specifically Greek system of writing) alone brought the philosophical form of discourse into existence. But this ignores the nature of the technology, the context in which it was used, the limitations of its application, and it fails to identify the specific connection between the philosophical form of discourse and the written word. A system of writing requires people to use and develop it and this presupposes specific forms of

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73. But in agreeing with Lloyd on this point one is not thereby committed to his alternative explanation. This is because Lloyd cast his argument in terms of a framework of necessary and/or sufficient conditions which led to his analysis becoming unduly reductive. Thus for Lloyd, the hypothesis concerning political conditions becomes the only one with the necessary explanatory power. The exclusion of the conditions articulated by the other hypotheses is thereby sanctioned. Yet surely any explanation must account for all the possible contributory conditions to the phenomenon in question without imposing choices of a mutually exclusive nature.

74. This was the view that Lloyd was particularly concerned to refute. But in refuting it he thereby ruled it out from playing any further part in his eventual explanation for the emergence of philosophy as pointed out in the previous footnote.

social life.<sup>75</sup> As Goody suggested, the changes to the means of communication will result in "an outcome that will always depend for its realisation on a set of socio-cultural factors".<sup>76</sup> There is no *a priori* reason why writing should have led, merely by virtue of its existence, to the emergence of the philosophical form of discourse. All that can really be said is that such a system of writing promoted the creation of a written mode of discourse. But such a statement is little better than a tautology and hence lacking any real explanatory power.

The second proposition, however, implies something quite different. Even if all the other conditions (i.e. a surplus-producing economy, people with the necessary leisure to engage in speculative thought, appropriate political developments, and so on) had been present, the absence of a system of writing suited to the Greek language would have precluded the development of the philosophical form of discourse in ancient Greece. While it can be said that this view parallels the tautology mentioned above, it goes beyond mere tautology in that it does not treat the Greek system of writing in isolation but posits it as the focal point for a number of other contributory conditions. It does not suggest a linear sequence of cause and effect but suggests a degree of complexity which the first point obscures.

In order for the above to have any purchase, however, the nature of the relationship between the Greek system of writing and the philosophical form of discourse must be examined. That is, how did

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75. That is, some of the conditions outlined in the above hypotheses would also have been required because a particular technology qua technology is inert. It neither rises of its own accord nor is its use predetermined by its existence. Such things are the result of human activity and it is humans who give technology and its consequences their utility and hence significance. The conditions outlined by the above hypotheses should therefore be treated as complementary rather than mutually exclusive or alternative explanations.

76. J. Goody, (1977), p. 147.

the Greek alphabet facilitate the growth of a philosophical form of discourse? It has already been established that the Greek alphabet made possible a number of transformations with respect to the production and storage of Greek knowledge and values. With the aid of the alphabet the *aoidos* began to be transformed into a *poetes* who was freed from the need to disseminate the composition immediately. It became possible for such composers to examine the content and structure of what was being produced because the product was stored and available for immediate or subsequent re-examination in *exactly* the form in which it had been written down. The mnemonic constraints of the oral mode of discourse were broken by the capacity to record and store what was said independently of the human memory. The *aoidos/poetes* could thus be more discriminating in the choice of words because reliance on formulaic phrases was no longer a necessity imposed directly by composition-in-performance. But as noted, the necessities of performance still acted as a constraint on composition. The way or ways in which words could be strung together could take different directions in terms of metre, phrasing, and so on. However, that only touches upon an enhanced faculty for a proliferation of poetic forms; but what of the philosophical form?

One of the central features of philosophical discourse is that the account itself, not just its content or the overall claims of its author, becomes an object of contemplation. This is what Lloyd described as the positing of second-order questions.<sup>77</sup> A writer had the opportunity to reflect on what was said by reviewing what had already been

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77. G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 234. Lloyd also pointed out that while this undoubtedly increased the level of critical reflection it was not necessarily the case that each newly emerging philosopher was actively self-critical, hence "the claim to be critical can be upheld only within certain well-defined limits" (p. 234). Nevertheless, Lloyd was of the view that, early Greek philosophy, when considered in its totality, can be said to have embodied a radical and critical argumentative approach.

written down. This made it possible for a writer to see the derivations and connection between words and phrases, and thereby bring them into different relationships. Utterances, and by extension, the ideas they expressed, could be composed and decomposed at will. The paratactic style of sentences of oral composition could be reformulated to yield more complex structures. Indeed, the very structure of the work itself could be analysed and altered to suit the particular aims of the author.

What had to be developed was a linguistic syntax which was freed from the parataxis of orally produced works. As Snell noted, this was a slow process involving the creation of abstract nouns from concrete nouns.<sup>78</sup> This presupposed the use of the definite article in its generic sense which, as is argued by Snell, both Homer and Hesiod lacked.<sup>79</sup> For both those poets, the definite article was specific in that it did not denote abstract concepts but denoted singular or plural instances. Snell traced briefly its slow emergence within the development of written discourse and suggested that its emergence made possible the conversion of adjectives and verbs into nouns.<sup>80</sup> Such nouns became abstract nouns in that they referred to universals and generalities which became the central objects of philosophical discourse. This process Snell termed "substantivation" in which the definite article performed a three-fold function.

First it delimits and defines the non-concrete. Second, it promotes it to the status of a universal. And third, it re-defines and individualises this universal<sup>81</sup> so that we may make statements about it.

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78. B. Snell, pp. 232-233.

79. *ibid.*, pp. 228-229. See also T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53), pp. 23-24.

80. B. Snell, (1982), pp. 28 ff.; T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53), pp. 23-25.

81. B. Snell, (1982), p. 231.

In this way, previously "mythic" powers (i.e. those attributed to the gods) could be de-personalised and treated as impersonal forces.

In addition to the above developments, the new form of discourse had to create its own language of expression which had to

be able to express abstract ideas easily and clearly as substantives which can stand in any possible relation to the rest of the sentence. Secondly, the sentences must be so constructed and joined together that they can express the progressive stages of a complicated argument. 82

The process of "substantivation" or creation of abstractions has already been mentioned. The second aspect (i.e. sentence construction etc.) was achieved by the use of the 'period' or sentence which consisted of two or more "clauses or participial phrases in addition to one (or more) main sentences".<sup>83</sup> A periodic sentence usually exhibited a number of individual propositions and qualifications standing in a composite (and often quite complex) relationship with each other depending upon the propositional connectives used. A "main sentence", on the other hand, usually exhibited one proposition; and composite main sentences were usually strings of shorter main sentences conjoined with connectives like 'and' and 'but'. Such sentences were paratactic and constituted the paradigm sentence form within the oral mode of discourse.

By way of clarification, consider this example. The sentence '[It is raining] and [I am cold]' is a composite main sentence consisting of two smaller main sentences (designated for expository purposes by square brackets) conjoined by the connective 'and'. Each of the two

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82. T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53), p. 17. Webster also noted that

"The philosopher must be able to make new abstractions at will, and he must be able to express the relations of abstract ideas to each other in an argument which shows those relations clearly". (p. 17).

83. *ibid.*, p.19.



main sentences stands in an equal relationship in that neither is subordinate to the other. It thus can be considered a paratactic statement. The sentence '[It is raining] therefore [I am cold]'<sup>84</sup> is a sentence exhibiting a periodic form. The two main sentences are related by the connective 'therefore'. The result is a hypotactic statement in which one main sentence can be seen to be dependent on or subordinate to the other. The hypotactic sentence conveys an overt argument form whereas the paratactic sentence merely conjoins two propositions with no hint of any causal or logical relationship that might possibly exist between them.<sup>85</sup> The paratactic sentence form therefore makes it difficult, if not impossible, to express overt arguments as part of its structure.<sup>86</sup>

This does not mean that paratactic compositions could not present an argument or a number of arguments. Homer presented many arguments in both the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. However, the method was not hypotactic. Rather it consisted of the repetition of key words or formulaic phrases (usually those which designated the main ideas to be related) such that the progression from one state of affairs to another could be made explicit.<sup>87</sup> It was repetition that enabled the progression of thought to be made clear, rather than the articulation of the logical relationships between them. Moreover, these logical relations between words could only be achieved once the move to more abstract expressions is achieved. Within the oral mode of discourse, where composition was

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84. An alternative rendering of this sentence in hypotactic form would be '[I am cold] because [It is raining]'. The two possibilities are not necessarily logically equivalent, however, but for present purposes they may be regarded as interchangeable.

85. Any such relationship between paratactically arranged propositions must be derived (by the audience itself) from the wider context in which the paratactic sentence is embedded. Cf. B. Snell, (1982), pp.236-237.

86. T. B. L. Webster, (1952/53), p. 19.

87. *ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

achieved in performance, it was necessary for main sentences to express actions or procedures.<sup>88</sup> As such, the emphasis was on both concrete and proper nouns (i.e. names) usually achieved through the repetitive use of formulaic phrases. The shift to abstract expressions or abstract nouns (the process of substantivation as described by Snell) was thus precluded by the need to render what was being articulated into concrete, action terms.

One further aspect of sentence structure requiring attention is the use of the verb 'to be'. The issue has been well canvassed by Havelock, Kahn, Snell, and Mourelatos<sup>89</sup> and will be dealt with only briefly here. The verb 'to be' has three basic functions. It functions as a copula to link subject and predicate, as an identity relation, or as an existential signifier.<sup>90</sup> Within early Greek literature, from Homer to Parmenides, demarcation between these functions was never clearly defined. Its signification of existence, in an absolute sense, was not achieved until the work of Parmenides, although, as Mourelatos has argued,<sup>91</sup> even that is open to some interpretation. For Homer and many who came after him, the verb combined all three functions and served to locate activities, procedures, or status levels with respect to the subjects of sentences or utterances. Predication for oral composers was always in terms of process or activity.<sup>92</sup>

The linking of subject and predicate in terms of logical relations only began to emerge once predicates could be lifted out of

88. E. A. Havelock, (1978), pp. 137-138.

89. *ibid.*, pp. 233-248; B. Snell, (1982), pp. 236-237; C. H. Kahn, (1966), pp. 245-265; A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), pp. 269-276.

90. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 234. Note also Havelock's suggestion that the verb also carried an acoustic value for oral composers.

91. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), p. 49.

92. E. A. Havelock, (1978), p. 247.

their concrete and procedural habitat. The linking of subject and predicate in the oral mode of discourse was a linking of particulars. The use of 'is', as an identity relation between equivalents was, as Havelock demonstrated, unnecessary for Homer (and only slightly less so for Hesiod) since it was used to link particulars expressed in "main sentences" that stood in an equal relation to each other.<sup>93</sup> Once particulars could be turned into universals by the process of substantivation, the identity relation became important because the relationship between universals and particulars was not one of equals and hence the nature of the relationship became problematical. The identity relationship of 'is' enabled the statements of relations between universals and particulars to be more fully explicated.<sup>94</sup> In addition, the speculative sense of 'to be' gradually became more fully articulated. Again, the work of Parmenides gives the clearest formulation of this, but traces of this development can be found in the works of Xenophanes and Heraclitus.<sup>95</sup> The point here is that the unfolding and articulation of the various senses and possible uses of the verb was a gradual process. From a fuzzy and almost indistinguishable interpenetration of the various senses to be found within the oral mode of discourse, these senses gradually became more and more distinct in the works of Parmenides and others.<sup>96</sup>

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93. *ibid.*, pp. 246-247.

94. B. Snell, (1982), p. 236.

95. A. P. D. Mourelatos, (1970), pp. 60-61.

96. It should be understood that the sense of 'distinct' used in the above does not mean that Parmenides' use of the verb 'to be' was clearly defined. Rather, it means that it is possible to discern several separate senses in which he was using the verb. The particular sense (or even senses) had to be determined from the text and was thus a matter of applying one's *logos* to gain the full import of his views. Although this may well have been beyond the ken of many in his audiences it is nevertheless fair to say that those becoming skilled in working with (and helping to create) the language of the new form of discourse were cognisant of the implications.

The development of the generic definite article and the concomitant process of substantivation, the periodic sentence, and the unfolding of the senses of the verb 'to be' were all inter-related. Together they provided the means for a suitable linguistic frame for the philosophical form of discourse to emerge. The common denominator for this was the development of the Greek alphabet. This enabled the orally composed words to be seized and made available for scrutiny at a later date. Once freed from the necessity of composing-in-performance, a writer could begin to experiment with the way in which words were arranged to convey particular ideas. The writer was able to employ his or her eyes as well as the ears in composing written works, whereas the *aoidos* was restricted to the use of the ears.<sup>97</sup> This meant that a writer could experiment with different ways of formulating words by literally 'seeing' how to fit them together in ways other than that which prevailed in an oral mode of composition. The writer could attempt to rework traditional material and themes and arrive at new or different interpretations. No longer were knowledge and values confined to the epic language of orally preserved discourse. With the growth of different poetic metres the vernacular came to be more commonly used. Moreover, the gradual development of prose meant that epic diction was pushed even further from the central role of articulating knowledge and values. The gradual development of a linguistic frame for the philosophical form of discourse was part of this.<sup>98</sup>

All of these developments can be attributed to the innovatory

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97. E. A. Havelock, (1978), pp. 224 ff.

98. This does not mean, however, that writers developed such a linguistic frame with the philosophical form of discourse already in mind as a goal to be reached. Rather, the philosophical form of discourse was the ongoing result of a continuous process of arriving at a language that was capable of expressing ideas and values in ways that exhibited a high degree of rigour and critical self-appraisal that had hitherto been virtually impossible.

potential of the Greek alphabet. Thus the alphabet can be understood as the condition without which the philosophical form of discourse would not have been possible. But this does not mean that philosophical discourse was 'caused' by the availability of the alphabet. It opened up the potential for new possibilities of expression but these possibilities could not be realised without other conditions being present. There was no fixed path of causation according to which the development of a suitable language entailed the manifestation of the philosophical form of discourse. But the existence of the alphabet meant that some changes in the Greek languages would be inevitable, and that some of these changes would have an influence on the way or ways in which ideas came to be expressed.

Not just the content but the form and structure of cultural expressions became items of intellectual contemplation in the post-Homeric literate tradition. The ideas of 'truth' and 'validity' became important because, with so many different accounts of Greek experience and of nature proliferating, often radically at odds with received wisdom from the oral heritage (and hence challenging what constituted 'common-sense' for the Greeks), it soon became apparent that not every account could be correct. Thus the language of the philosophical form of discourse had to be developed beyond that used in poetry, history, and drama, as a technique that could separate mere opinion from that which was now coming to be understood in a new way as the 'truth'. Such a task required the conscious application of human effort, and could not simply be taken for granted as a necessary consequence of the Greek alphabet.

## Chapter 6

### The Sophist-ication of Greek Knowledge and Values

By the end of the fifth century B.C. the philosophical form of discourse was a highly visible and controversial forum for the redefinition of social knowledge. This effort involved open debates concerning the nature of the relationships between individuals and their respective possession of knowledge. The last half of this century has come to be regarded by many historians as the Greek "Age of Enlightenment"<sup>1</sup> because of the general ferment of intellectual activity. But it was also a time of political ferment as the political and military dominance of Athens in the Greek world was beginning to decline.<sup>2</sup> The intellectual and political ferments were inextricably interwoven.

Occupying a central place in these debates were the works and teachings of the diverse group of thinkers known collectively as the Sophists. In so far as they represented a coherent social phenomenon the Sophists can be loosely regarded as a distinct group. However, their views and teachings were extremely diverse. Their status as a distinct social group arises from the fact that they were concerned with issues raised by the relationship of knowledge and power, the practice of rhetoric, and the argumentative method of *antilogos*. Moreover, all of the Sophists discussed below spent at least part of their lives

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1. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy: Volume III The Fifth Century Enlightenment*, of six volumes, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969) pp. xii-xiii. This was also the period in which questions of human nature became prominent. See, for example, B. Snell, (1982), Ch. 11; L. Versenyi, *Socratic Humanism*, (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1963).

2. V. Ehrenburg, (1973), Chapters VI and VII; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981), Ch. 5; A. Lintott, *Violence, Civil Strife and Revolution in the Classical City*, (Croom Helm, London, 1982).

in Athens. This placed them within a common social matrix which, despite the very real differences that separated them as thinkers, served to provide them with a common frame of reference. These thinkers cannot therefore be understood in isolation from the intense struggles over democracy within the Athenian *polis* of the late fifth century.

The aim of this chapter is to give a sketch of some of the important innovations undertaken by the Sophists. This will illustrate that, already by Plato's time, nothing could be taken for granted with respect to knowledge and values. The proliferation of diverse and often contradictory ideas that appeared to lack any solid foundation, particularly with respect to what could be taken as real and certain knowledge, provided the focus for much of Plato's own theories. Plato was irked particularly by the Sophists' methods, primarily those of rhetoric and *antilogos*. This chapter will provide an examination of the sophistic method, and Plato's response will be examined in the next.

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Although the names of more than twenty-six sophists have been established by classical scholarship,<sup>3</sup> only a dozen or so will be mentioned here. Of these the most important was probably Protagoras of Abdera (c. 490-421 B.C.). He was almost certainly the first to demand a fee for what he taught.<sup>4</sup> Protagoras advocated a fairly radical form of relativism and his two most famous pronouncements were (1) that he could teach people to defend both sides of any argument, and (2) that

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3. G. B. Kerferd, *The Sophistic Movement*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1981) pp. 42 ff.; W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 181-225; H. D. Rankin, *Sophists, Socratics, and Cynics*, (Croom Helm, London, 1983) provides a more abbreviated overview.

4. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 269 n. 4.

man was the measure of all things. Protagoras was both well known and well respected and was part of the circle of intellectuals closely associated with Pericles.<sup>5</sup> Protagoras was reputedly condemned for impiety, expelled from Athens, and his books were publicly burnt in the *agora*.<sup>6</sup> Despite this rather unfortunate end to his career, his importance cannot be underestimated because in many respects his works and teachings can be regarded as representative of the general developments of sophistic thought.<sup>7</sup>

Almost as important as Protagoras was Gorgias of Leontini in Sicily (c. 490-385 B.C.).<sup>8</sup> Gorgias was a master orator and his skills in rhetoric won him a wide reputation. Unlike Protagoras, Gorgias did not claim to teach *arete* (virtue or moral excellence).<sup>9</sup> Rather, he claimed to teach rhetoric. Gorgias believed that this skill was the surest means of achieving political power.<sup>10</sup> He also believed that certain knowledge was not attainable and that all knowledge therefore amounted to no more than *doxa* (opinion). Rhetoric made it poss-

5. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 43.

6. *ibid.*, p. 43. Some doubt exists about these events. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 263 n. 2 and n. 3 lean towards the more categorical assertion of J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, (MacMillan & Co., London, 1943) pp. 111 ff. that the story should be rejected. However, given the way in which political leaders were attacked, particularly Pericles, through the condemnation of their circle of advisers/friends, the story of Protagoras' demise is plausible; especially since it has been well attested that at least one other of Pericles' close associates, the philosopher Anaxagoras, was tried and banished as a means of diminishing Pericles' public standing. On this sort of procedure see W. R. Connor, *The New Politicians of Fifth-Century Athens*, (Princeton University Press, Princeton, 1971).

7. The case has been well argued by L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 8-38 that Protagoras can be regarded as the paradigmatic sophist in so far as he marked out the major directions that were pursued by nearly all those who can be regarded as Sophists.

8. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 269 n. 2.

9. *ibid.* ., p. 271.

10. *ibid.* ., p. 271.



ible for people to articulate their opinions (right or wrong or confused though those opinions might be) in the strongest possible way.<sup>11</sup> Hence the premium that was placed on rhetoric as a persuasive art by ambitious young men of Athens.

Another highly regarded sophist was Prodicus of Ceos (c. 470-399 B.C.). Language was his main philosophical interest and Socrates spoke highly of him.<sup>12</sup> Prodicus emphasised the importance of language for the articulation of ideas through his discussion of the semantic distinctions to be drawn from and between philosophical terms. He also had a theory of religion that drew attention to the close correspondences between agricultural practices and the development of religious practices and deities.<sup>13</sup> Prodicus was said to have been accused of impiety and executed although this may not have been the case as no contemporary sources mention it.<sup>14</sup> Hippias of Elis (c. 470-390 B.C.) was also highly regarded, especially for his depth and breadth of scholarly research. Indeed, he has been credited with being the first historiographer of philosophy.<sup>15</sup> He was noted for believing that positive law was a matter of *nomos* and as such it did not provide universal standards of conduct or a reliable guide to human nature. On the contrary, he believed in the "fundamental unity of the human race"<sup>16</sup> which was for him a matter of *physis*. Laws produced by humans were artificial and undermined the unwritten laws of nature that were the basis for human existence.<sup>17</sup>

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11. *ibid.*, p. 273.

12. *ibid.*, pp. 275-276.

13. *ibid.*, p. 279.

14. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 46.

15. *ibid.*, pp. 46-47.

16. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 285. It is unclear as to whether Hippias meant the human race in general or just the Greeks.

17. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 55.

Antiphon of Rhamnus (c. 470-411 B.C.) was another sophist renowned for his skills as an orator.<sup>18</sup> Like most Greek citizens of his times he was politically active. He was a member of the Four Hundred which was an oligarchic group that seized power for four months in Athens in 411 B.C.<sup>19</sup> On its demise he was executed.<sup>20</sup> In essence his philosophy can be described as hedonistic. He advocated that people should always seek pleasure and avoid pain. This could only be made possible in an ordered, as opposed to an anarchic, society.<sup>21</sup> For Antiphon, an anarchic society was undesirable and there is every reason to believe that, given his oligarchic background, he regarded the development of Athenian democracy as verging closely on anarchy.

According to Antiphon, *physis* was superior to *nomos*. Where the (unwritten) laws of nature conflicted with human laws (i.e. statutes etc.) the former were to be preferred. In particular, he advocated that one should really only obey the laws of the state if not to obey would result in more pain (or lack of pleasure) than obeying.<sup>22</sup> The one area where

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18. There is some doubt about who Antiphon actually was. That is, was Antiphon of Rhamnus the same person as Antiphon the sophist or were they two different persons? This debate is summarised in W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 285 ff. and G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 49-51. It is almost impossible to tell but for present purposes they will be assumed to be one and the same.

19. For some background on the Four Hundred see V. Ehrenberg, (1973), pp. 318-320; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981), pp.283 ff.

20. It is probable that Antiphon was executed as a reprisal for the campaign of terror that the Four Hundred used to gain and sustain its short lived reign. As a leading spokesperson for aspects of its rule he was a certain candidate for reprisals of which there were surprisingly few given the ruthlessness of the Four Hundred.

21. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 290.

22. *ibid.*, p. 291.

he made a singularly original contribution was in relation to dreams. He argued that dreams needed to be interpreted rather than taken literally because dreams may well represent the opposite of what they appear to portray.<sup>23</sup> In this respect, Antiphon was probably at the forefront of the intellectual movement that was attempting to pierce the veil of superstitious beliefs and practices.<sup>24</sup>

Thrasymachus of Chalcedon was an important sophist partly because of his role in Plato's *Republic* where he was portrayed as advocating the view that justice consisted in the right of the stronger prevailing. His importance there was accentuated by the fact that, for Plato, Thrasymachus represented the world-view of an aristocratic class that was no longer adequate in so far as the pursuit of *arete* was no longer a primary concern for that class. Plato's definitive demolition of Thrasymachus' views on justice was predicated on the idea that the aristocracy had lost touch with its traditional concerns and, as understood by Plato, this meant that they had forsaken the pursuit of *arete*. The theory of the *polis*, and people's respective places within it, needed to be reconstructed along more adequate lines.<sup>25</sup> Thrasymachus provided the foil for Plato's argument.<sup>26</sup>

However, the historical Thrasymachus was also important in his own right because of his contribution to the art of rhetoric. He

23. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 51.

24. *ibid.*, p. 51. Recall also the view of G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 269 concerning the continued presence and social importance of "non-rational" approaches to knowledge. See also E. R. Dodds, (1951).

25. The point is developed in detail by E. & N. Wood, (1978) pp. 140 ff.

26. At the same time, however, it must be remembered that Thrasymachus was articulating a view in the *Republic* that was entirely consonant with the lived experiences of many Athenians as far as justice between city-states was concerned. The experience of the long period of Athenian hegemony in the fifth century B. C. gave some basis for the view that right followed, even depended on, might. See L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 56-59.

was concerned with the technical details of rhetoric as well as with the development of suitable prose-rhythms to improve the impact of its delivery.<sup>27</sup> He was also interested in ethics and justice. His views on justice were pragmatic and were a bit more complex than the portrait given by Plato. As Guthrie has suggested, Plato's account was one-sided, presenting only the side of Thrasymachus' views that fitted with what was needed in the *Republic*.<sup>28</sup> Thrasymachus, along with Hippias, Prodicus, Antiphon, Gorgias, and Protagoras, can perhaps be regarded as the nucleus of the sophistic movement in late fifth century Athens. Others who deserve a mention were Euthydemus and Dionysodoros (twin brothers) of Chios, Alcidamus of Pergamon, and Lycophron (birthplace unknown).<sup>29</sup>

One further person needs to be added to the above list of sophists, namely Socrates. At first glance, this might seem paradoxical, even absurd, given Plato's portrayal of Socrates as one who was diametrically opposed to the sophists. But Socrates was part of the intellectual cross-currents stirred up by the sophists' activities.<sup>30</sup> Socrates was an important contributor to these activities, especially when these are seen against the background of the struggle for Athenian democracy. The on-going struggle within the aristocratic class, the struggle between that class and its opponents, particularly those from the ordinary *demos*, provided the backdrop against which the intellectual developments of

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27. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 295.

28. *ibid.*, pp. 295-298 for a full discussion of Thrasymachus' views on justice, including Plato's portrayal of them. See also L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 56-59.

29. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 311-319; G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 53-54. Some reference should be made to two anonymous texts, the *Anonymous Iamblichus* and the *Dissoi Logoi* as these give some insight into the techniques used by the sophists. The *Dissoi Logoi*, if not written by Protagoras, was strongly influenced by him and bears a strong resemblance to the Protagorean schema of argumentation. See L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 9 and p. 18 n. 19.

30. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 55.

the times took place. This was precisely how Plato portrayed him; a man of engaging (even exasperating) intellect locked in debate with other citizens, in particular his fellow aristocrats,<sup>31</sup> in his unique and obsessive effort to make sense of and affect what was going on around them.

Furthermore, it is also fairly well established that Socrates was regarded by his contemporaries as a part of the sophistic movement despite his professed lack of enthusiasm and support.<sup>32</sup> Referring to Socrates' contemporaries, Kerferd concluded that

Socrates *was* quite widely regarded as part of the sophistic movement. Through his well-known friendship with Aspasia it is likely that he was in fairly close contact with the circle of Pericles, and his intellectual and educational impact on the aspiring young men at Athens was such that *in function* he was correctly so regarded. The fact that he took no payment ~~does~~<sup>33</sup> not alter his function in any way.

Kerferd went on to point out that, in so far as the sophists were concerned with "the search for the stronger *logos* or the correct *logos* in relation to the conflicting claims of apparently opposed *logoi*", Socrates

31. That Socrates was himself of aristocratic leaning and disposition, despite his father's humble background, has been well argued by E. & N. Wood, (1978), pp. 81 ff. But note that Socrates was quite capable of opposing (both in word and deed) aristocratic ideals and practices when these ran counter to his own principles. See W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 409-416.

32. The most obvious evidence for this can be seen in Aristophanes' play the *Clouds*, where Socrates' name is used to caricature the typical philosopher or sophist. See G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 56-57; W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 359-377.

33. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 57 (emphasis in original). See also L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 69. It also needs to be noted that the sense of "took no payment" in the Kerferd quotation must be understood as meaning that he did not charge a fee for his teachings. This does not mean, however, that he refused the hospitality of friends and admirers in return for giving advice and discoursing on various topics. Furthermore, his reputation for not accepting money for his teaching can be interpreted as a means whereby he could distance himself from the practices of others in the sophistic circle.

was very much a sophist.<sup>34</sup> This is not to deny the very substantial differences between Socrates and his contemporaries concerning the method and content of their respective views. All that is denied is that Socrates was the complete antithesis of the archetypical sophist as the Platonic legacy would have it.<sup>35</sup>

It is quite clear, especially from some of Plato's dialogues, that Socrates was opposed to the use of rhetoric for its own sake as it could very often lead to poor philosophising.<sup>36</sup> Socrates was not opposed to rhetoric as such nor was he opposed to the sophists tackling philosophical questions. Indeed, Socrates was himself concerned with rhetoric, or at least concerned enough to become adept in its use and to employ it as the need arose, as can be seen from the defence speech attributed to him by Plato in the *Apology*.<sup>37</sup> Kennedy brings this point out well.

Though he cannot stoop to flattery or indulge in emotional appeal, and though the argument of the speech is not developed in the usual way — the cross-examination of Meletus is particularly striking — Plato's Socrates does employ many of the commonplaces of contemporary judicial oratory and in general observes the rules for oratorical practice. ... Even if Socrates in delivering his defense tried to abandon the framework of organization taught by the rhetoricians, and this is not certain, Plato in writing the *Apology* did not. He portrays a Socrates thoroughly familiar

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34. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 57. Of course, not all the sophists were concerned with such things but certainly Protagoras, Gorgias, Hippias, Prodicus, and Antiphon were. These sophists, especially Protagoras and Gorgias, were Socrates' contemporaries and comprise the nucleus around which the fifth century Greek Enlightenment developed, and against whom Socrates (and after him, Plato) directed much of his thinking.

35. See especially the introductory remarks of W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 3-13.

36. See especially Plato's *Euthydemus* [307], *Gorgias* [500-517], and *Phaedrus* [269].

37. It is here assumed that, in the *Apology*, Plato was portraying accurately the words of Socrates.

with the commonplaces of judicial oratory. Traditional rhetoric was already so deeply implanted in the Greek consciousness that there was no question of any successful deviation from it. In the history of rhetoric that<sup>38</sup> is the great significance of the *Apology*.

This clearly supports the view that Socrates must be situated within the context of the sophistic movement even if it cannot be established with certainty that Socrates was a typical sophist.

Where Socrates clearly differed from the sophists was over the uses to which the art of rhetoric could and should be put. Socrates emphasised the question of means and ends and the concomitant issue of the nature of the relationship (if any) between the two. The sophists concentrated on the means (rhetoric) and generally eschewed close considerations of the ends to which such an art might be put. It was this particular aspect of the practices of the sophists that irked Socrates (and Plato) most, although it must be said that Socrates' hostility towards the sophists cannot be reduced to a single issue in isolation from the pressing political undercurrents of the time. There were a number of issues which separated Socrates from the sophists and which often left him arguing from a lone perspective.<sup>39</sup>

Such issues concerned the nature of knowledge, the teaching of *arete* and its relationship with knowledge, the search for the good with respect to being a true citizen, justice and equality, and the nature of *eros* (love). On occasion Socrates could find support from within the sophistic circle but more often than not he was a lone defender of his views. This abbreviated summary of the issues of concern for

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38. G. Kennedy, *The Art of Persuasion in Greece*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1963) pp. 150-152.

39. As indeed it did on occasion with his fellow aristocrats. Cf. note 31 *supra*.

Socrates does not do justice to the scope of his intellectual inquiries but it does chart the key issues. Perhaps the issue that separated him most sharply from his contemporaries was his claim to know nothing except the extent of his own ignorance.<sup>40</sup> This belief gave the impetus for his seemingly never-ending search for true and certain knowledge. In contrast to the sophists, Socrates believed that knowledge was both possible and certain.<sup>41</sup> But one had to search for it. In that respect, rhetoric was a poor means for discovering the sort of knowledge that Socrates believed existed because rhetoric could as easily make the false seem true as the true seem false. Hence his opposition to rhetoric as the appropriate tool for the seeker of wisdom.

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The general picture of a sophist that emerges from this review of several well-known sophists is of a person concerned with the articulation and dissemination of knowledge and, using the latter to improve one's fortune through the gaining of influence and power by being adept at rhetoric and hence being able to win over whatever audience one addressed. On the articulation and dissemination of knowledge, a sophist was in keeping with the tradition of sages and poets. This tradition included Homer, Hesiod, Solon, Thales and other pre-Socratic philosophers, and seers. The etymology of the word 'sophist' gives some indication of this lineage. The word 'sophist' was related to the words for wise (i.e. *sophos*) or wisdom (i.e. *sophia*)<sup>42</sup> and as Guthrie noted, the noun

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40. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 442 ff.

41. *ibid.*, p. 449.

42. *ibid.*, p. 27; G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 24; H. D. Rankin, (1983), p. 13; L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 6.



'sophist' (i.e. *sophistes*) was derived from the verb *sophizesthai* which meant to practise *sophia*.<sup>43</sup> The first known use of the noun in written discourse was in an ode composed by Pindar (c. 520-443 B.C.)<sup>44</sup> and, as Kerferd pointed out, its use in that fashion was probably gaining currency by the mid to late fifth century B.C..<sup>45</sup>

Kerferd suggested that the generally received account of the evolution of the meanings of *sophos* and *sophia* is "artificial and unhistorical" in that *sophia* had always been "associated with the poet, the seer and the sage".<sup>46</sup> Proceeding from the singular instance to the universal, its meanings developed, according to the received account,

from (1) skill in a particular craft, especially handicraft, through (2) prudence or wisdom in general matters, especially practical and political wisdom, to (3) scientific,<sup>47</sup> theoretic or philosophic wisdom.

Although *sophia* was often used to describe knowledge of particular skills or crafts,<sup>48</sup> it referred not so much to the skills or techniques themselves (and hence to that particular knowledge) but to the sort of knowledge which transcended individual instances and referred to "the gods, man and society, to which the 'wise man' claimed privileged access".<sup>49</sup> To exhibit such *sophia*, one could not be taught but had to be divinely blessed or inspired. It was the sort of knowledge that was denied to

43. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 28; H. D. Rankin, (1983), p. 13. Note also the substantivation process (as described in the previous chapter) at work in providing a generic or more abstract noun (*sophistes*) from an action-word or demonstrative verb (*sophizesthai*).

44. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 30; H. D. Rankin, (1983), pp.13-14.

45. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 24.

46. *ibid.*, p. 24. He had developed the basic argument in a much earlier work, "The First Greek Sophists", *Classical Review*, Volume 64, 1950 pp. 8-10.

47. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 24.

48. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 27-32; G. B. Kerferd, (1950), p.8.

49. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 24.

ordinary mortals, who could only receive it indirectly via the mediation of the *aoidoi* (and later the poets), the seers and the sages.

There is an important sense, however, in which the above sequence of development can be understood as having some connection to an actual historical situation. It was not so much that the meaning of *sophia* changed but that the word and its cognates began to be applied to a narrower set of practitioners of *sophia*.<sup>50</sup> As the writers of *sophia*, that is the poets and so on, began to achieve prominence at the expense of the traditional, orally based purveyors of *sophia* (like the *aoidoi*) the need emerged to be able to describe such practitioners in a definitive fashion. This became more pronounced as conflicts began to develop over the correctness or otherwise of the various accounts of how things were or were supposed to be. Such a term was *sophistes* which, as already noted, could be applied legitimately to poets and others within the emerging written mode of discourse.<sup>51</sup> It was the term used to describe the practitioners that underwent development rather than what (i.e. *sophia*) was practised. The need to invoke divine inspiration began to subside until by the late fifth century it had ceased to be a necessary feature of *sophia*. *Logos* had come to replace divine revelation or inspiration as the basis for one's *sophia*, although it needs to be understood that many late fifth-century thinkers remained within the general ambit of Greek religious habits despite their challenges to particular aspects of such thought. Where Homer and Hesiod had appealed to the authority of the gods for their views, later thinkers appealed to *logos*. The term *sophistes* developed in tandem with this transition such that by the late fifth century it referred more specifically to

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50. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 6.

51. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 24.

the thinkers of that century, namely the sophists. The latter were thus part of a tradition of those who practised *sophia* and to whom the Greeks looked for their instruction or education in such matters.

The difference between the Sophists and those whom they claimed as their antecedents is that they began to charge for their services. This constituted a radical change from earlier practices.<sup>52</sup> A sophist thus became more than a practitioner of *sophia*, more than just a wise man or sage; he was a professional educator who was paid for his services. Much of the content of the sophists' teachings, however, derived from this earlier tradition. A knowledge of Homer and other poets could be taken for granted by the sophists to have been imparted to their students at an early age in a "primary" period of tuition and religious practices.<sup>53</sup>

The term *sophistes*, as it came to refer almost exclusively to the late fifth century thinkers, also attracted a degree of odium, much of it stemming from, and perhaps reflected by, Plato's often hostile accounts of the sophists.<sup>54</sup> It is difficult to know just how much this hostility was felt at large in Athens and how much was contrived for dramatic and political purposes.<sup>55</sup> Nevertheless, as far as Plato

52. H. Marrou, (1977), pp. 46-50.

53. *ibid.*, pp. 36-45.

54. Plato was not the only writer to offer hostile or disparaging portraits of the sophists. Aristophanes, for example, poked fun at them in a way that was similar to but not as insightful as Plato's. See K. J. Dover, (1968); V. Ehrenberg, (1962).

55. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 38 where he described the Athenian public as ambivalent but generally receptive to the sophists. According to L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 7-8 the fact that the sophists charged for their services may account for some of this hostility since the poorer Athenians may not have been able to afford to pay for this sort of education and hence resented those who sold it, and conversely some aristocrats may have resented them for being "foreigners and disdain them for not being gentlemen, since they were paid for their service" (p. 8). It would thus be fair to say that the odium attributed to sophists would not have been as general as Plato's accounts suggest but perhaps isolated to specific minority groups within the Athenian population.

(and perhaps Aristophanes) was concerned, it is at least clear that he was articulating the views of an aristocratic class whose grip on political power, and hence on social values in general, was under threat if not in actual decline.<sup>56</sup> Aristophanes wrote at the beginning of this period and thus was content to satirise it. Plato, on the other hand, was born into this decline and hence grew up as a member of a class whose time was rapidly fading. He did not satirise but set about reconstructing the particular ideas and values that he thought were necessary for a *polis* in which the aristocracy could be returned to its former position of leadership. Though lamenting its decline he worked hard to arrest and reverse it, at least as far as intellectual and social values were concerned.<sup>57</sup>

Whilst it is true that Plato was not completely hostile to all the sophists,<sup>58</sup> it is still the case that, as a group, he had a low opinion of them as educators and thinkers.<sup>59</sup> Again, the fact that they accepted money for their services counted heavily against them. According to Plato, knowledge should be freely shared amongst like-minded people rather than sold. In selling knowledge, the sophists were obliged to teach all who had the means to pay. Hence they were limited in their

56. V. Ehrenberg, (1962), p. 111.

57. E. & N. Wood, (1978), pp. 121 ff.

58. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 39 n. 3;

59. This is borne out by the statements he has his fellow aristocrats utter. Guthrie cited these as well as other characters from Plato's dialogues to demonstrate that it was not Plato but his associates who were anti-sophist ((1969), p. 37). However, the fact remains that Plato, in so far as he wrote the dialogues, controlled what they said, and as such he was able to articulate an anti-sophist sentiment current in his class without bringing himself or Socrates down to his characters' level of (often acrimonious) discussion. Once Plato is seen as a (political) partisan in the ideological struggles of his day, his real relationship to the sophists becomes much clearer, as is convincingly argued by E. & N. Wood, (1978), pp. 1-3.

freedom to choose (and reject) potential students.<sup>60</sup> But as Kerferd pointed out, the evidence is not conclusive on this interpretation of sophistic teaching since even Plato has Hippocrates (in the *Protagoras*) express doubt about being able to convince Protagoras to accept him as a student.<sup>61</sup> Indeed, the dramatic tone of that dialogue is set by Hippocrates' plea for Socrates to intercede on his behalf.<sup>62</sup> Clearly, the sophists had some discretion over whom they would or would not teach.

Another reason for the odium that began to be attached to the sophists has been suggested by Kerferd. It was not that the sophists were obliged to take on "all kinds of people", but rather that "all kinds of people" could gain access to the sorts of teachings that the sophists had to offer.<sup>63</sup> This was spelt out by Protagoras (or rather by Plato through the character 'Protagoras' in the dialogue of the same name)<sup>64</sup> when it was discussed what Hippocrates would learn under Protagoras' tutelage. His pupils would learn how to order their affairs (both private and public) and how to "speak and act for the best in the affairs of state".<sup>65</sup> They would learn to be good citizens who would have the skills to be "effective and successful politicians".<sup>66</sup> The sophists were thus making it possible for non-aristocrats to compete successfully

60. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 39-40.

61. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 25.

62. That is, Hippocrates wanted Socrates to persuade Protagoras to take him on as a student since he made it clear that it was not simply a matter of paying Protagoras the appropriate fee but also of effecting an introduction with the master sophist so that, despite Hippocrates' youth, Protagoras would receive him favourably. (*Protagoras* [310d-e]).

63. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 26. The phrase 'all kinds of people' is Kerferd's.

64. It is reasonably certain that Plato gave an accurate portrait of Protagoras in that dialogue.

65. *Protagoras* [318e-319a].

66. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 26; *Protagoras* [319a].

in the political arena.

But more significantly, the sophists were usurping the traditional means of teaching the art of good citizenship. Prior to the rise of the sophists, the teaching of this art had been the privilege of the "amateur and gentleman" who imparted this art not so much by formal instruction as by a process of osmosis within the aristocratic class.<sup>67</sup>

It was un-gentlemanly of the sophists to claim to be able to teach excellence and hence to be able to make people better because "such claims attack the very foundation of aristocracy, the idea of hereditary excellence".<sup>68</sup> The sophists, with their emphasis on rhetoric (and its power to persuade), were a clear threat to the aristocrats' traditional ways of training future leaders and politicians from amongst their sons. Paternal and family ties and influence effectively enabled the aristocrats to exclude those from a non-aristocratic background thereby enabling them to retain the upper hand in the exercise of political power. The sophists thus offered a way to break the aristocratic monopoly on the training of future leaders, and most importantly, the values that the latter might espouse. The stigma that came to surround the sophists (especially for subsequent generations) derived from this.<sup>69</sup>

Placed within the social context of the emergence of democracy in Athens, the sophistic movement as a social phenomenon can be regarded as a part of the growth of democracy, particularly in the latter half

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67. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 39. On the aristocratic notion of 'gentlemen' (*kaloi kagathoi*) see E. & N. Wood, (1978), p. 2 and pp.157-160, and p. 205 n. 52 where the point is emphasised that the term "was always confined to the upper classes" and was "never simply a characterization of certain moral qualities irrespective of class". See also the brief discussion in H. I. Marrou, (1977), pp. 43-45.

68. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 8.

69. This does not mean that other factors such as their foreign origins, advocacy of innovation and change, and possible remoteness of access to their teachings for the poorer Athenians and so forth were not important but that the threat to aristocratic power provided the means for the aristocrats to exploit these other factors in denigrating the sophists.

of the fifth century, which depended upon a new generation obtaining just the sort of education that the sophists had to offer.<sup>70</sup> This view has been contested by Marrou, who argued that it would be a mistake to draw too close a parallel between what the sophists offered and the development of Athenian democracy.<sup>71</sup> He argued that although there was undoubtedly some connection, the fact that aristocratic families went on supplying most of the leaders and politicians even when Athens had its most radical and far-reaching democratic practices meant that the influence of the aristocrats was still important.<sup>72</sup> He argued further that it was not possible to pick out "any definite political bias" in the teachings of the fifth century sophists because they taught people from the rising newly rich as well as having an eager and willing clientele from the older, longer established aristocratic families.<sup>73</sup>

Marrou thus concluded that

the revolution in education that has come to be known as Sophistry seems to have had a technical rather than a political origin: on the basis of a mature culture, these enterprising educators developed a new technique, a form of teaching that was wider in its scope, more ambitious and more effective than any previous system.<sup>74</sup>

Marrou was undoubtedly right to urge caution in this area. And he was quite right to point to the continued presence of the aristocratic families in political affairs despite the tendency towards democratic participation.<sup>75</sup> However, the undisputed right to rule by the

70. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 15.

71. H. I. Marrou, (1977), p. 47.

72. *ibid.*, p. 47.

73. *ibid.*, p. 47.

74. *ibid.*, p. 48.

75. Indeed, one could argue that it was precisely because of this tendency that kept, even renewed, the aristocrats' political activity to the fore.

aristocratic families was no longer accepted. The conduct of public affairs and public business was no longer the province of a few but the domain of most citizens. This was one of the fundamental principles of Athenian democracy: power and its exercise rested with all citizens (at least in theory) and not just the select few.<sup>76</sup> An equally important principle of Athenian democracy was that public duties that required specialised expertise (e.g. military commands) should be carried out by those best qualified and equipped to do so.<sup>77</sup> Both of these principles were well understood by all Athenian citizens. This created a need for a form of training or education that was not fully served by existing means. Hence the demand for a form of teaching that was more accessible to and held more relevance for the wider population of citizens, a demand that was met by the sophists' teachings and methods.

On Marrou's second point, the issue is not "political bias" but the political consequences of the sort of education offered by the sophists. The aristocracy was neither unanimous nor undivided over the value of sophist teachings. Many of the younger generation of Athenian aristocrats were eager to learn from the sophists. Many of the older generation were more hostile to what the sophists represented. No doubt some of this hostility would have derived from the fact that their children were being taught by influences beyond their control. It is no accident that many of the virulent outbursts against the sophists (especially in Plato's dialogues) came from those devoted to traditional aristocratic views and values. This was Plato's way of reflecting a view commonly held by older, established aristocrats that the sophists and their students were contributing to the undermining of the old ways.

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76. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 16.

77. *ibid.*, p. 16.



Plato was shrewd enough, however, to realise that some of these "old ways" were no longer appropriate. This insight was perhaps due to his having come to maturity when the aristocrats of the old guard, so well personified by Thrasymachus in the *Republic*, had shown their incapacity for the Athens-to-be of the fourth century. In the dialogues it was Socrates and then Plato who spoke the most civilly with the sophists because, after all was said and done, and despite their opposition to what the sophists represented, Plato had to demonstrate the intellectual superiority, logical necessity, and cogency of his arguments when seen against those of the leading sophists. Although committed to the pre-eminence of an aristocratic class, Plato set about reconstructing their values and ideas in a way that was more in tune with what he saw as appropriate for the Athenian *polis*.<sup>78</sup>

The issues at stake were as much political as educational, perhaps more so. But it would be a mistake to infer from the fact that because the sophists as a group offered a radically and politically threatening form of education that they were in accord as to their political views. On the contrary, the sophists were of diverse political leanings. Protagoras, whose works exhibited a strong feeling for democratic practices exemplified one pole, whereas Thrasymachus, as a supporter of the rights of the stronger, exemplified the other. The values espoused by Thrasymachus tended to be the aristocratic values of a fast disappearing fifth-century Athens. The rest of the sophists fell between these poles in varying degrees. In Plato's sharply simplified view, the sophists, despite their diversity of thought and political preferences, were either advocates of more democracy or else they were attempting to hang on to, or rather superimpose, antiquated aristocratic values

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78. Plato therefore reconstructed an image of the *polis* after his own preconceptions as is well argued by E. & N. Wood, (1978), in the aptly titled Chapter IV: "Plato: Architect of the Anti-*Polis*".

on an increasingly unstable society. In either case they were to be denounced; the one for encouraging the replacement of aristocratic hegemony altogether, and the other for attempting to turn back the clock.<sup>79</sup>

Contrary to Marrou, politics was thus at the very centre of the conflicts and debates that embroiled the sophists.<sup>80</sup> Their teachings were not independent of politics but, on the contrary, were inextricably tied to the political undercurrents and upheavals of their time.

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Some time has been spent in sketching the social context of the sophists so that their contributions to the production and dissemination of knowledge can be properly assessed. The two contributions of importance to this study were the debate over *nomos* and *physis* and their professional use of rhetoric. Since rhetoric derived from the much older art of persuasion, rhetoric was not a sophistic invention.<sup>81</sup>

79. The attempt to return Athens to an earlier style of government is best seen in the short-lived rules of the Four Hundred (411/410 B.C.) and the Thirty Tyrants (404/403 B.C.). In both cases an attempt was made to dismantle the democratic gains. For example, the Thirty Tyrants repealed the laws of 462 B.C., emasculated the popular courts, and used a systematic form of terror to pacify/ossify the *demos*. The fact that both groups maintained their rule with the systematic use of terror and murder indicates the strong commitment to democracy that existed on the part of the ordinary Athenians, and conversely, of the kinds of measures needed to subdue them. A key figure in the Thirty Tyrants was Critias, Plato's uncle, who was the prime mover behind the reign of terror and hence was responsible for much of the bloodshed during the short rule of the Thirty Tyrants. Plato was more than generous in his characterisation of his uncle in the various dialogues in which the latter appeared. See V. Ehrenberg, (1973), pp. 352-354; G. E. M. de Ste. Croix, (1981); A. Lintott, (1982).

80. One could also criticise Marrou's argument because of his assumption that Sophistry was simply technical, and therefore devoid of political considerations. But the very notion of 'technique' involves a political dimension both as to its composition and the range of its exercise.

81. Rhetoric was clearly a feature of Homer's works as has been argued by Andrew J. Karp, (1977), but note the reservations expressed in n. 57 p. 208 *supra*. Also, the work of pre-Socratic thinkers like Xenophanes, Heraclitus, and Parmenides gave evidence that they were both attempting to articulate their views as well as persuade any who would listen of the correctness of their views.

However, the sophists did make special use of it and, by refining and reshaping it, made it one of their distinctive achievements. The *nomos/ physis* debate will not be discussed in detail as many of the issues it raises fall beyond the scope of this study.<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, some discussion of the debate must be undertaken because it highlights the important role of *logos* in late fifth-century Greek thought, especially in relation to the question of truth and opinion, and hence to the nature of knowledge.

*Nomos* and *physis* became sharply separated by the sophists.<sup>83</sup> As Guthrie explained it, "what existed 'by *nomos*' was not 'by *physis*' and vice versa".<sup>84</sup> The two were mutually exclusive terms. Rendered as 'nature', *physis* meant the reality of what existed, and hence to enquire into the *physis* of an object or condition was to seek its real or true nature (i.e. its *logos*). *Nomos* came to mean law or convention although it initially meant what was traditionally thought to be true. This older meaning remained current in the fifth century but became increasingly subordinate to the newer meaning of law or formal convention.<sup>85</sup> In human affairs, *physis* came to be synonymous with necessity (and hence independent of human actions or will) whereas *nomos* was always dependent upon human actions or will.

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82. An extended discussion of this debate is given by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 55-134. More abbreviated accounts are in G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 111-130; L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 53-59; H. D. Rankin, (1983), pp. 79-91.

83. E. & N. Wood, (1978), p. 85 credit the late pre-Socratic, Archelaus of Athens, (reputedly one of Socrates' mentors) with being one of the first to make this sort of distinction. But it is also clear that a number of the earliest pre-Socratic thinkers were pushing in this direction in so far as they were attempting to articulate fixed "laws" of the "natural" world to be used as justifications of guides for human actions.

84. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 55.

85. M. Ostwald, *Nomos and the Beginnings of Greek Democracy*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969) for some discussion on the background of *nomos* and its development.

The debates in the late fifth century about *physis* and *nomos* therefore presupposed the further issue of *logos*.<sup>86</sup> The *logos* established by *nomos* need not be the same *logos* established by *physis*. For many sophists, *logoi* established by *physis* were the yardstick and source for all other *logoi*. This view was adopted by Callicles, Antiphon, Plato, and even Aristophanes.<sup>87</sup> For these writers, *physis* had priority over *nomos*. Others, like Thrasymachus, held a position closely related to that of Callicles and Antiphon. Regardless of how *logos* was established, those with the power and the means to enforce their own particular view would do so and then label it what they liked. Guthrie called this "an attitude of hard-headed realism or fact-facing".<sup>88</sup> In many respects, this view resorted to arguments from *physis* to establish the arbitrary *nomos* of the stronger and more powerful.

A third position was exemplified by Protagoras who favoured *nomos* over *physis*. He suggested that no matter how one approached the problem of *physis*, its elaboration always remained a contingent matter. It was a matter of establishing it by *nomos*. As a result, Guthrie described Protagoras' views on this as

extreme subjectivism according to which there was no reality behind and independent of appearances, no difference between appearance and being, and we are each the judge of our own impressions. What seems to me *is* for me, and no man is in a position to call another mistaken. ... No natural philosopher went as far as this,<sup>89</sup> for it is a denial of the very meaning of *physis*.

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86. The above reference to *logos* may seem to be a misrepresentation of the discussion in W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 60 where he discussed *physis/nomos* in terms of law and ethical values. But the issue of *logos* is still appropriate because one of the chief concerns of many sophists was how to differentiate between competing *logoi* and hence is germane to the *physis/nomos* debate.

87. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 110 ff..

88. *ibid.*, p. 60.

89. *ibid.*, p. 186.

While Guthrie was referring specifically to Protagoras' "man-measure principle" it is clear that Protagoras used this principle to guide him in the *physis/nomos* controversy.<sup>90</sup> Kerferd took the other tack, and described Protagoras' views as objectivist because, although each person could perceive the same phenomena differently or in opposing terms, the perceptions were due to qualities inherent in the phenomena themselves.<sup>91</sup> Such qualities "coexist in the same physical object" and this constituted what Kerferd called the objectivist view.<sup>92</sup>

The terminology of 'subjectivist' and 'objectivist' is unfortunate (and possibly flawed) and raises issues of a meta-theoretic nature that are beyond the scope of this study. The use of such terminology here has been unavoidable because of the way in which Guthrie and Kerferd have framed the issues with respect to the views of Protagoras. Some justification for feeling uneasy about the metaphysical bog of the subjectivist/objectivist framework emerges from the following discussion of Kerferd's analysis where he appears to be having it both ways. He claims that the subjectivist position

will embrace the view that perception is causally based on features actually present in the objective world. These causal factors may well, on a commonly held view, be the source of the contents of an individual's perceptions. But what he perceives are the results of these causes, not the causal factors themselves and, as these results are determined by the impact of causal factors on himself as a subject, it will be convenient and not I hope too misleading to continue to include this theory under the heading of subjectivist theories.<sup>93</sup>

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90. L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 30-32, and n. 25 p. 31.

91. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 86-87. In an earlier paper, "Plato's Account of the Relativism of Protagoras", *Durham University Journal*, Volume XLII, New Series, Volume XI, 1949/50, p. 21 Kerferd expressed it thus: "opposite qualities inhere in the same thing".

92. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), pp. 86-87.

93. *ibid.*, p. 87.

But it is misleading, or at least question begging. On the one hand, Kerferd suggests that "qualities which can co-exist in the same physical object" can give rise to different perceptions. On the other hand, causal "features actually present in the objective world" give rise to differing perceptions. These perceptions are based not on the causes but on their results or effects which are themselves differentially perceived because their impact on individual persons will "vary from person to person according to differences in the subject". Thus for an objectivist, reality is differentially constituted and is so perceived, whereas for a subjectivist, reality is constituted differently because individuals are differently constituted. One might ask why perceptions are effects of "causal factors" for a subjectivist but not for an objectivist? Why does the fact that individuals differ as to their constitutions and powers (as is acknowledged by Kerferd) not affect an objectivist's perceptions of these causes? Such questions render the subjectivist/objectivist terminology extremely problematical.

The point is that there can be no perception without the means to perceive and hence there can be no reports without reporters.<sup>94</sup>

This was the core of Protagoras' "man-measure principle".

Man is the measure of all states of affairs,  
of what is the case, that it is the case,<sup>95</sup>  
of what is not the case, that it is not so.

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94. D. K. Glidden, "Protagorean Relativism and *Physis*", *Phronesis*, Volume XX, No. 3, 1975 p. 215 n. 29.

95. *ibid.*, p. 209. n. 1. There is some variety in the translations of Protagoras' words. For example, R. K. Sprague, *The Older Sophists*, (University of South Carolina Press, South Carolina, 1972) p. 18 has "Of all things the measure is man, of things that are that they are, of things that are not that they are not". L. Versenyi, "Protagoras' Man-Measure Fragment", *American Journal of Philology*, Volume 83, No. 330, 1962 p. 183 and Adolph Levi, "The Man-Measure Principle: Its Meanings and Applications", *Philosophy*, Volume XV, 1940 p. 148 both begin "Man is the measure of all things". Levi's interpretation was that the 'things' (*chremata*) referred to were 'facts'. This was the interpretation adopted by Glidden for his analysis. Versenyi's interpretation in (1962) and (1963), though not identical, closely parallels Glidden's and Levi's.

Although it may be granted that Glidden was a little less literal in his translation than some, the sense that he drew from it was consistent with Protagoras' known views. Indeed, the apparent disjunction between Protagoras' ethical views and his views on truth<sup>96</sup> disappears when it is acknowledged that Protagoras was concerned, in any given situation, with the facts at issue rather than with the nature of the objects of those facts.

That is, for Protagoras, the 'facts at issue' were those that were of direct concern or relevance for humans. This was well brought out by Versenyi, who argued that Protagoras

holds that the thing a pig, a firefly, a dog-faced baboon, or some still stranger creature may be concerned with is relative to each of these creatures. The point, however, is (and this is what the fragment is designed to emphasize) that we are neither pigs nor dog-faced baboons nor some still stranger creature but human beings, and thus, as far as *we* are concerned, man, whether the individual, the state, or mankind, is the measure of things. If it seems merely tautological at first to say that things of our concern concern us, it is far from trivial to recall this at a time when men appear oblivious of the fact. To remind man at such a time that he is not an abstract-theoretical chimera in communication with objective-immutable absolute essences, but a living human being, to point out that this world of *chremata* is the one in which he lives, the one which ultimately concerns him, and thus to recall him from the world of Parmenides and post-Parmenidean natural philosophy, in which he literally lost himself, into a world of practical action — this is far from trivial. It is the thinker's first and most important task. It is what Protagoras did. Pointing to the world in which our relationships, attitudes, and opinions are decisive, our concerns of<sup>97</sup>utmost concern, he recalled man to himself.

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96. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 187.

97. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 13. (Emphasis in original).

It was the relationship between a human being and the *chremata* of their specific, lived situation that was important and such a relationship would therefore be a contingent matter.

For Protagoras, man<sup>98</sup> was the best and only judge of his experiences and consequently, as far as those experiences were concerned, could never be wrong. Hence Protagoras held that no one man's assertions or claims (relative to himself) could take the status of being more truthful than any other man's statements. As Glidden put it,

Protagoras is using 'true' in its standard sense as 'true of' and he is arguing that all of an individual's sensations and beliefs are true of his psycho-physical condition. In the case of simple sensations Protagoras argues that each man is infallibly aware of what he senses. In the case of political, ethical, and mathematical beliefs Protagoras claims that these beliefs are merely ways of taking one's experiences and as ways of taking these experiences they are infallible as well.

Thus truth in the sense of 'true of' was not an absolute concept for Protagoras but a relative one. It was relative to an individual's understanding of his perceptions of a given state of affairs at a given time.<sup>100</sup>

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98. It is clear that, given the status of women in ancient Greece (see references cited in n. 48 p. 205 *supra*), the term 'man' cannot be understood in the generic sense of Humanity or Humankind but must be understood literally as 'man-kind'. Thus men as males were the standard by which all else was judged. This seems to have escaped those who have argued over the sense of 'man' in Protagoras' fragment. Such arguments have centred on whether Protagoras meant man as individual (W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 188-189) or man as a species (L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 9-13). Yet this is really a pseudo-problem because it rests on a confusion generated by treating 'individual' as a term in abstract isolation from its purported referent and as such was un-Protagorean. Protagoras was trying to show that each person (or at least each male) would perceive things slightly differently. At the same time this view was built on the basis that perception (and its interpretation) was a property common to the species. Hence for Protagoras, a distinction between 'individual' and 'species' would have been meaningless in so far as the sense of 'individual' presupposed a species-being, and as noted, for the Greeks this meant the male half of the species.

99. D. K. Glidden, (1975), p. 217.

100. L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 20-21.



A consequence of this view was that there would be a proliferation of truths (in the sense used above), none of which could claim *a priori* precedence over any other. However, this did not mean that people were bound to their beliefs or that they could not differentiate between competing beliefs as to which were better or worse. As people's perceptions of the (changing) world around them altered so too would their beliefs. But such changes were not mechanical. Part of the establishment of a relationship between an individual and the facts of a given situation depended upon the constitution of the individual with respect to the ability to perceive and interpret what is being perceived.

In discussing Protagorean doctrine, Plato used the example of the physician and the sick person to demonstrate the analogous procedure concerning beliefs about what is true of any given situation.<sup>101</sup> A sick person may perceive the taste of food as bitter while a healthy person perceives the taste of the same food as not bitter. In order to change the sick person's tastes (and hence the perceptions/beliefs) with respect to the food, the physician does not change the food but changes, or attempts to change, the sick person's disposition. The physician restores the sick person to health, a state of affairs that one assumes was considered by the Greeks to be the normal condition for the human body since a healthy person was regarded as superior to an unhealthy person. Once the patient is cured the patient's sense-perceptions about the food also change. By altering the disposition of the

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101. What follows is based on Glidden's more extensive discussion of this example in D. K. Glidden, (1975), pp. 217-220. The particular analogy is given in Plato's *Theaetetus* [166 ff.]. Strictly speaking it is Plato's argument, delivered by Socrates giving a summary of Protagoras' views. That Plato did not distort Protagoras' views to any significant extent is more or less accepted as is the fact that Plato achieved his "win" over Protagoras with suspect argumentation.

patient's physical existence,<sup>102</sup> the physician effects a transformation of the related perceptions. The formerly bitter tasting food no longer tastes bitter. Glidden noted that far from denying *physis* Protagoras was in fact using *physis* to explain the nature of perception.

Far from denying PHYSIOLOGIA, Protagoras appeals to it at a critical juncture. Man's physical condition is a necessary prerequisite in the production of those sense experiences. *PHYSIS* explains why man has the sense experiences he does.<sup>103</sup>

But Protagoras was not asserting the priority of *physis* over *nomos*. He was pointing to the fact that, as far as human beings were concerned,<sup>104</sup> *physis* was neither constant nor homogeneous, hence any attempt to postulate a particular *physis* was an arbitrary matter on a par with *nomos*. Protagoras was thus fundamentally opposed to formulating ideas about *chremata* (whether as 'things' or 'facts') as entities "in themselves".<sup>105</sup>

The above analogy was then applied to the beliefs of healthy people and the way in which their beliefs could be altered, for better or worse. It was at this point that the role of a sophist came into its own for Protagoras. It was up to the sophists (or similar teachers) to effect the appropriate changes in the dispositions of their pupils or audiences, thereby changing their beliefs. Protagoras' views on this point were expressed by Socrates (as reconstructed by Plato) in the

102. The Greeks regarded human beings as comprising a set of powers or capacities, the proportions of which and their respective inter-relations varied from person to person. See G. Vlastos, "Equality and Justice in Early Greek Cosmologies", *Classical Philology*, Volume XLII, Jan.-Oct., 1947 pp. 156-178. For a more detailed discussion of Greek medical beliefs and practices see G. E. R. Lloyd, (1983).

103. D. K. Glidden, (1975), p. 217.

104. The use of the terms 'human beings' and 'person' in this thesis when discussing Protagorean and other views is not intended to be anachronistic or distortive of their actual views. Rather, it assumes that, despite the particular prejudices concerning women, Protagoras' views have a generality that can be applied to the modern age where such prejudices are more hotly contested.

105. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 22.

the *Theaetetus*.

So too in education it is necessary to bring about a change from the worse condition to a better; but whereas the doctor affects a change by means of drugs, the sophist does it by discourse. ... when somebody has depraved thoughts because of a depraved mentality one improves his mentality and thereby causes him to think correspondingly good thoughts. Some ignorant folk describe these new thoughts as 'true'; I should call them *better* than others, but certainly not *truer*.<sup>106</sup>

In altering or attempting to alter people's "physical" dispositions the sophist attempts to change the ways in which people come to terms with their sense-perceptions of themselves and the world around them. The physicians, by exercising their skills, cured the sick (and improved their perceptions). Analogously, the sophists, by exercising their particular skills, provided the means for their pupils to alter their understanding of the world.<sup>107</sup>

Of central importance here is the fact that the means by which perceptions were articulated or made manifest involved language and hence *logos*. *Logos* entailed both the fact that such means were ordered arrangements of words,<sup>108</sup> and the fact that these sequences of words could be composed for everything that existed. That is, a *logos* could be given of everything that existed and, for thinkers within the philosophical form of discourse, this meant that everything had a *logos*. This is consistent with the general tenor of Greek thought in that knowing (i.e. giving a *logos* in the sense of giving an account) and being (i.e. claiming an ontological status for *logos*) were fused

106. *Theaetetus* [167b]. (Translation Warrington's, his emphasis).

107. L. Veresenyi, (1963), pp. 33-35 has demonstrated the close parallel between sophistic and medical arts in ancient Greece as is acknowledged by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 167. That this analogy was accepted by most Greeks can be seen from the fact that Plato used it not just in the *Theaetetus* but also in other dialogues (e.g. *Phaedrus* [276]).

108. Cf. the definition of language alluded to n. 55 p. 63 *supra*.

together.<sup>109</sup> Thus giving a *logos* of an object or phenomenon was the same as saying that it exhibited a particular *logos*.

As was noted earlier, for some sophists *logoi* given by *physis* were to be preferred to all else. It was here that Protagoras denied the priority of *physis* over *nomos* (but not the necessity of *physis*) because the attribution of one or another *logos* was purely arbitrary. It was a matter of convention to be determined by those interested enough to enquire after such things. The articulation of the *logos* of a particular object or process derived from the sense-perceptions of human beings with the wider environment.<sup>110</sup> A particular *logos* was a definite, but not immutable way of ordering a person's beliefs. If the ordering of beliefs or sense-perceptions was altered such that they were brought into new or different relationships with each other then the views of the person or persons holding those beliefs would also change.

For a sophist, *logos* was the place and the means of intervention through which a person could be changed, for better or worse. Thus the aim of a sophist like Protagoras was that of

wise and honest orators [who] replace with sound opinions the community's distorted view of what is right. For it is my belief that whatever courses of action seem right and commendable to any given State are right and commendable for the State in question, so long as it holds to them. But when those courses are, in any particular instance, bad for the citizens, the wise man substitutes others that are and appear more expedient. On the same principle the sophist, who can likewise educate his disciples along the right lines, is wise and entitled to large fees from them when their training is complete.<sup>111</sup>

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109. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 187 n. 1.

110. D. K. Glidden, (1975), p. 226.

111. *Theaetetus* [167c]. (Translation Warrington's, his emphasis).

It is clear from this that the sophists (at least Protagoras) were concerned with improving people's perceptions. The interest of the sophists was not just a matter of wanting to make the "weaker argument stronger"<sup>112</sup> as many, including Plato, have maintained. Rather, the sophists were concerned with perfecting their rhetorical skills to transform the worse *logos* into a better *logos* thereby attempting to minimise the prevalence of distorted views and ignorant opinions.

Of course, it might be objected that not all sophists were concerned with such ostensibly noble ends. Gorgias, for example, maintained quite steadfastly that his *only* real concern was to teach the art of rhetoric.<sup>113</sup> For him, rhetoric was the master key that opened all doors. The diminution of ignorance was but one benefit that might be gained through the use of rhetoric. An important benefit in the Athenian context, for Gorgias perhaps *the* most important, was the gaining and exercising of political power and the prestige that would follow from it. As far as Gorgias was concerned the ends to which his students put the art of rhetoric was a matter for their own individual consciences. It was not his responsibility to teach them wrong from right, good from bad, noble from base: in short to teach *arete*.<sup>114</sup> This is not to say

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112. Protagoras has often been cited as saying that he could make the "weaker argument stronger" and this has led some to consider the sophists as some sort of charlatans. (E.g. Aristotle in R. K. Sprague, (1972), p. 21.). However, this saying can also be rendered as "making the worse argument better" or even "making the sound argument sounder". These renderings are not, strictly speaking, inconsistent with each other, nor are they inconsistent with the above analysis. One does not need to be considered a charlatan simply because one aims to strengthen an argument. The conclusion drawn by Aristotle and others, drawn primarily from Plato's interpretations, was based on a preconceived view to portray the sophists as practitioners/teachers of *eristic* (i.e. "seeking victory in an argument" (G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 62 with little or no concern for what was "true") and less on their claim to be thinkers of integrity in their own right.

113. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 271.

114. *ibid.*, p. 271.

that in the course of being instructed in rhetoric a student might not pick up some hint or guidance as to what Gorgias felt was a proper and just use for rhetoric. Gorgias argued that since *arete* was not an absolute and since his students should have learnt some of what it entailed before they came to him, the focus of his teaching should not be *arete* but rhetoric. The contradiction over *arete* into which Plato's 'Socrates' led Gorgias<sup>115</sup> should not be taken as a denial of the veracity or legitimacy of Gorgias' actual philosophical position. As Guthrie pointed out, Gorgias' denial that he taught *arete* resulted from having been

driven into a corner, and we cannot be certain that he would have said such a thing in real life.<sup>116</sup>

The most reasonable, or at least fairest, conclusion would be that, for Gorgias, *arete* had a very low pedagogical priority.

Furthermore, the sophists presumed that the basic values associated with *arete* had already been taught to their students before they sought out the more advanced teachings of the sophists. This highlights an important difference between the sophists and Plato and Socrates. For the sophists, such issues, while not settled on any absolute basis, were nevertheless something which they, as advanced teachers, should be able to take for granted. For Socrates and Plato such issues could not be taken for granted because it was these that they were trying to redefine. They saw it as their duty to reformulate the basic concepts of truth, justice, goodness, and so on. Hence their almost obsessive preoccupation with *arete* compared with the more casual approach to social morality of many of the sophists. Most of the sophists

115. See *Gorgias* [460-461].

116. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 272.

rejected the doctrines of certain knowledge and unchanging truths. For the sophists, such knowledge was not fixed but a matter of opinion and subject to change. Hence their emphasis on rhetoric.

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For the sophists, rhetoric was the means whereby people, either singly or in groups, could be persuaded, if they so chose, to adopt a better or more appropriate *logos*. In so far as rhetoric can be understood as being synonymous with the art of persuasion, it predated the age of the sophists in that such an art had been important in Homeric times.<sup>117</sup> However, the sophists' influence

on prose oratory, hitherto a spontaneous though dignified mode of speech, was to give it a structure and diction and at times a rhythm and use of figures no less self-conscious than [*sic*] those which poetry had long controlled.<sup>118</sup>

The sophists thus built on an existing practice and refined it.<sup>119</sup> However, it would be a mistake to assume that this practice was confined to just that of "prose oratory" (i.e. speech-making). This was but one of a set of practices that also included

the cultivation of the spoken and written word, the art of speaking correctly, of expressing and conveying thought in the right manner ..., and of analysing the rules and constitution of language.<sup>120</sup>

For Protagoras, Prodicus and Gorgias, for example, these were all necessary features of successful "prose oratory". And although the sophists

117. As was noted earlier in the paper by Andrew J. Karp, (1977).

118. William Chase Greene, "The Spoken and Written Word", *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology*, Volume 60, 1950. p. 40.

119. G. Kennedy, (1963), pp. 26-27; W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 179.

120. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 36.

can be regarded as being primarily responsible for these features, it is nevertheless the case that these features reached back to techniques established in the oral mode of discourse and which continued to a greater or lesser extent with the development of the literate mode of discourse<sup>121</sup> where writing became the principal organisational means for the composition and preservation of one's thoughts.

It is clear that the sophists were prose writers.<sup>122</sup> Yet unlike many of the pre-Socratic writers, the sophists did not see poetic forms or techniques as constraints on the means of dissemination. As noted earlier, the poetic medium acted as something of a brake upon the innovatory potential of the technology of writing with respect to dissemination.<sup>123</sup> The sophists, however, embraced the poetic and attempted to incorporate it within their discourses for maximum advantage. They developed a specialised language of discourse which, while still part of the philosophical form of discourse, expressed their concern with concrete social situations in addition to the more abstract issues of method. (This is most easily seen in the views of Protagoras who, in Versenyi's apt phrase, "recalled man to himself".)<sup>124</sup> Without presupposing a *logos* that was definitively absolute, eternal, or unchanging, the sophists developed means of distinguishing between, and if necessary, transforming competing or conflicting *logoi*. This is borne out by the fact that the art of rhetoric was regarded by practitioners and and disparagers alike as the "art of *logoi*".<sup>125</sup> In developing a spec-

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121. William Chase Greene, (1951), pp. 24-39.

122. As can be seen from the fragments contained in R. K. Sprague, (1972), *passim*.

123. See Chapters 3 and 4 above.

124. L. Versenyi, (1963), p. 13.

125. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 177.



ialised language devoted to persuasion<sup>126</sup> the sophists developed the written word, prose in particular, in new and uncharted directions.

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In his analysis of the art of rhetoric, Kennedy distinguished its five basic parts.<sup>127</sup> *Invention* dealt with the choice of subject matter or content; *arrangement* referred to the organisation of the words of speech, whether written or oral; *style* focussed on the structure and rhythm of the particular composition; *memory* and its related mnemonic devices provided the means of retention; and finally *delivery*, or control of voice tones and bodily movements, to maximise the speaker's impact on the audience. All of these features of rhetoric, though developed more completely at a later time,<sup>128</sup> were present even in the rudimentary stages of persuasive discourse. Two of the constituent elements, namely *arrangement* and *style*, warrant closer examination as they were perhaps the elements which received the most considered development at the hands of the fifth century sophists. (One might wish to include *invention* as part of the sophists' distinctive contributions, as Kennedy did,<sup>129</sup> but this would be tangential to the task at hand because, for all intents and purposes, the choice of subject matter had an arbitrary aspect to it.)

*Arrangement* referred to the component parts of a speech or (or other types of discourse) according to their function within it.

126. Richard Burke, "Rhetoric, Dialectic, and Force", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Volume 7, No. 3, Summer 1974. p. 155. Note also his observation on p. 154 that rhetoric cannot be limited just to speeches but "must apply to language in the broadest sense". Similar views are given by L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 36-38.

127. G. Kennedy, (1963), pp. 10-12.

128. R. McKeon, "The Methods of Rhetoric and Philosophy: Invention and Judgement", in L. Wallach, (ed.), *The Classical Tradition*, (Cornell University Press, New York, 1966).

129. G. Kennedy, (1963), p. 30.

First came the proem which introduced the topic and foreshadowed in a general way what was to follow. This may be considered as a variation on the echo-principle used in the oral mode of discourse.<sup>130</sup> After that would come an outline of the "facts"<sup>131</sup> of the matter, together with the articulation of the testimony of witnesses (if relevant) and the presentation of supporting evidence. This section was generally regarded as a narrative. By contrast, the third section was devoted to argumentation, and the proof proper of the issue at stake. Here the rhetorician wove the views presented in the narrative into a tight and compelling unity whilst at the same time disparaging and disproving opposing views thereby leaving them in disarray. The fourth and final component was the summation and recapitulation of the key points of the argument. This became known as the epilogue and was an innovation on earlier techniques of discourse.<sup>132</sup> It provided the speaker with the opportunity to achieve a greater and lasting impact on the audience.

The increased attention to the component parts of a discourse meant that the *style* exhibited by such *arrangement* became important. This was because the object of the exercise was persuasion and hence the more clearly articulated and formalised the structure of the *arrangement* became, the more necessary it became to develop a *style* that complemented it and enhanced audience attention. Gradually, the simpler prose style began to be transformed in that it began to make full use of earlier poetic techniques; the very techniques that had traditionally been

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130. This was discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 76-78, *supra*.

131. It needs to be understood that the "facts" (of any matter whether judicial or more broadly pertaining to knowledge discourse like philosophy) were *precisely* what were in question. The "facts" became facts only if the speech or writing (perhaps more correctly, its *logos*) was accepted as being true of the issue in question. It was the power of *logos* that established the facts not the "facts" themselves.

132. G. Kennedy, (1963), p. 32.

so effective in achieving close attention from the audience. Gorgias, for example, consciously developed a prose style that was heavily dependent upon a standard stock of poetic techniques in which rhyme, formulaic phrases, parallelism, and antithesis featured prominently.<sup>133</sup> As Kennedy noted, Gorgias' debt to poetic techniques was considerable, especially as these had been established within the earlier oral mode of discourse. Although rhythm was of some importance for Gorgias, it nevertheless took a back seat to the above techniques, especially antithesis for which he became renowned by later rhetoricians.<sup>134</sup>

It was Thrasy machus who placed the most emphasis on creating an appropriate prose rhythm. He was probably the first writer of prose to appreciate and consciously adapt the prose medium to rhetorical ends. He saw the value of a rhythm that provided variety and yet was repetitive.<sup>135</sup> In contrast to his predecessors in the poetic tradition, Thrasy machus attempted to incorporate various rhythms within the one work. It will be recalled that the *oidoi* of the oral mode of discourse had a set rhythmic structure, the hexameter, within which to arrange their words and formulaic phrases. Superimposed was the rhythm of meaning which, as Frankel noted, gave a limited variation in the overall effect but which did little to change or disturb the fundamental rhythm of the hexameter.<sup>136</sup> For the *oidoi*, any significant variation in rhythm was more or less impossible given the actual conditions of composition. The *poietai*, it is true, were able to employ a wide range of

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133. *ibid.*, p. 33 and p. 64.

134. *ibid.*, pp. 65-66.

135. *ibid.*, pp. 68-69.

136. H. Frankel, (1975), pp. 30-32. This was discussed in Chapter 2, pp. 69-70, *supra*.

rhythmic patterns in their poems. However, each poem exhibited only one basic rhythm. Once a particular rhythm had been chosen, and hence the verse form established for the particular poem, no new rhythm was introduced into that poem. The regularity of the verse form was generally maintained for its duration. Like the *oidoi*, the *poetiai* could make use of pauses or breaks to good effect, but the central rhythm remained in force once it had been set. Gorgias too, used pauses to good effect, and has been credited with the development of the idea of the "favourable moment" within sophistic discourse<sup>137</sup> which emphasised the choice of timing in selecting both the structural and stylistic effects for a particular composition. Thrasymachus placed less emphasis on poetic techniques as such, preferring to concentrate on rhythmic variation as the central feature of his prose compositions. Thrasymachus writings exhibited "a degree of sentence structure more developed than in any earlier writer"<sup>138</sup> and this was in large part due to his innovations with respect to rhythmic patterns. In so doing, he provided a model of prose composition that was revered by later rhetoricians in the same way that Gorgias was revered.<sup>139</sup>

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The importance of antithesis for the sophists' contribution to the development of rhetoric was seminal. As Kennedy noted, the "habit of antithesis was deeply engrained in the Greek character".<sup>140</sup> A

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137. A. Lesky, (1966), p. 351; G. Kennedy, (1963), pp. 66-67.

138. G. Kennedy, (1963), p. 68.

139. *ibid.*, p. 69.

140. *ibid.*, p. 34.

similar point was made by Webster in his discussion of the development of a specifically philosophical language in early Greek thought.<sup>141</sup> The use of antithesis can be found in almost any work from Homer to the sophists. This is partly due to the fact that it was a key means of organising and stressing important ideas. It was also a mnemonic requirement of composition for the *aoidoi* within the oral mode of discourse because it made the task of composing in performance less onerous. With the advent of writing, the problems of composition became less immediate but, even in the late fifth century when partly literate audiences could be taken for granted by a writer, oral dissemination remained the most common way in which people came into contact with the ideas of the various writers. The mnemonic significance of antithesis remained important as far as the audience was concerned because it facilitated the remembering of a writer's words and ideas.

Kennedy presented a description of antithesis from the *Rhetorica ad Alexandrum* that succinctly expressed what was meant by such a term.

An antithesis is that which has both opposite terminology and meaning in contrasting clauses or either one of these. What follows would be opposed in terminology and meaning at the same time: 'It is not just for my opponent to have my property and be wealthy while I, having parted with my substance, am no more than a beggar.' Opposition in words only: 'Let the rich and prosperous give to the poor and needy.' In meaning: 'I nursed him while he was sick, but he has been the cause of the greatest evils to me'. Here the words are not opposed but the actions are. Antithesis in both respects, meaning and terminology, would be most effective, but the two other types are also antithetical.<sup>142</sup>

Antithesis was thus a matter of opposing words, clauses, or even sentences at various levels of articulation.<sup>143</sup> The importance of antithesis

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141. T. B. L. Webster, (1952-53), p. 20.

142. G. Kennedy, (1963), p. 65.

143. T. B. L. Webster, (1952-53), p. 20.

for rhetorical discourse was that its use came to be regarded as *antilogos*. Guthrie described *antilogos* as meaning both 'contradiction' and 'contrary arguments'.<sup>144</sup> Kerferd described *antilogos* as that

which consists in causing the same thing to be seen by the same people now as possessing one predicate and now as possessing the opposite or contrary predicate.<sup>145</sup>

And further, he suggested that it

consists in opposing one *logos* to another *logos*, or in discovering or drawing attention to the presence of such an opposition in an argument or in a thing or state of affairs.<sup>146</sup>

Despite the variations inherent in the meaning of the word *logos*, ranging from simply 'word' through to 'reason', 'argument', 'account', *inter alia*, Kerferd's and Guthrie's interpretations fall within that range.<sup>147</sup> And quite clearly, the transition from antithesis to *antilogos* within rhetorical discourse was compatible with their definitions as will become evident from what follows.

In the narrative part of a particular rhetorical work, antithesis was an appropriate term. But as the narrative gave way to the proof, and antithesis was placed within the framework of a formal argument or proof, antithesis also became more formalised. For the proof,

the essential feature is the opposition of one *logos* to another either by contrariety or contradiction.<sup>148</sup>

Hence the shift from antithesis to *antilogos* was a shift from single words

144. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 177 and p. 182 n. 1.

145. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 61.

146. *ibid.*, p. 63. This is quite clearly very similar to the description of antithesis given by G. Kennedy cited on p. 264 n. 142, *supra*.

147. A. Lesky, (1966), p. 351 where he stressed that Gorgias, more than any other sophist, made full use of *logos* in its sense of 'word'.

148. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 63.

and perhaps clauses to whole arguments. This does not mean that antithesis was redundant or that instances of it were not employed within the proof. But there was a decided change of emphasis from the concrete points of narrative to the more thematic and abstract features of *logos*.

*Antilogos* became more commonly a method of argument in which a speaker trained in rhetoric could proceed from one *logos* to another opposing or contrary *logos*, thereby leaving the supporters of the first either to accept both *logoi* (thereby embracing a contradiction) or, to acknowledge the contradictory situation and reject the first *logos*. Alternatively, supporters of the first *logos* could attempt to show that the second *logos* was not derived from the first, or attempt to demonstrate the falsity of the second *logos*. Whatever the choice made by the supporters of the weakened *logos*, the method of *antilogos* bore a strong resemblance to the method of *reductio ad absurdum* that characterised the proofs of Zeno of Elea, and other early pre-Socratic like Xenophanes or Parmenides.

It needs to be understood that the method of *antilogos* did not have to assume the truth or correctness of its initial assumptions. Although the argument proceeds from an assumed *logos* to an appropriate proof, the status of the assumption was of small moment for the rhetoricians. After all, rhetoricians, like Gorgias, were famous for their claim that a *logos* could be provided on any subject and an argument constructed accordingly. A feature of the teacher of rhetoric was the claim to be able to argue both sides of an issue with equal strength. It was this skill that teachers of rhetoric professed to be able to impart to their students. The substantive factual and moral content of an argument was relatively unimportant as far as the skill itself was con-

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cerned. The essential point was that the aim of the discourse was to persuade the audience of the view being promulgated by the speaker or writer. Any other considerations were secondary or of negligible importance for the rhetorical method.

This was entirely consistent with the sophists' general approach to knowledge at any given time. Truth in any absolute sense was illusory in that all knowledge was, for the sophists, a matter of opinion, and hence a matter of probability to be established by argument.<sup>149</sup> Some opinions were weaker than others and vice versa. Whether such opinions were true of a given state of affairs depended upon the power of the argument presented in its favour to persuade the audience. An opinion was assumed and the supporting argument presented which thereby established its *logos*. Alternatively, its *logos* could be assumed as a starting point for the establishment of a more wide-ranging *logos*. Since the aim of the exercise was to persuade the audience, the performance of the speaker or the written word had to be powerful enough to move those present to reconsider their own opinions and to decide accordingly.

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In many respects the situation of the sophists was comparable with that of the *oidoi*. The relationship between performer, audience, and the material was crucial for both the *oidoi* and sophists.<sup>150</sup> In both cases, the person presenting the material, be it song or oratory, had to seize the attention of the audience and hold it for the duration of the performance. Hence both cast their ideas in forms that generated

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149. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 178 ff.

150. Richard Burke, (1974), p. 156 stressed the importance of this relationship for the sophists.



strong emotional appeal.<sup>151</sup> It is not surprising that the sophists drew heavily on poetic techniques, long entrenched in the habits of ancient Greek thinking, as a mainstay of their discourse.

The major difference between the sophists and the *oidoi* was that the former had the advantage of the technology of writing. Unlike the *oidoi*, the sophists did not have to compose in performance but could prepare their works well beforehand so that the actual performance was either a recitation from memory (thereby approximating an *oidic* performance) or a straight reading from the prepared text. Indeed it was considered to be the mark of a sophist to be a writer of prepared texts for public performance. Some Athenian speakers, particularly politicians, avoided writing their speeches down for fear of being called a sophist. And at least one sophist, Alcidamus, defended extempore speech-making on the grounds that a written speech was but a pale imitation of its orally produced counterpart.<sup>152</sup>

Unlike the *oidoi* who simply presented the knowledge and values of received culture and wisdom, the sophists provided critical analyses and assessment of the knowledge and values of their day. Whereas the *oidoi* performed a culturally unifying function, the sophists' methods exemplified and individualised the burgeoning proliferation of contending opinions, reflecting the fact that the unity with a distant past was, by the late fifth century, no longer tenable.

The sophists may also be credited with making the philosophical form of discourse more widely accessible by offering the means for others to engage in the discourse through their instruction in the art of

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151. G. Kennedy, (1963), p. 63.

152. William Chase Greene, (1951), p. 57 n. 74.

rhetoric<sup>153</sup> with its implicit method of *antilogos*. Underlying this was the sophists' central concern with *logos*. Even though the sophists generally regarded certain knowledge as unattainable it was nevertheless possible in their view to seek out and articulate the best possible *logos* at any given time. While such a *logos* might well be temporary, considering that it was always possible for it to be refuted, this was the best that could be expected of human knowledge. In this the sophists were giving voice to the changing nature of their political and social world. But they were more than just a mirror of their times. They were also a creative part of the emerging tradition of the philosophical form of discourse.

The significance of their contributions to this tradition can perhaps be measured by the fact that Plato saw them as his chief adversaries in the intellectual and political struggles of his own time. The desire to underline this contrast was sufficiently strong to lead Plato to re-define philosophy so that his own views of what constituted knowledge could be placed on (at least in his opinion) a firmer footing than that of his predecessors and contemporaries. A significant part of this project involved articulating what he regarded as an adequate method for the philosophical form of discourse, which in turn involved the formulation of the concept 'dialectic'. This problem will be the focus of the next chapter.

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153. As L. Versenyi, (1963), pp. 38-39 has stressed, for the sophists, particularly Protagoras, the art of rhetoric can not really be separated from their conception of teaching. The two went together as part of the same "package" in so far as both had as their task the improvement and betterment of those who sought out the sophists' tutelage.

## Chapter 7

### At the Crossroads: Plato, Philosophy, and the Concept 'Dialectic'

Plato found himself at the beginning of the fourth century B.C. in a situation of political and intellectual ferment. The restoration of democracy in Athens, an event bitterly resisted by the aristocrats (including some of Plato's own family), brought with it a number of reprisals in which Socrates, Plato's mentor, was condemned and executed.<sup>1</sup> The aristocratic values and standards with which Plato shared some sympathy were no longer regarded as the exclusive mainstay for human conduct. Other values and types of knowledge, particularly those associated with the democratic outlook, had emerged during the fifth century to provide alternative sources of validation for social and human conduct. Although it was axiomatic for most Greeks that human conduct was guided by knowledge and values, the problem as Plato perceived it, was that no one could really say for sure what constituted knowledge. There was a proliferation of theories which engendered much moral, intellectual and political uncertainty. The basis for human conduct, particularly the nature of justice, was thus unreliable and it was to this broad problem that Plato directed his attention.

This problem cannot be reduced to one of defending aristocratic values against the incursions of those thought to be a product of democratic practices or attempting to restore the former to their

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1. Socrates' fate was not simply a result of vengeance on the part of the democrats. When compared with the reign of terror and bloodshed during the short-lived usurpations of power by the Thirty Tyrants and the Four Hundred in the closing years of the fifth century, the reaction of the democrats was remarkably restrained. For more details see V. Ehrenberg, (1973), pp. 314 ff. and pp. 351-358.

supposed earlier pre-eminence, as some have argued.<sup>2</sup> For Plato the situation was not that simple. Even though he generally disdained democratic politics and the outlook it engendered, blaming as he did the death of Socrates on the ill-informed actions of the *demos* and its leaders, he nevertheless also realised that many of the aristocratic values of the past were no longer appropriate or relevant for the Athenian *polis* of the fourth century.<sup>3</sup> The real problem for Plato was to reconceptualise knowledge and values comprehensively, with the aim of establishing a new basis for human conduct.

Such a task required that the whole domain of knowledge and values had to be reconsidered. Only that which could be established as certain by the rational activity of the mind could be accorded the status of knowledge and hence truth. All else would be opinion and, though it might be possible to have a right or wrong opinion, this was not the same as partaking of truth. For Plato, the problem of knowledge, and specifically what should be regarded as the proper object of knowledge, was of central importance. Indeed, Plato's quest for the certainty of knowledge, and hence truth, can be regarded as the thread that united his various dialogues. Although his views changed, receiving different degrees of emphasis at different times, the quest for certainty was a constant feature of his thought.

Before proceeding further, it will be useful to clarify the grouping of the dialogues for the purposes of this study, especially with respect to our ability to separate the views of Socrates from those of Plato, and particularly on the question of dialectic. Plato's dialogues are usually grouped as the early period (*Apology*; *Crito*; *Laches*;

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2. For example, G. Novak, (1979), can be regarded as representative of such an approach.

3. E. & N. Wood, (1978), Chapter IV.

*Lysis*; *Charmides*; *Euthyphro*; *Hippias Minor and Major*; *Protagoras*; *Gorgias*; *Ion*), the middle period (*Meno*; *Phaedo*; *Republic*; *Symposium*; *Phaedrus*; *Euthydemus*; *Menexenus*; *Cratylus*), and the late period (*Parmenides*; *Theaetetus*; *Sophist*; *Statesman*; *Timaeus*; *Critias*; *Philebus*; *Laws*).<sup>4</sup> These divisions are somewhat arbitrary and are not necessarily accepted as definitive by all scholars.<sup>5</sup> The 'Socratic' dialogues refer to those in which Plato reconstructed "in form and substance, the conversations of his master without as yet adding to them any distinctive doctrines of his own".<sup>6</sup> Guthrie singled out nine such dialogues: *Apology*; *Crito*; *Euthydemus*; *Laches*; *Lysis*; *Charmides*; *Hippias Minor and Major*; and *Ion*. The *Phaedo* may be regarded as Socratic in so far as it dealt with the "last hours and death" of Socrates but in terms of its content it reflected Plato's views rather than his mentor's.<sup>7</sup>

While it can be accepted that Plato, in the Socratic dialogues, attempted to portray Socrates' views and methods accurately, it is accepted that they were in varying degrees affected by Plato's authorship.<sup>8</sup> In many respects Socrates, or more accurately the character 'Socrates', functioned as a mask in the dialogues (as did the other characters) behind which lurked Plato and his views. In the Socratic dialogues, the

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4. W. K. C. Guthrie, *A History of Greek Philosophy Volume IV: Plato, the Man and his Dialogues — The Earlier Period*, of six volumes, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1975), p. 50.

5. G. C. Field, *Plato and his Contemporaries*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1948); G. E. Mueller, *Plato: The Founder of Philosophy as Dialectic*, (Philosophical Library, New York, 1965); P. Friedlander, *Plato: An Introduction*, Volume I, of three volumes, trans. by H. Meyerhoff, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1958) all offer slightly different groupings of the dialogues.

6. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 67.

7. *ibid.*, pp. 69-70.

8. *ibid.*, pp. 69-70 where Guthrie canvassed the major scholarly views on this issue.

mask of 'Socrates' can be regarded as a reasonably accurate facsimile of the actual Socrates, whereas in the other dialogues the correspondence between the two was comparatively weak. It will be shown at some length that Plato's purpose in using the Socratic mask was intimately connected with his choice of the dialogue format. Two preliminary points should be mentioned here. First, Plato was able to lay the foundation for his later views by first presenting the problems that preoccupied Socrates and his contemporaries thereby effectively establishing the existence of such problems and the inadequacies of the proffered responses to Socrates' questioning.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, this motive is borne out by the fact that many of the Socratic dialogues finished somewhat inconclusively, thus indicating Plato's dissatisfaction, or at least uneasiness, with his teacher's method and approach. Plato's reconceptualisation of the philosophical form of discourse as the only appropriate domain for the pursuit of knowledge presupposed the critique of other domains where such discourse was supposed to take place.

To describe Plato's philosophical efforts as a reconceptualisation is, however, partly misleading because his project encompassed not just the conceptual content but also the very practice of engaging in philosophical discourse. For Plato,

True philosophical discourse, ... can take place only among real men living in an actual society, men who are discussing issues of serious concern to them.<sup>10</sup>

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9. The Socratic dialogues can thus be regarded as a critique which formed a kind of preface to Plato's subsequent works.

10. Herman L. Sinaiko, *Love, Knowledge and Discourse in Plato: Dialogue and Dialectic in Phaedrus, Republic, Parmenides*, (University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1965) p. 6. Sinaiko's use of the term 'men' here is entirely appropriate because Plato was concerned primarily with male human beings. Despite his reputation as a feminist (of sorts), Plato's talk of men was gender-specific. See J. Annas, "Plato's *Republic* and Feminism", *Philosophy*, Volume 51, 1976; S. B. Pomeroy, "Feminism in Book V of Plato's *Republic*", *Apeiron*, Volume 8, No. 1, May 1974. That Plato regarded women as inferior to men was made explicit in *Timaeus* [42b-c; 90e-91a] and *Laws* [917a] and this was in keeping with the dominant Greek outlook.

Philosophy was a lived experience that carried within it imperatives for action and was therefore unique as a form of discourse because

It does not seek simply to understand and master the means to an end; it seeks instead to realize the end itself. ... Philosophy proper starts with the realization that our values are inadequate to the situation we face, and it proceeds to search for new and better ones.<sup>11</sup>

Plato's attitude to the written word will be addressed in detail below, but it is important to note that he regarded the written word as dead. For Plato, the philosophical form of discourse had to embody "living words". That is, for Plato,

The abstract, verbal formula is not, and cannot be, philosophy of itself; only the "living word" in the soul, the principle actually expressed through the pattern of a man's life, constitutes philosophical knowledge.<sup>12</sup>

There was more than just an echo of the "winged word" of the oral mode of discourse (as discussed in Chapter 2) in Plato's conception of philosophy. Plato also drew heavily on his Pythagorean heritage. He adopted Pythagoras' characterisation of the philosopher as a lover of wisdom, and it was not enough simply to love wisdom. One had to apply that wisdom. Pythagoras was justly famous for his aphorisms and proverbial sayings.<sup>13</sup> Perhaps most importantly of all, Pythagoras had rejected the written word as an appropriate medium for recording his wisdom. As far as is known, Pythagoras never wrote anything;<sup>14</sup> his teachings were of an oral nature. Finally, Plato's indebtedness is shown by his incorporating and extending Pythagoras' doctrine of immortality (and transmigration) of the soul. This constituted a break with

11. *ibid.*, p. 7.

12. *ibid.*, p. 8.

13. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1962/67), p. 183.

14. *ibid.*, p. 155. This does not mean that members of his "school" may not have made use of the written word. Note also the centrality of secrecy with respect to Pythagorean doctrine.

the teachings of the historical Socrates (as portrayed in the Socratic dialogues) because Socrates remained ambivalent on such questions. He tended to treat the soul as a given rather than provide an analysis of it within his philosophical doctrines.<sup>15</sup> It was Plato who dealt with the specific issue of the soul and the implications it held for his (and to some extent Socrates') theory of knowledge.

Both Socrates and Plato were agreed, however, that right understanding of what constituted knowledge was a necessary prerequisite for right conduct. Both were in agreement that knowledge had to be separated from opinion so that only true knowledge should be the basis for human conduct. And both were of a similar view on the nature of the philosopher and philosophical discourse. Plato, however, was dissatisfied with Socrates' solutions because they were often ambiguous and had implications that could be seen as undermining the very quest for certainty. For Plato, the Socratic method needed to be reorganised with its weaknesses eliminated. The quest for an adequate theory of knowledge in which its object was defined and demonstrable led Plato to introduce a number of views absent from the Socratic outlook.

The theories of the immortality and transmigration of souls have already been mentioned. In addition, Plato introduced the theory of recollection (*anamnesis*), the theory of Forms, and his concept 'dialectic', innovations that were central to Plato's project. The two most important of these were the concept 'dialectic' and the theory of

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15. Socrates' treatment of the soul in the *Phaedo* might be seen as an exception to the above. However, this dialogue was written by Plato after his visit to Italy (where he presumably came into contact with the specifics of Pythagorean teachings) and the words he attributes to Socrates go beyond the sorts of views he attributes to Socrates in the early, Socratic dialogues. For a detailed discussion of Socrates' views on the soul (*psyche*) see W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 467-484. Guthrie points out the essential differences between Socrates' and Plato's respective views on the soul on pp. 483-484.



Forms.

The quest for certainty or truth, the object of knowledge, was intertwined with his theory of Forms. The theory itself can be seen to have been derived from two of Socrates' most basic assumptions. These were

(1) If two things are to be called by the same name *n* they must share a common form or essence which is within each one and gives it (or rather is) its character qua *n*; if any do not, the common name has been wrongly applied to them. (2) Justice, holiness and other virtues are objective realities. 16

Plato took over these assumptions from Socrates but he attempted to give them a more thorough grounding. In the early period, only the *Euthyphro*, the *Lysis*, the *Laches*, the *Charmides*, and the *Hippias Major* specifically allude to or mention the Forms. In those dialogues the notion of a Form remained consistent with the Socratic assumptions mentioned above. No attempt was made to elaborate or defend the notion of Forms in any systematic fashion.

In the middle period, however, Plato had begun to offer such such a defence. The *Phaedo* and the *Republic* both gave prominence to the exposition of the doctrine of Forms. The *Republic* was perhaps the work in which the doctrine received its most thorough review to that point, so much so that by Book Ten, the doctrine could then be taken for granted.

Then shall we start by following our usual procedure? You know that we always postulate in each case a single *form* for each set of particular things, to which we apply the same name.

However, the doctrine developed in the *Republic* remained close to its Socratic roots in so far as it remained a search for "a single, unique,

16. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 212.

17. *Republic* [596a]. (Translated by D. Lee, emphasis added.)

supreme Form typified by the Form of the Good".<sup>18</sup> As Cornford noted, the Socratic approach

contemplates a single Form (such as The Beautiful Itself) and the many individual things which partake of that Form. Only one Form is in view, and the definition is to be gained by a survey of individual instances.<sup>19</sup>

The direction or path to knowledge remained an upward one in the sense that the method proceeded from the basis of the many to the one.<sup>20</sup> The object of knowledge was arrived at by building up from a myriad of particular instances. True knowledge was associated with light, with Sun, with the Heavens whereas opinion, especially bad opinion, was associated with darkness. Hence to acquire or reach truth, one had to ascend, to journey upwards.<sup>21</sup>

Plato became aware of a number of problems with the doctrine of Forms as elaborated in the *Republic* and in his later period set about overcoming them.<sup>22</sup> Plato's emphasis changed in that he became concerned with analysing the relations between the Forms themselves as well as the relations between the Forms and their various particulars in the sensible world. In the later dialogues, especially the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*, and *Statesman*, Plato was concerned with elaborating the principles upon which the theory of Forms rested, and he progressively

18. J. Stannard, "Socratic Eros and Platonic Dialectic", *Phronesis*, Volume 4, No. 1, 1959. p. 130.

19. F. M. Cornford, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1935) p. 185. See also J. Stenzel, *Plato's Method of Dialectic*, trans. & ed. by D. J. Allan, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1940) pp. 44 ff.

20. F. M. Cornford, (1935), p. 185.

21. This is emphasised most explicitly in the *Phaedo*. The *Republic* extends the metaphor particularly in Books VI and VII and the latter part of Book X. The association of true knowledge and light had long been a feature of early Greek philosophy (cf. Xenophanes and Parmenides).

22. J. Stenzel, (1940), pp. 44-45.

unfolded it as an "interrelated system",<sup>23</sup> complete in itself. But the nature of knowledge revealed by the new doctrine of Forms also changed. The Forms, though remaining as ultimate existents in an ontological sense, changed from being definitions of essences in mutual isolation to definitions arrived at relationally.<sup>24</sup>

However, to say that the nature of knowledge changed is not to say that the object of knowledge changed. The object of knowledge remained the search for the correct definition (i.e. its *logos*) of the particular entity under investigation. It was the nature of the definitions used to arrive at the knowledge of the Being of an entity that changed with the new doctrine of Forms. Teske noted that it was "one of the basic assumptions of the early dialogues that knowledge supposes definitions".<sup>25</sup> This meant that, for Teske, as the nature of the definition changed so too would the nature of knowledge. Implicit in Teske's analysis was the view that this entailed a change in the object of knowledge. Yet, while Teske was correct in pointing to the relationship between knowledge and definition, and the way it changed with the development of a more sophisticated doctrine of Forms, the object of knowledge, Being, remained the prime objective for Plato. This is borne out by the comment made in the *Laws*, one of Plato's last dialogues, where the interrelated aspects of Being, definition, and word were stressed.<sup>26</sup> These three aspects formed a hierarchy with Being at the apex to emphasise its status as the proper object of knowledge. Being remained the object

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23. J. Waddington, "Introduction" to *Plato: Parmenides, Theaitetos, Sophist, Statesman*, (1961), p. xi.

24. Roland J. Teske, "Plato's Later Dialectic", *The Modern Schoolman*, Volume XXXVIII, November 1960-May 1961. p. 178.

25. *ibid.*, p. 180.

26. *Laws*, [895d].

of knowledge, but the nature of the means to signify or apprehend it, the definition, changed significantly.

Knowledge of the Being of an entity<sup>27</sup> was gained by ascertaining its Form through a process of discourse in which a definition was established. In his earlier dialogues Plato suggested that such knowledge could not be achieved through the use of reason alone but was the result of a combination of (divine) inspiration and reason.<sup>28</sup> This was particularly pronounced in two of his middle dialogues; the *Symposium* where the seeker of wisdom or truth (i.e. the philosopher) was driven by *eros*,<sup>29</sup> and the *Phaedrus* where it was argued that such a seeker, inspired by the "divine madness" of *eros*, attained the most accurate recollection of the Forms.<sup>30</sup> In these dialogues Plato was still reassessing his Socratic heritage in an attempt to give it a further grounding. In the later period, however, Plato appealed to reason alone as the only means to apprehend the Forms.

It is necessary, therefore, to train oneself both to give and to understand a rational account of everything; for these incorporeal realities which are the greatest and grandest can be clearly demonstrated by reason alone and in no other way.<sup>31</sup>

The training mentioned by Plato referred to the ability to give an adequate definition of the Form in question.

The problems in arriving at such definitions had been approached by Plato in the *Cratylus* and remained of central importance for dialogues of the later period, especially the *Parmenides*, *Theaetetus*, *Sophist*,

27. The assumption that Plato maintained consistently that non-material qualities were objective realities and hence could be regarded as 'entities' was cited on p. 8 *supra*. See also n. 31 *infra*.

28. R. E. Carter, "Plato and Inspiration", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 5, No. 2, 1967. p. 117.

29. *Symposium* [202e-203a].

30. *Phaedrus* [249c-250e, 258e, 265e-266d].

31. *Statesman* [285e-286a].

and *Statesman*. The problem centred on the fact that a definition involved the use of words. A definition, however, could not be a single word because it would then be a name, and as such might not correspond to what it was supposed to signify. Moreover, it was common practice to use the same word to name many particulars of the same Form<sup>32</sup> but this would be misleading as to the nature of the Form itself. Knowledge of a Form was not to be derived from its name.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the meanings of words changed over time.<sup>34</sup> To the extent that definitions depended on and were composed of words, definitions were also subject to change and hence were a matter of some arbitrariness.

The fact that some words and definitions were subject to change was not particularly disturbing for Plato. Such changes reflected the "living" nature of words, a situation more or less favourably accepted by Plato. (This point is central to understanding Plato's conception of philosophy.) What concerned Plato was the need to find a method to arrive at adequate definitions of the Forms. That is, he had to find a means that did not render the words used to articulate the Forms lifeless. Such a means or method was that of dialectic. It needs to be understood, however, that in describing dialectic as 'method' it is not implied that it constituted something separate from philosophy.

Plato did not separate dialectic from philosophy as we tend to separate, say, logic or methodology from metaphysics. Dialectic was not a propaedeutic to philosophy. It was not a tool that you might or might not choose to use in philosophizing. It was philosophy itself, the very search for essences, only considered in its methodical aspect. The method occurred only in the search, and the search only by means of the method.<sup>35</sup>

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32. Cf. the *Republic* [596a].

33. *Cratylus* [439a-440e].

34. *Cratylus* [411a ff., 431a ff.]; *Phaedrus* [274b ff.].

35. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 71.

For Plato, dialectic was philosophy and vice versa.

In Plato's reconceptualisation of the philosophical form of discourse the two were inextricably bound together. Although Plato refined the concept 'dialectic' after introducing it in his works, its presence and importance remained central for his articulation of an adequate theory of Forms. Implicit in this brief account is the view that the concept 'dialectic' was a Platonic invention. That claim will be dealt with subsequently. Before that can be done, however, it will be necessary to examine more carefully Plato's view of philosophy as a specific and unique form of discourse.

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It has already been noted that, for Plato, philosophy was a social activity.<sup>36</sup> That is, it involved individuals engaged in the search for adequate answers to the particular problems with which they were confronted in their actual life-situations. To some extent this was compatible with Protagoras' view of the search for knowledge.<sup>37</sup> But Plato's approach and conclusions were far different from those of Protagoras. As Robinson pointed out, for Plato, confronting one's actual life-situations entailed "the pursuit of moral excellence or the pursuit of intellectual excellence or both".<sup>38</sup> Moral and intellectual excellence were two sides of the same coin and both formed part of the proper domain of enquiry for the lover of wisdom.

Enquiry was an activity engaged in by individuals pursuing

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36. See pp. 273 n. 10 and 274 n. 11 *supra*.

37. It was compatible in the sense that Protagoras emphasised the need for thinkers to pay attention to the problems of their every-day situation as was expressed in Versenyi's phrase that Protagoras returned "man to himself" with the "man-measure principle" (L. Versenyi, 1963, p.13).

38. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 71.

their common goal of wisdom or truth. Such activity was dialogue, the conversations between like-minded individuals which enabled them to arrive at some understanding of what constituted knowledge. As Plato has Socrates affirm,

I am a lover of knowledge, and the men  
who dwell in the city are my teachers,  
and not the trees or the country.<sup>39</sup>

This learning arose only from the dialogic relationship of conversation of questioning and cross-questioning between individuals.<sup>40</sup> One had to converse (*dialegesthai*) in order to arrive at mutual understanding. In such situations, words (or strings of words) conveying ideas were articulated and challenged, defended and changed, as they moved from one speaker to the other travelling from mouth to ear.

It was in this sense that words were alive for Plato. The spoken word of dialogue between individuals rather than the written words of a text constituted for Plato the philosophical form of discourse. The written word was at best an imitation of what was spoken. In the following lengthy citation from the *Phaedrus* the primacy of the spoken word is made very explicit.

Soc. I cannot help feeling, Phaedrus, that writing is unfortunately like painting; for the creations of the painter have the attitude of life, and yet if you ask them a question they preserve a solemn silence. And the same may be said of speeches. ... And when ... [words] ... have been once written down they are tumbled about anywhere among those who may or may not understand them, and know not to whom they should reply, to whom not: and if they are maltreated or abused, they have no parents to protect them; and they cannot protect or defend themselves.

*Phaedr.* That again is most true.

Soc. Is there not another kind of word or

39. *Phaedrus* [220e].

40. John Fisher, "Plato on Writing and Doing Philosophy", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, Volume 27, No. 2, April-June 1966. p. 164.

speech far better than this, and having far greater power — a son of the same family, but lawfully begotten?

*Phaedr.* Whom do you mean, and what is his origin?

*Soc.* I mean an intelligent word graven in the soul of the learner, which can defend itself, and knows when to speak and when to be silent.

*Phaedr.* You mean the living word of knowledge which has a soul, and of which the written word is properly no more than an image?

*Soc.* Yes, of course that is what I mean. And now may I be allowed to ask you a question: Would a husbandman, who is a man of sense, take the seeds, which he values and which he values and which he wishes to bear fruit, and in sober seriousness plant them during the heat of summer, in some garden of Adonis, that he may rejoice when he sees them in eight days appearing in beauty? at least he would do so, if at all, only for the sake of amusement and pastime. But when he is earnest, he sows in fitting soil, and practises husbandry, and is satisfied if in eight months the seeds which he has sown arrive at perfection?

*Phaedr.* Yes, Socrates, that will be his way when he is in earnest: he will do the other, as you say, only in play.

*Soc.* And can we suppose that he who knows the just and good and honourable has less understanding, than the husbandman, about his own seeds?

*Phaedr.* Certainly not.

*Soc.* Then he will not seriously incline to 'write' his thoughts 'in water' with pen and ink, sowing words which can neither speak for themselves nor teach the truth adequately to others?

*Phaedr.* No, that is not likely.

*Soc.* No, that is not likely — in the garden of letters he will sow and plant, but only for the sake of recreation and amusement: he will write them down as memorials to be treasured against the forgetfulness of old age, or by any other old man who is treading the same path. He will rejoice in beholding their tender growth; and while others are refreshing their souls with banqueting and the like, this will be the pastime in which his days are spent.

*Phaedr.* A pastime, Socrates, as noble as the other is ignoble, the pastime of a man who can be amused by serious talk, and can discourse merrily about justice and the like.

*Soc.* True, Phaedrus. But nobler far is the serious pursuit of the dialectician, who finding a congenial soul, by the help of science sows and plants therein words which are able to help themselves and him who planted them, and are not unfruitful, but have in



them a seed which others brought up in different soils render immortal, making the possessors of it happy to the utmost extent of human happiness. ... he who thinks that in the written word there is necessarily much which is not serious, and that neither poetry nor prose, spoken or written, is of any great value, if like the compositions of the rhapsodes, they are only recited in order to be believed, and not with any view to criticism or instruction; and who thinks that even the best of writings are but a reminiscence of what we know, and that only in principles of justice and goodness and nobility taught and communicated orally for the sake of instruction and graven in the soul, which is the way of true writing, is there clearness and perfection and seriousness, and that such principles are a man's own and his legitimate offspring; — being, in the first place, the word which he finds his own bosom; secondly, the brethren and descendants and relations of his others; — and who cares for them and no others — this is the right sort of man; and you and I, Phaedrus, would pray that we may become like him.<sup>41</sup>

Such a man would be a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, a practitioner of the philosophical form of discourse, who concentrated on living words rather than their dormant imitations.

The views presented in the *Phaedrus* about writing remained more or less unchanged for the rest of Plato's life. This is borne out by the fact that he expressed substantially the same sentiments late in his life in the *Seventh Letter*. There too the living word is accepted as embodied in the actual situation of individuals engaged in questioning and cross-questioning where it remains a spark to be kindled into that which "shines forth understanding about every problem" and produces an "intelligence whose efforts reach the furthest limits of human powers".<sup>42</sup> Again, such knowledge will not be exposed to abuse and misunderstandings by being written but will remain inscribed on the soul of their perpetrators to emerge only through the act of con-

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41. *Phaedrus* [275a-278b].

42. *Seventh Letter* [344b].

versing. Truth, the knowledge sought by the philosopher, once it has been "laid hold" of by the soul will not be forgotten.<sup>43</sup> Such knowledge is recalled and made public only through discussion between likeminded individuals.

Of key importance to both the above accounts of the merits of the spoken word is Plato's view of the soul and his theory of recollection (*anamnesis*). Plato's theory of the soul was quite complex and all of its ramifications cannot be addressed here. Some key points, however, may nevertheless be noted. Plato began with the Socratic view of the soul (*psyche*) in which the soul was regarded as the controller of the body. For Socrates, the soul was "purely and simply the intelligence, which in a properly ordered life is in complete control of the senses and emotions".<sup>44</sup> As Guthrie pointed out, this constituted one of Socrates' distinctive contributions in that it was Socrates who drew most forcefully the analogy between the relationship of the soul to the body with the artisan to his or her tools of trade.<sup>45</sup> In a very real sense the body was seen as the vehicle for the soul.<sup>46</sup> The soul was in touch with the divine in that it was the repository of wisdom (*sophia*), and the task confronting all humans was to take care of one's soul.<sup>47</sup> This meant that one had to know one's soul because such knowledge was *arete* and thus would enable a person to lead a good life.

43. *Seventh Letter* [344d-344e].

44. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 469-470. (Cf. the earlier Greek conceptions of the soul (as found in Homer's works for example) as outlined in Chapter 2 above,)

45. *ibid.*, p. 469. See also the *Laches* [185b-185e].

46. This enabled Plato to develop his view that the body was therefore temporary whereas the soul was not. This point is addressed pp. 285 ff. *infra*.

47. The care of one's soul was a constant theme for both Socrates and Plato. See the *Apology* [29e]; *Crito* [47e-48a]; *Phaedo* [107c]; *Laches* [185e]; and *Symposium* where its expression though implicit is pervasive.

Failure to care for one's soul would leave a person incomplete because for both Socrates and Plato,

the virtue of a complete man both as an individual and as a social being is knowledge of the moral and statesmanlike virtues — justice, courage and the rest<sup>48</sup>

Nurturing one's soul and seeking wisdom were thus identical activities.

In keeping with his view that the soul was divinely inspired and that it was superior to the body (since it was its controller), Socrates also held that the soul was immortal. Socrates' views on this issue remain somewhat uncertain as to detail but it can be reliably accepted that he at least held a belief in immortality as it pertained to the soul; a belief which was mainly religious in origin because of his acceptance of the prior conviction that the soul was divinely inspired.<sup>49</sup> The soul did not perish with the body at death but changed its abode in some way.<sup>50</sup> But for Socrates, this was not a certainty because he made it plain (or rather Plato as author did) that such a view was based on what "men say" and "if what is said is true".<sup>51</sup>

While the view attributed to Socrates in the *Apology* seems consistent with what is generally known about him, the discussion in the *Phaedo* posits a couple of innovations which belong more to Plato than Socrates. First, Plato offers several arguments to prove that the soul was immortal and indestructible.<sup>52</sup> This thereby transformed the Socratic view from belief to demonstrable knowledge. And as Guthrie

48. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 473.

49. *ibid.*, pp. 473-484 for a full discussion. See also his (1975) pp. 340-341.

50. *Apology* [40d].

51. *Apology* [40d, 41c-41d].

52. *Phaedo* [70c-107a].

noted, such a transformation, given the setting of the *Phaedo*, would have been unthinkable for Plato if Socrates himself had not also held the belief in the first place.<sup>53</sup> Second, Plato extended Socrates' distinction between the soul and the body by portraying the body as a prison for the soul which, if not checked, could poison or corrupt the soul.<sup>54</sup> While this is in keeping with the Socratic view it differed very significantly in its implications for Plato's conception of the philosopher's life.

The philosopher's life was one of "training for death" in the sense that in seeking to care for one's soul one was attempting to keep it pure so that it would not be burdened at death by the corruptions endured or embraced by the body.

the soul which is pure at departing and draws after her no bodily taint, having never voluntarily during life had connection with the body, which she is ever avoiding, herself gathered into herself; — and making such abstraction her perpetual study — which means that she has been a true disciple of philosophy; and therefore has in fact been always engaged in the practice of dying? For is not philosophy the study of death? ... That soul, I say, herself invisible, departs to the invisible world, — to the divine and immortal and rational; thither arriving, she is secure of bliss and released from the error and folly of men, their fears and wild passions and all other human ills, and forever dwells, as they say<sup>55</sup> of the initiated, in company with the gods.

A tainted soul, one that was subordinated to the vicissitudes of the body, would find it difficult to shed the encumbrances of the body at death. Because it had been poorly attended during the life of its body

53. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), pp. 353-354; p. 481.

54. *Phaedo* [81a]. The very terminology that Plato uses such as "release from" (cf. [84a]) reinforces the prison imagery at [81e].

55. *Phaedo* [80e-81a]. (Translation by Jowett.).

it could not return to the divine but returned to another corporeal body, perhaps those of "asses and animals of that sort".<sup>56</sup> The treatment that a soul received would determine its fate after its vehicle perished. A philosopher, one who assiduously tended his or her soul, was the only type of person whose soul would be capable of reaching the "invisible world" to dwell "in company with the gods".

While the sharp distinction between soul and body was distinctly Socratic, Plato had changed the emphasis considerably. For Socrates, the pursuit of knowledge was rooted in the everyday world of human beings so that knowledge could be made use of in resolving the moral and ethical dilemmas confronting them. The love of wisdom was intimately concerned with the realisation of the good life in a practical sense. Although Plato also shared that conviction, in the *Phaedo* he shifted the emphasis in such a way as to undermine that conviction in favour of tending the soul for its own sake. The separation of soul and body began, for Plato, to take on a view of philosophy as an end in itself separated from the pressing concerns that had inclined him towards philosophy in the first place. Once he had begun to characterise the philosopher's life as a preparation for death with the concomitant disdain for actual life, Plato signalled his divergence from his mentor's teachings.<sup>57</sup>

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56. *Phaedo* [81e].

57. This does not mean that Plato had abandoned completely the prevalent view that knowledge and values were intimately related to one's actions in the world. Rather it signalled his uneasiness with its accepted status as an isomorphic relationship. In addition, the above does not intend to imply that the above divergence should be understood as signalling a Socrates the humanist and Plato the metaphysicist as argued by K. Popper, (1962), Vol. I. Plato remained very much concerned with humanist issues as is suggested by R. C. Cross & A. D. Woozley, *Plato's Republic*, (MacMillan & Co., London, 1964); R. B. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1953). Plato was concerned with overcoming the difficulties inherent in the Socratic position. His solutions differed from Socrates' but it nevertheless remained true that he was pursuing the same basic aims. Whether these were humanist aims is a moot point but Popper's separation of Plato and Socrates in terms of humanist values serves to obscure rather than highlight their more important differences.

In the *Phaedo*, Plato nevertheless retained Socrates' view of the soul as a unitary and undivided entity. This was partly necessary because he used such a formulation as part of the proof that the soul would not scatter after the death of the body. An homogeneous soul was also necessary because Plato was still pursuing his enquiries in terms of "what-is" questions to the exclusion of more complex considerations. These began to be developed and pursued in subsequent dialogues, particularly in the *Republic* and the later dialogues. In addition, in the *Phaedo* and preceding dialogues, Plato was still pursuing the Socratic thesis that knowledge and *arete* were, for all practical considerations, identical. Since the soul was the repository of knowledge, it could not be divided against itself because then knowledge too would be divided against itself.

By the time of the *Republic* Plato's theory of the soul had undergone a significant change. The soul considered as an entity in itself remained on a par with the divine, but it became, in the *Republic*, subject to a three-way division when considered in relation to the body (i.e. as an embodied soul). Within the embodied soul there existed three elements or parts;<sup>58</sup> reason or intellect, appetite (i.e. desires associated with bodily needs), and spirit (i.e. emotions like ambition, shame, fear, pride etc.).<sup>59</sup> When these three elements were in harmony, with reason firmly in control, a person was capable of achieving *arete* and hence of becoming just and leading a good and virtuous life.

The reason for this change centred on the view that was

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58. Just how literal Plato was in describing this division in terms of 'parts' or 'elements' is a matter of dispute. R. C. Cross & A. D. Woozley, (1964), pp. 127-128 regard Plato's terminology as metaphoric in nature. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), pp. 477-478 suggested that Plato should be taken more literally given his concern for the relationship between a person and its society.

59. *Republic* [434e-441b].

axiomatic for all Greeks, including Socrates and Plato, that the soul was the ultimate source "of all life and motion"; a body without a soul was without life.<sup>60</sup> To treat the soul only as reason, as Plato did in the *Phaedo*, was to leave its other "elements" to the domain of the body and allows the conclusion that the body could move itself (i.e. have life) without the presence of a soul. Hence it was necessary for Plato to be able to account for appetite and spirit in terms of the soul rather than the body. Plato did this in the *Republic* most explicitly, though some hints were given in earlier dialogues,<sup>61</sup> to ensure that the soul remained the focus for a theory of knowledge. Plato's theory of the soul as presented in the *Republic* enabled him to present an explanation for the different behaviours of individuals.<sup>62</sup>

More importantly, Plato accepted that an individual may know that an act was wrong in itself yet still persist in perpetrating it, a view that Socrates rejected.<sup>63</sup> Such incontinence<sup>64</sup> was explained by Plato by reasoning that the faculty of reason was insufficiently developed (and hence not strong enough) to control the other faculties of appetite or spirit or both hence the latter two produced or caused behaviour that the individual *knew* was wrong but which he or she was powerless to overcome. This was the significance of the allegory of the charioteer and the two steeds in the *Phaedrus*.<sup>65</sup> There, Plato was concerned to de-

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60. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 421. Cf. The remarks made in Chapter 4 about Thales and *psyche* and the lodestone.

61. *Gorgias* [504 ff.]; *Phaedrus* [253d-254e]. However, the discussion given by W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975) pp. 421-425 and pp. 473-478 is decisive in attributing the tri-partite soul to the *Republic*.

62. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 478.

63. T. Irwin, *Plato's Moral Theory*, (Oxford University Press, London, 1977) p. 190.

64. The term 'incontinence' is discussed extensively in T. Irwin, (1977).

65. *Phaedrus* [249c-249d].

defend the identification of the soul with reason rather than give an account of the divided soul because his central concern in that dialogue was with power of *eros*.

The lover of wisdom, the philosopher, was driven by *eros* to that level of madness or possession which alone made true knowledge possible.<sup>66</sup> This view was reinforced further in the *Symposium* where *eros* was described as the power that enabled a person to pursue knowledge in its purest form and drove that person towards that goal to the exclusion of all else.<sup>67</sup> In discussing the soul's immortality late in the *Republic*, Plato made the point that the earlier discussion of the soul at [434e ff.] focussed on one which had been "deformed by association with the body and other evils".<sup>68</sup> But to see the soul as it really was, in its "pure state", one must "look elsewhere ... to the soul's love of wisdom".<sup>69</sup> Again, Plato made the point that *eros* was of central concern for the soul because that was what enabled its divine nature to be revealed. Only someone driven by *eros* could attain the knowledge of the true soul and hence aspire to wisdom and knowledge of the Forms.

Of some significance in this respect was Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis*, first introduced in the *Meno*.<sup>70</sup> In essence, this doctrine held that learning, what is ordinarily understood as acquiring knowledge, was in fact the recollection of what the soul already knew. Such know-

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66. *Phaedrus* [249c-249d]. Note that the sense of Plato's discussion here makes it clear that he had in mind a unitary rather than divided soul.

67. *Symposium* [202e-203a, 203e ff.].

68. *Republic* [611c].

69. *Republic* [611d-611e].

70. *Meno* [81a ff.]. Note that N. Gulley, *Plato's Theory of Knowledge*, (Methuen & Co., London, 1962) p. 5 disagreed and suggested that such a theory was only rudimentary in the *Meno*. But it is clear that Plato is introducing the theory quite explicitly despite Gulley's claim that it was primarily religious in nature (p. 10).



ledge was gained in previous incarnations of the soul. Plato was thus postulating that true knowledge was *a priori* and arose from sources independent of the particular sources of the soul's present incarnation.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, once something has been recollected by the soul, then the soul may go on to "discover" other things since for Plato all ideas were connected in some way.<sup>72</sup> Success depended upon the degree of perseverance and dedication of the person concerned. The soul gains knowledge of the true before becoming attached to any particular body<sup>73</sup> because the soul is immortal. Having been "born" many times it has therefore "seen all things both here and in the other world, has learned everything there is".<sup>74</sup> For Plato, all humans have the possibility of such knowledge<sup>75</sup> but the fact that the soul must be attached to a body means that it becomes forgetful, or at least clouded, as a result of that association.<sup>76</sup>

The two central questions in the *Meno* concerned whether virtue could be taught and, since at this stage Plato still accepted that virtue was knowledge,<sup>77</sup> whether knowledge was possible. To both of these questions Plato was convinced that the answer, in keeping with his Socratic

71. N. Gulley, (1962), p. 5.

72. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 249.

73. Cf. the *Meno* [86a] where Plato used the example of the slave to demonstrate that the slave's "knowledge" was acquired when the slave "was not a man".

74. *Meno* [81c].

75. Although Plato does not bring this point out in the *Meno*, it is a necessary assumption underlying the dialogue. Without it, the example of the slave would lose much of its impact. That knowledge is possible for human beings is brought out explicitly by Plato in the *Phaedrus* [249b].

76. *Republic* [611c].

77. Although Plato never abandoned his view that knowledge was necessary for virtue it is nevertheless possible that he began to question the complete identification of the virtue with knowledge in the course of developing his later theories as is suggested by T. Irwin, (1977).

heritage, was yes. Plato never doubted the following tenets;

first, that a good life demanded adherence to permanent standards, independent of temporary expediency, and secondly that certain knowledge was attainable.<sup>78</sup>

The problem for Plato, however, was to prove such a view without falling victim to the sorts of problems that he felt rendered Socrates' solutions inadequate. This problem remained of central concern in all his dialogues subsequent to and including the *Meno*.

Plato's solution to this was the theory of Forms. This theory was touched upon in some of his early dialogues, but ~~there it was~~ essentially Socratic and lacked an adequate foundation. The *Meno* marked the turning point for Plato's search for such a foundation. A significant feature of the *Meno* was Plato's introduction of examples drawn from mathematics to illustrate his views. This reflected the Pythagorean influence on his thinking after his visit to Italy.<sup>79</sup> The mathematicians had produced some notable achievements. What especially impressed Plato was the fact that the truths of mathematics (at least as they had developed in his day) were timeless and a-temporal, unaffected by the vicissitudes of the sensible world. Moreover, mathematical or geometrical shapes like triangles, squares, circles and the like could never be realised perfectly in the sensible world. All attempts by mathematicians and geometers were necessarily only imperfect copies of ideal forms because

78. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 251.

79. *ibid.*, pp. 250-252; N. Gulley, (1962), pp. 12-13. Note, however, that Guthrie and Gulley diverge on their interpretation of some of the key points about the *Meno*. In particular, the doctrine of *anamnesis* is regarded by Gulley as only rudimentary and did not become explicit for Plato until the *Phaedo* because the Platonic theory of Forms is not articulated until the latter dialogue. Guthrie's analysis, however, is preferable because, although much work remained to be done on both doctrines, it is clear from the *Meno* that Plato had definitely linked *anamnesis* with the Forms and was working towards a more adequate viewpoint. Moreover, Gulley appears to admit as much on p. 13.

of the physical limitations involved in producing them. Such attempts were approximations of the truths they expressed and hence could not be taken for the real thing.

Of particular significance for Plato was the fact that the Pythagoreans had invoked their mathematical findings to demonstrate the order they felt underlay the seeming chaotic appearances of the phenomenal world. Mathematical entities were not sensible objects but products of the mind. They were non-empirical with a reality peculiar to themselves. A similar situation seemed to Plato to obtain for such things like justice, piety; in short, the moral virtues. No Greek doubted that these virtues existed and therefore had a reality of their own. Mathematics as developed by the Pythagoreans gave Plato the spark he needed. If physical attempts at realising mathematical entities were only approximations of the truths they expressed then why not the same for the virtues? By co-opting the Pythagorean developments in mathematics and coupling them with the Pythagorean view of the soul's immortality and reincarnation, Plato was able to begin to unfold his doctrine of *anamnesis*.<sup>80</sup>

This doctrine had three distinct stages to enable the seeker of knowledge to attain his or her goal.<sup>81</sup> The first was the realisation that what had initially been assumed to be true was in fact false. Gulley described this as the "process of disillusionment".<sup>82</sup> The next

80. It needs to be understood that Plato, in the *Meno*, was not claiming the doctrine as distinctively his own. Only later, in the *Phaedo*, could such a claim be made. This is perhaps why Gulley preferred to treat the doctrine in the *Meno* as only rudimentary.

81. Note that N. Gulley, (1962), pp. 13-14 described these stages as (1) disillusionment, (2) true belief without proof, and (3) knowledge; whereas W. K. C. Guthrie, *Plato: Protagoras and Meno*, (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, (1977) pp. 112 ff describe the respective stages as (1) unconscious knowledge, (2) opinion or belief, and (3) conversion of opinion into knowledge.

82. N. Gulley, (1962), p. 13.

stage involved recognising that something was true but the reason for believing it to be true remained unknown or hidden. Such knowledge constituted opinion or belief and although it could be true it did not constitute knowledge in Plato's sense.<sup>83</sup> To achieve that one had to prove or demonstrate the truth of what was believed to be the case. This was the third stage. Here the influence of mathematical reasoning was most pronounced because Plato argued that recollecting knowledge was effected by the use of the "working out of reason" in which the logical relations between successive premises are shown to be a matter of necessity independent of the exigencies of the temporal world. With the doctrine of recollection, Plato was in a position to explore further the range of solutions to the questions pursued by Socrates but which Socrates had been unable to solve with any certainty or decisiveness.

This is perhaps the appropriate time to note an apparent degree of correspondence between Plato's theory of recollection and the theory of re-remembering as outlined earlier in the discussion of the *oidoi* and their articulation of Greek knowledge and values in the oral period.<sup>84</sup> While the two appear to be similar they are in fact quite different. For Plato, knowledge was *a priori*. But more than that, it was eternal, timeless, and unchanging. It was always there to be apprehended or "discovered". Knowledge, that is, the Forms, were the originals of which human versions remained at best good imitations.

The *oidoi*, however, were not producing copies or approximations. Each performance was an original in its own right because

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83. For further discussion of Plato's distinction between knowledge, true or correct opinion, and false opinion see W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), pp. 256-265; N. Gulley, (1962), pp. 16-21.

84. See Chapter 2, pp. 93-94, *supra*.

the knowledge so presented had to be created at the moment of performance. There is a very limited sense in which it could be understood as *a priori* in that both the performer and the audience had prior expectations of the general nature of the content of the performance. But it was not *a priori* in the Platonic sense. The knowledge and values produced by the *oidoi* were temporally conditioned, changing and adapting with the historical conditions in which both the audience and performers found themselves. Nor was the knowledge and values pre-natal in the sense that it belonged to immortal souls that possessed successive bodies as in Plato's doctrine. Although the *oidoi* unfolded the winged words of truth by making visible that which was hidden within the memories of the members of the audiences, such memories were created after birth in historically specific social situations. The knowledge and values were kept "alive" from generation to generation by actual performances for as long as the social situation demanded it. As situations changed, particular ideas and values that were no longer appropriate simply ceased to exist because they were no longer performed. Re-membering by the *oidoi* was not Platonic recollection. Indeed, the substance of orally produced and sustained knowledge was of a different order to that with which Plato was familiar.

It is, however, interesting to note that both Platonic recollection and *oidic* re-membering deal with basically oral situations, though each presupposed different historical and material conditions. The significance of this correspondence is that Plato was attempting to recreate the domain of winged words within a specifically philosophical form of discourse. The preoccupation with winged words in Plato's dialogues was not simply literary as Fisher has pointed out.<sup>85</sup> Oral

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85. John Fisher, (1966), pp. 166-168. This point is taken up in a bit more detail in the next chapter.

discourse was in the very nature of philosophy as Plato envisaged it. Those engaged in the philosophical form of discourse did so in face to face encounters, interrogating each others souls to liberate the winged words of Platonic truth (i.e. knowledge). Whereas the *aoidoi* did not have to explain how knowledge arose, Plato did, because there was no longer any social consensus about what constituted such knowledge. Hence Plato had to postulate that knowledge was "engraved on the soul" and existed *a priori* of its human embodiment. Only through dialogue, orally conducted, could such knowledge be apprehended. And hence Plato's deprecation of the written word as a pale imitation of oral discourse because the former could not respond. It remained as it was produced, inert and without wings. The face to face dialogue between seekers of wisdom was basic to Plato's conception of philosophy. This was why he never abandoned the Socratic method of question and answer (*elenchus*) in presenting his views.<sup>86</sup>

While the Socratic *elenchus* remained important for Plato's expositions, it did not constitute dialectic. Some have argued for a Socratic dialectic,<sup>87</sup> or at least presumed that the Socratic *elenchus* constituted dialectic,<sup>88</sup> but it will be argued below that such a view

86. Indeed, this is the prime reason that Plato chose the dialogue format for his written works. It was the nearest he could get to oral dialogue, to capturing the spirit of the winged words, within a written format in a society that was by Plato's time taking the written word for granted as the arena for discourse on knowledge and values. See Drew Hyland, "Why Plato Wrote Dialogues", *Philosophy and Rhetoric*, Volume 1, No. 1, 1968; John Fisher, (1966).

87. J. Burnet, *Greek Philosophy: Thales to Plato*, (MacMillan & Co., London, 1943); Julius A. Elias, "'Socratic' vs. 'Platonic' Dialectic", *Journal of the History of Philosophy*, Volume 6, No. 3, July 1968; J. Stannard, (1959); W. K. C. Guthrie, (1975), p. 510.

88. H. Alderman, "Dialectic as Philosophical Care", *Man and World*, Volume VI, 1973; Robert E. Cushman, *Therapeia: Plato's Conception of Philosophy*, (University of North Carolina Press, Chapel Hill, 1958); R. B. Levinson, (1953); R. Robinson, (1953); Julius Stenzel, (1940).

is mistaken. Rather it will be argued that it was Plato who developed the concept 'dialectic' and made it central to his philosophical project. However, before any such arguments can be mounted, the nature of the Socratic *elenchus* needs to be discussed in detail to provide a more adequate basis for these claims.

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The Socratic *elenchus* was, quite literally, a dialogue between individual people concerned with arriving at an agreed understanding of a particular issue. Such issues included justice, goodness, piety, virtue, honesty, courage; in short the moral virtues necessary for good citizenship in the Greek world. Once a particular topic had been singled out for analysis, the procedure was to arrive at a definition of it. This was in keeping with the general assumption of the Greeks that knowledge and values were what guided human action and conduct. But more importantly, it was in keeping with Socrates' (and Plato's) aim of rehabilitating Greek intellectual and social thought generally so that rights and wrongs of human conduct could be more clearly delineated. It was thus necessary to define what constituted the various virtues.<sup>89</sup> Only then could such knowledge be applied to the domain of human conduct.

The way in which a particular topic was singled out for discussion was usually a matter of Socrates posing the question of "what is X?" where 'X' denoted a particular value such as justice or piety or goodness etc..<sup>90</sup> This was described by Robinson as the positing of the primary question.<sup>91</sup> Socrates would then elicit answers from his

89. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 432.

90. That is, the way in which a particular topic was singled out as depicted in Plato's dialogues.

91. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 8.

interlocutors, on the basis of the initial or primary answer, by asking them a host of subsidiary questions. These "secondary questions" were designed to bring forth answers in which all instances of what was thought to constitute 'X' were advanced. They were so phrased to elicit affirmative answers so that at each step along the way the respondent remained in general agreement with Socrates' development of the discussion.<sup>92</sup> This was the hidden trap of his approach. Having gained assent to each individual secondary question, Socrates would then bring them together with the result that he was usually able to show that they amounted to a contradiction (and hence refutation) of the answer to the primary question.

Propositions to which the answerer feels he must agree have entailed the falsehood of his original assertion.<sup>93</sup>

The way was then clear for the question to be re-opened. The Socratic *elenchus* involved a combination of induction and deduction, the former to establish the various premises of the argument and the latter to provide a refutation of the answer (or answers) posited by his interlocutors to the primary question.

However, Socrates' method hinged not on whether an answer was logically admissible but on whether his interlocutors admitted to its inclusion. Once their assent was gained, Socrates could then proceed to show them the error in their views as to what constituted an answer to the primary question. Socrates' approach was thus to refute his opponents by drawing out the contradictions inherent in their views.<sup>94</sup>

92. *ibid.*, pp. 7-8.

93. *ibid.*, p. 7.

94. For a far more detailed account of the various techniques of logic used by Socrates (and Plato) see *ibid.* Chs. II-V. The above sketch of the Socratic *elenchus* is, however, sufficient to convey its basic attributes.



This was the negative aspect of the *elenchus*.

The essence of the Socratic method, the *elenchus*, is to convince the interlocutor that, whereas he thought he knew something, in fact he does not.

Although this aspect was supposedly cathartic in that the aim was to make his companions conscious of the extent of their own ignorance on such questions,<sup>96</sup> the effect often left them with feelings of hostility towards Socrates. Indeed, this may have been a significant factor in Socrates' own demise in 399 B.C..<sup>97</sup> Nevertheless, for Socrates, such a critical approach was necessary if one was to aspire to knowledge. Only after the humbug and cant of ill-conceived opinions had been exposed could the pursuit of knowledge be undertaken in earnest.

Such a pursuit was the positive aspect of *elenchus*. Using the same basic approach of question and answer, suggestions and ideas could be put forth, criticised and amended so that the true Form of the entity under consideration could be revealed.<sup>98</sup> This was Socrates' central aim in employing the *elenchus*. The pursuit of knowledge was supposed to be a cooperative venture in which questioner and answerer were mutually engaged. This was well summed up by Guthrie.

Neither knew the truth yet, but if only the other could be persuaded of this, they might set out together with some hope of finding it, or at least approaching it more closely, for

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95. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 447.

96. F. M. Cornford, (1935), p. 184.

97. A case in point might be that of Anytus, Socrates' accuser at his trial, who in the *Meno*, was enraged at Socrates' demolition of the conventional wisdom that great men (e.g. Athenian statesmen) could teach virtue simply by their example. Plato's use of the person of Anytus here was both dramatic and pertinent and should not be undervalued. Cf. the *Apology* which R. Robinson, (1953), p. 18 noted implied that most of those whom Socrates revealed as "ignorant" remained angry and unconvinced of Socrates' good intentions, nor were they convinced that they had benefited from being publicly "chastened" by Socrates.

98. F. M. Cornford, (1935), p. 184.

the man who has rid his mind of a false  
conception is already nearer to the truth.<sup>99</sup>

Hence the negative aspect was a necessary first step to be followed by the joining of forces in the common pursuit of truth. Yet Socrates never really presented a positive view of knowledge but rather only pointed to the direction in which he thought it might lie. At best, Socrates only presented glimpses of what true knowledge might be.

This meant that the Socratic dialogues often ended somewhat inconclusively, with the positive aspect of the *elenchus* never being developed in any systematic way. In this respect, Socrates only increased the degree of *aporia* (perplexity) which he instilled in his interlocutors, which was further compounded by Socrates' profession that he knew nothing save the extent of his own ignorance. Armed only with that opinion of himself and the method of *elenchus*, Socrates proceeded to demonstrate that the same held true of those who claimed to know much. The emphasis was thus not on the positive doctrines in the Socratic dialogues but on the demonstration that what passed for knowledge was mistaken. In that sense the Socratic dialogues were a success.

Some have disputed the degree to which the Socratic dialogues end inconclusively with respect to a positive view of knowledge.<sup>100</sup>

Yet the fact remains that Plato authored these dialogues. As Gulley has pointed out, Plato was not just concerned with a "realistic portrait" of his mentor, but also with highlighting what seemed to him to be the limitations of the Socratic method.<sup>101</sup> In this view, Plato was pointing to

the need ... [for] ... a constructive theory  
of knowledge which will provide a more adequate

99. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 449.

100. *ibid.*, pp. 447-449 for a discussion of those views that suggest that the degree of inconclusiveness in the Socratic dialogues has been overstated, or at least over-emphasised.

101. N. Gulley, (1962), p. 4.

critterion of truth than that upon<sup>102</sup>  
which the Socratic method relies.

Hence the inconclusiveness of the Socratic dialogues was a necessary prelude for Plato's own theories.

However, the inconclusiveness of the Socratic *elenchus* was not the only reason that Plato felt dissatisfied with it as a method essential to philosophical discourse. Its inherent and often devastating negative critique was especially important with respect to the use of contradictions, or at least the eliciting of them, as a means to refute an interlocutor's views. Such a procedure could easily be confused with *antilogos*, the sophistic mainstay of rhetorical argument. As such, the method would have as its aim *eristic* (i.e. merely the winning of an argument) rather than truth. Truth could become a casualty of the *elenchus*.<sup>103</sup>

Although Socrates may be properly regarded as having played a part in the sophistic movement in Athens, for Plato Socrates was definitely not a sophist. As far as Plato was concerned the respective aims of the sophists and Socrates were clearly different. The sophists were less concerned with truth (as a constant value) than with making the weaker *logos* stronger and vice versa, whereas Socrates was concerned with arriving at the true *logos* of knowledge and values.<sup>104</sup> Yet as Irwin has argued, a distinctively sophistic work also made the same basic claim.

The 'Double Arguments' (*Dissoi Logoi*) claim to offer equally cogent arguments for and

102. *ibid.*, p. 4.

103. R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 84-88.

104. W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 436 and especially p. 449 where the Socratic aim is contrasted with that of the sophists. It needs to be remembered, however, that not all sophists can be assumed as having no regard for the truth even if they maintained that it was a matter of relative rather than certain values.

against disputed moral principles; Socrates' method, applied to any account of the virtues, seems to be equally capable of refuting all candidates, and leaving no acceptable answer.<sup>105</sup>

Socrates' (and Plato's) fundamental assumption that the virtues were objective realities, each exhibiting a single, definable Form, was the basis for the Socratic theory of knowledge. Yet Socrates presented his theory in a rather indirect fashion. He showed that the basis of knowledge invoked by his opponents was fundamentally flawed, and in so doing enabled his own theory to emerge by default. In effect, Socrates was demonstrating to his companions the weaknesses implicit in their own *logoi*. In contrast, therefore, the Socratic *logos* was revealed as the stronger despite his own claim of possessing no knowledge. For Plato, this left the Socratic method of *elenchus* open to the very charges he had advanced against the sophists' method of argument. Even though Plato never doubted Socrates' conviction of searching for the truth, he was concerned that the dividing line between the Socratic *elenchus* and the sophistic method of *antilogos*, with its alleged aim of *eristic*, was for all practical philosophical purposes too easily overlooked.<sup>106</sup>

What was needed was a method that would incorporate the best features of *elenchus* yet at the same time go beyond it so that it could not be mistaken for *antilogos*. Such a method was dialectic. This was "the coping-stone of the sciences",<sup>107</sup> the truest of all manner of knowledge,<sup>108</sup> as Plato would describe it in later the post-Socratic dialogues. Plato never regarded the Socratic *elenchus* on its own as dialectic.

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105. T. Irwin, (1977), p. 35.

106. R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 86-87.

107. *Republic* [534e].

108. *Philebus* [58a].

Dialectic, then, was an improved intellectual method which retained the face to face dialogue between real individuals. Philosophical discourse could proceed in no other way as far as Plato was concerned. Hence the distinctive feature of the *elenchus*, question and answer, was retained at the core of Plato's new concept of 'dialectic', but something more was required.

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In seeking to overcome what he saw as the shortcomings of the specifically Socratic *elenchus*, Plato did not lose sight of his goal of attempting to provide certain definitions with respect to the objects of knowledge. Indeed, the failure of the Socratic method to do just that prompted Plato to look elsewhere for a more adequate grounding for his theory of knowledge. A key innovation developed by Plato in his middle period was that of developing the notion of 'hypothesis'.<sup>109</sup>

Plato began to explore this notion in the *Meno* and continued to use it in the *Phaedo* and the *Republic*. In the latter work, too, the concept 'dialectic' received its most thorough exposition to date. Yet even there Plato's exposition of the concept remained more descriptive than explanatory. It also needs to be pointed out that Plato shifted his emphasis from seeking to define particular Forms to that of defining the nature of the very concept 'Form' itself. As Robinson made clear,

The assumption that there are 'forms' served in the early dialogues only to introduce the destruction of every proposed account of a 'form'; but now, losing some of his previous interest in defining particular 'forms', Socrates uses the general assumption as a

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109. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 93. The discussion of 'hypothesis' is discussed in detail by Robinson in chapters VII and ff.. The above account presupposes much of what Robinson argued but on some points dissents from his arguments.

groundwork on which to construct various positive doctrines, for example, that the soul is immortal.<sup>110</sup>

The definition of particular Forms came to be seen as really the definition of the ultimate Form, that of the Absolute Idea of the Good (*arete-eidos*).<sup>111</sup> This became most apparent in the *Republic*.<sup>112</sup>

It was no accident or mere coincidence that the first mention of dialectic (as the "technical adjective 'dialectical'"<sup>113</sup>) was in the *Meno*,<sup>114</sup> the very dialogue in which Plato's view of 'hypothesis' began to unfold. In fact the two went together. Hypothesis was the innovation that enabled Plato to develop his method of dialectic as an improvement on the purely Socratic method.

As was noted earlier, the *Meno* also marked the introduction of Plato's use of mathematical examples in developing his views. The significant thing about this was not the examples themselves but that they gave evidence of Plato's admiration for the approach of the mathematicians. Mathematicians began with fixed or established hypotheses and developed their arguments as deductions from them. The result was a proof or demonstration of the validity of the initial hypotheses.

110. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 61. Note that Robinson refers to Socrates rather than Plato but it is clear from his overall discussion that it was Plato's 'Socrates' rather than the historical Socrates that Robinson had in mind.

111. J. Stenzel, (1940), pp. 44-45.

112. It might be objected that the *Republic* was concerned with the definition of justice (i.e. a particular Form) rather than with *arete-eidos*. Yet justice is most clearly addressed in Book I. In subsequent Books it is subsumed within the more general, and for Plato, more important, problem of the Absolute Idea of the Good. The idea of justice reappears briefly at [429d-449a] but even so this must be seen in the context of the quest for *arete-eidos*.

113. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 85.

114. *Meno.*, [75d].

In the mathematical model, the hypotheses thus functioned as something like first principles or axioms. Yet while Plato certainly admired this method, he was nevertheless uneasy about it because their hypotheses were not really first principles in the sense of certain knowledge because they were not definitions in the Platonic sense.<sup>115</sup>

Plato's criticism of the mathematicians' use of hypotheses was made explicit in the *Republic* in at least two places. First, in his discussion of the Divided Line, mathematicians are described as basing their analyses on hypotheses

and proceed from them not to a first principle but to a conclusion.<sup>116</sup>

Then later, Plato made the point even more pungently when he suggested that mathematicians,

though they have some hold on reality, we can see that they are only dreaming about it; they can never wake and look at it as it is so long as they leave the assumptions they use undisturbed and cannot account for them. For if one's starting point is unknown, and one's conclusion and intermediate steps are made up of unknowns also, how can the resulting consistency ever, by any manner of means become knowledge.<sup>117</sup>

In both of these cases, it needs to be pointed out that Plato was specifically contrasting dialectic with the mathematical method.

For Plato, hypotheses were not something to be proved. On the contrary, they were provisional views that one posited or assumed.<sup>118</sup>

115. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 104.

116. *Republic* [510b]. (Translated by D. Lee).

117. *Republic* [533b-533c]. (Translated by D. Lee).

118. R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 94-99 for an extended discussion of the senses of 'hypothesis' clustered around 'posit' or 'to put' in which something was assumed as a beginning. But note that this did not include the fictional or make-believe. See also D. Lee's note 2, p. 313, in his translation of the *Republic* where he points out that 'hypothesis' meant "something assumed for the sake of argument".

in order to arrive at correct definition. As Cornford put it, hypotheses "were mere stepping stones ... [to be] ... kicked away in the ascent to the correct definition".<sup>119</sup> The "correct definition" was, for Plato, "the first principle of everything".<sup>120</sup> That is, it was *arete-eidos*, the Absolute Idea of the Good, which constituted the "unhypothesized beginning" to borrow Robinson's phrase.<sup>121</sup> As far as Plato was concerned, the hypothesis, qua hypothesis, need not be proven but only what followed from or could be deduced from it. Hence one had to guard against inconsistency of argument and admit no contradiction to the premises. If such a flaw occurred then the particular hypothesis had to be abandoned and another one adopted. This procedure was repeated until one eventually arrived at the "first principle of everything". Yet such a procedure of interrogating successive hypotheses, the very method of dialectic as presented in the *Republic*, bore a striking resemblance to the mathematical approach by appearing to assert that the "first principle of everything" appears in the course of the interrogation as the result of moving from hypothesis to hypothesis. To be sure, Plato argued that once the "first principle of everything" had been reached one then had the basis for knowing and hence could proceed to use it to arrive at a true understanding of the world of Forms and its sensible correlates. In this way Plato felt that his method of dialectic surpassed that of the mathematicians who could offer no foundation for their knowledge.

Nevertheless, in his description of dialectic in the *Republic*,

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119. F. M. Cornford, "Mathematics and Dialectic in the Republic VI-VII", in R. E. Allen, (ed.), *Studies in Plato's Metaphysics*, (Routledge & Kegan Paul, London, 1965) p. 86.

120. *Republic* [511b and 533c].

121. R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 158-159.



Plato does not explain how one gets from hypotheses to that which is unhypothesised, the "first principle of everything", where certain knowledge becomes possible. Although Plato felt that dialectic could make the crossing, his claim in the *Republic* remained more enigmatic than straightforward. Robinson canvassed a number of possible interpretations to elucidate Plato's thinking on this point. The one of relevance here<sup>122</sup> is what Robinson termed the '*elenchus*-theory' of the upward path<sup>123</sup> which refers to the movement from hypothesis to hypothesis culminating ultimately in the "first principle of everything". One began with an hypothesis (in Plato's sense) and proceeded to deduce all possible consequences from it. If in doing so one discovered a contradiction, the original hypothesis was refuted. A new or modified hypothesis was then adopted and examined in the same manner as before. If another contradiction was discovered then a new or modified hypothesis was again adopted and the process repeated until the hypothesis under consideration had "endured every test and stood consistent in all its consequences"<sup>124</sup> over a long period of enquiry lasting months or years. This continued until it "dawned" upon the thinker that the hypothesis in question was "certainly true, that it was no longer an hypothesis but an anhypotheton",<sup>125</sup> the

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122. This is not to say that the other theories of the upward path are irrelevant as such. Rather, for present purposes, the one that Robinson felt was appropriate is going to be looked at in some detail in the above. For details of the others see R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 162-172. Note that this does not intend blanket endorsement of his views since some of the details of his arguments are open to question. However, in broad sweep his general conclusions are accepted.

123. R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 172-177. There is no doubt that Plato saw such a path as an upward one. His metaphors and descriptions in that vein are too numerous to be discounted.

124. *ibid.*, p. 173.

125. *ibid.*, p. 173.

unhypothesised beginning. This "dawning" was the spark of truth. It was the (divine) inspiration possessed only by the philosopher driven by the quasi-divine *eros*.<sup>126</sup> With this spark the philosopher was able to arrive at a fully illuminated state of being, seeing things as they were for the first time clearly and unmediated by sensibles. True knowledge was thus attained. Misleading and false hypotheses were eliminated through the *elenchus*, the cross-questioning of their possibilities and potentials in dialogue, and hence constituted the basis for the the upward path.<sup>127</sup>

The evidence for the correctness of this interpretation (at least its main points) is provided in the dialogues of Plato's middle period. In particular, the *Republic* provided various instances to support the above interpretation. Such instances, however, also presupposed the particular answers given by Plato in the other dialogues. The *elenchus*, as understood by Robinson, was the key to this process.

In the *Republic*, Plato used the simile of the Cave to illustrate the gradual unfolding of illumination through the removal of the shadows obscuring the philosopher's vision. This process of removal enabled the philosopher to strengthen his or her eyes so that they would be fully capable of looking "directly at the sun".<sup>128</sup> This echoed the earlier images presented by Plato in the simile of the Sun<sup>129</sup> and the analogy of the Divided Line.<sup>130</sup> In all of these, the progression was from darkness to light, from illusion to knowledge. This is best seen from Plato's own account.

126. Recall the comments made on p. 278 notes 28-30, *supra*. The image of the spark was also referred to by Plato in his *Seventh Letter* [344b].

127. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 173.

128. *Republic* [516b].

129. *Republic* [507a ff.].

130. *Republic* [509d ff.].

This entire allegory, I said, you may now append, dear Glaucon, to the previous argument; the prison-house is the world of sight, the light of the fire is the sun, and you will not misapprehend me if you interpret the journey upwards to be the ascent of the soul into the intellectual world according to my poor belief ... [where] ... the idea of good appears last of all, and is seen only with an effort; and, when seen, is also inferred to be the universal author of all things beautiful and right, parent of light and of the lord of light in this visible world, and the immediate source of reason and truth in the intellectual; and that this is the power upon which he who would act rationally either in public or private life must have his eye fixed.

(*Republic* [517b-517c])

... our argument shows that the power and capacity of learning exists in the soul already; and that just as the eye was unable to turn from darkness to light without the whole body, so too the instrument of knowledge can only by the movement of the whole soul be turned from the world of becoming into that of being, and learn by degrees to endure the sight of being, and of the brightest and best of being, or in other words, of the good.

(*Republic* [518c])

And must there not be some art which will effect conversion in the easiest and quickest manner; not implanting the faculty of sight, for that exists already, but has been turned in the wrong direction, and is looking away from the truth.

(*Republic* [518d])

And whereas the other so-called virtues of the soul seem to be akin to bodily qualities, for even when they are not originally innate they can be implanted later by habit and exercise, the virtue of wisdom more than anything else contains a divine element which always remains, and by this conversion is rendered useful and profitable; ...

(*Republic* [518e-519a])<sup>131</sup>

Implicit here are Plato's theory of the immortal soul, the theory of

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131. The above above citations from the *Republic* are from Jowett's translation of Plato's dialogues.

*anamnesis*, the equation of knowledge or truth with Being, and the role of *eros* (the "divine element"). In addition, Plato alluded to dialectic (i.e. "some art which will effect conversion") as the appropriate means to reach "the good", the "first principle of everything".

The first reference to 'dialectic' in the *Republic* came in Plato's discussion of the Divided Line analogy, where the top level of the line, the intelligible, was the "sort of knowledge which reason herself attains by the power of dialectic".<sup>132</sup> This was repeated later when Plato began to discuss the concept 'dialectic' in more detail.<sup>133</sup> The most important passage for Robinson's account of the '*elenchus* -theory of the upward path' followed Plato's claim, repeated for a third time, that dialectic was the only means with which, beginning with hypotheses, one could eventually arrive at the unhypothesised beginning.<sup>134</sup>

Until the person is able to abstract and define rationally the idea of the good, and unless he can run the gauntlet of all objections, and is ready to disprove them, not by appeals to opinion, but to absolute truth, never faltering at any step of the argument — unless he can do all this, you would say he knows neither the idea of the good nor any other good; he apprehends only a shadow, if anything at all, which is given by opinion and not by science;... Dialectic, then, as you will agree, is the coping-stone of the sciences, and is set over them; no other science can be placed higher — the nature of knowledge can go no further.<sup>135</sup>

The important point for Robinson was that the process of dialectic meant that one not only had to articulate but also to defend one's *logos*. Hence one had to engage in *elenchus*.<sup>136</sup> Thus Robinson felt that it

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132. *Republic* [511b].

133. *Republic* [532a-532b; 533a ff.].

134. *Republic* [533c-533d].

135. *Republic* [533b-534e]. (Translation by Jowett).

136. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 176.

constituted an *elenchus*-theory of the means to the idea of the Good.

More significantly, Robinson also concluded that whereas Plato's claim to certainty heralded "some new method", it was a method which had "gone back to being practically the Socratic *elenchus*".<sup>137</sup> This seems to equate dialectic with *elenchus*, particularly the Socratic type. But this would have negated the very project that Plato was embarked upon since he was concerned with overcoming the pitfalls of the Socratic method. Although Robinson was correct to point to the importance of the *elenchus*, in so far as it involved a dialogic form of question and answer, for Plato's approach, he appears to have ignored the differences between Plato's and Socrates' visions of philosophical discourse. Both Plato and Socrates regarded philosophy as a process of dialogue between actual, living individuals. How else could the spark be produced that would liberate the "intelligent word graven in the soul ... [which] ... can defend itself"?<sup>138</sup> How else to produce knowledge — the light that "shines forth understanding about every problem"?<sup>139</sup> Yet the aim of Plato's *elenchus* was distinct from Socrates' with respect to what is positively achieved. It was not refutation for the sake of it, nor was it simply the art of making the *logoi* of one's opponents appear weaker or discredited. The aim was knowledge. A precondition for embarking on the upward path, the only correct "road" to knowledge, was that it be undertaken in a friendly manner, "without ill-will",<sup>140</sup> by those who were guided by *eros* with a genuine love of wisdom.

This was brought out in the *Meno* when Plato elaborated his

137. *ibid.*, pp. 177-178.

138. *Seventh Letter* [344b].

139. *Phaedrus* [276a].

140. *Seventh Letter* [344b].

theory of *anamnesis*. Part of this theory required the acknowledgement of one's ignorance as a precondition for setting out on the upward path.<sup>141</sup> Only then could the proper dialogic relationship of friendly enquiry be mutually undertaken because only then would the seekers of wisdom have common cause. Only then would they be on the same footing<sup>142</sup> in that none would be engaged in defending their own opinions but, as far as Plato was concerned, would be seeking the goal held in common, that which bound their dialogic enterprise, namely knowledge or truth. Hence Plato's *elenchus* was of a different order to that of Socrates. Contrary to Robinson, it had gone beyond the Socratic *elenchus*.

For Plato, the method he articulated in the *Republic* seemed to be an improvement on the Socratic approach. The quest for certainty had been realised through the use of dialectic. To be sure, the spark by which one sees past hypotheses to the unhypothesised beginning had all the characteristics of an act of faith. In many respects this did not seem to be much different from the mathematicians in that an act of faith, whether called a spark or dawning or anything else, could be regarded as lacking a foundation for certain knowledge. As far as Plato was concerned, however, he felt that he had avoided such a charge by elaborating the quasi-divine role of *eros* in the *Phaedrus* and the

141. *Meno* [84a-84d].

142. This might be a little misleading in the sense that the role of *eros* in the learning process often involved a relationship between the teacher and pupil in which substantial power differentials were the norm. More likely than not the teacher and pupil were lovers which further complicated the learning relationship. For Plato, both teacher and pupil succumbed to the power of *eros* but at the same time, the nature of the Platonic *eros* ostensibly aimed for a sublimation of the physical aspects in favour of the more important intellectual goal of seeking knowledge. The discussions in the *Symposium* are especially important in this regard and to a lesser extent so are those in the *Phaedrus*. Some acknowledgement of this is given in H. Marrou, (1977). Although noting the "heirarchical" structure of *eros*, J. Stannard, (1959), tended to ignore the power inequalities inherent in Plato's approach to *eros*. To the extent that philosophers (as distinct from their pupils) are regarded as equals (as suggested in the *Phaedrus* [248c-d] with the heirarchy of souls) the power differentials between such lovers of wisdom may be ignored.

*Symposium* and linking it with his theory of the soul.<sup>143</sup>

Yet this was not the most important reason that Plato's theory in the *Republic* would prove to be inadequate. His fundamental assumption was that dialectic enabled one to grasp knowledge, the Idea of the Good, *arete-eidos*, which became the presupposition for knowledge of everything else in the world. The problem, however, was that knowledge could only exist in the world of Forms, yet that world had been articulated as unitary. The Idea of the Good was indivisible in so far as it enabled true Being to be comprehended. How then were the Forms to be accounted for? If knowledge was to be restricted to the world of Forms, however they might be conceived, how could such a world be made applicable to the ordinary world of sensibles, the supposed copies of their respective Forms? Plato addressed this problem but its resolution remained ambiguous. He had mainly shown this relationship in terms of the upward path. Once the goal, knowledge, had been reached he had little to say about just how the downward path developed.

The relationship between knowledge and opinion meant that his theory of Forms as presented in the *Republic* had to be reexamined or at least modified. This also meant that his conception of dialectic had to be questioned and perhaps reformulated. Could dialectic remain a combination of pure reason, Platonic *elenchus* and inspiration?

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It has been claimed that Plato's main aim in his works was

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143. Even if the *Phaedrus* had been produced after the *Republic* as some have maintained (e.g. R. Teske, (1960); N. Gulley, (1962) who argued that it was one of Plato's last works), Plato made his point in the other dialogues of the middle period that were demonstrably antecedent or contemporary with the *Republic*. Moreover, the *Symposium* provides sufficient evidence to show that he had already given a prominent place to the role of *eros* prior to the *Republic*.

to provide an account of certain knowledge (or at least how such knowledge could be attained) to serve as the basis for action in the world. In the dialogues up to and including the *Republic*, Plato had expressed a view in which non-sensible entities or realities (i.e. Forms) were posited as the only basis for knowledge; indeed, it was knowledge itself. Such Forms were to be identified with Being. Each Form had its own Being (i.e. its own *logos*) by which it could and should be known. The task of the philosopher was to define these non-sensible realities.

Yet this was not an easy task, and it led Plato into a dilemma with respect to his theory of Forms as presented in the dialogues to the *Republic*. On the one hand, one became aware of Forms by acknowledging the instances of them, their copies or imitations, in the sensible world. One then abstracted from these many instances to reach a transcendent Form. On the other hand, Plato also argued that a Form was an instance of itself.<sup>144</sup> That is,

Plato assumes that, e.g. the Idea of Beauty is itself an ideal object which is beautiful (and supremely beautiful), the Ideal of Justice is itself something that is just (and supremely just), and so on. ... To be beautiful is to participate in the Idea of beauty. ... Hence if the Idea of beauty is beautiful ... then every Idea participates in itself. This consideration, which I choose to call the fundamental antimony of the Platonic theory of Ideas, is the greatest logical weakness of the theory.<sup>145</sup>

The key issue was, as Teske noted, that of *chorismos* (participation);

the participant cannot be said to be either a part or the whole of that in which it participates.<sup>146</sup>

144. R. Teske, (1961), p. 186.

145. A. Wedberg, *Plato's Philosophy of Mathematics*, (Stockholm, 1955), cited in R. Teske, (1961), p. 186 n. 36.

146. R. Teske, (1961), p. 186.



Thus the weakness of the theory of Forms as developed in the middle dialogues was that, on the one hand a Form was indivisible because it constituted the essence or Being of the entity in question, yet on the other hand a Form could be apprehended through grasping the proximate instances of it in the world.

This problem was heightened by the fact that, for Plato, the participation of sensibles in the determination of Forms (enabling their description) was a necessary aspect of his doctrine of *anamnesis*.<sup>147</sup> Yet Plato also argued that sensibles were constantly changing and hence it was more or less impossible to describe their *logos*.<sup>148</sup> That being the case, sensibles could not really participate in the recollection of Forms because knowledge would be based on something that could not be known. The Forms constituted the proper object of knowledge yet how could they be arrived at if the means to do so was denied any meaningful reference to sensibles.

Plato began to address the problems in his early theory of Forms in the *Parmenides* and the *Theaetetus*. In the *Parmenides*, the problem of sensibles participating in Forms was presented but not resolved. A particularly significant conclusion reached there was that the Forms, however they may be constituted, were nevertheless necessary for discourse.<sup>149</sup> If the Forms really were the proper objects of knowledge then they must be so constituted as not to preclude their apprehension.

Paralleling this argument was the discussion in the *Theaetetus* concerning the nature of knowledge, where Plato returned to the perennial problem of how knowledge could and should be defined. Plato argued

147. N. Gulley, (1962), p. 74.

148. *Cratylus* [440b-440d]; *Phaedo* [78b ff.].

149. *Parmenides* [135b-135c].

against the view that knowledge could be reduced to perception because perception involved reference to sensibles which were themselves not permanent.<sup>150</sup> The best that could be derived from perception was opinion. This led to the consideration of knowledge as a making of judgements.<sup>151</sup> This raised the problem of truth and falsity. If opinion was derived from changing sensibles (from which nothing can be known in Plato's sense of 'known') then to speak of true opinion was mistaken. Opinion could not serve as the object of knowledge.<sup>152</sup> Moreover, what constituted false opinion? But for Plato the question cannot be answered until knowledge has been defined.<sup>153</sup> At the close of the dialogue (i.e. *Theaetetus*) the issue remained unresolved. The conclusion reached was that knowledge was neither perception, correct or true opinion, nor true opinion plus definition and explanation.<sup>154</sup>

Yet all was not lost in the *Theaetetus* because the outline of a possible solution was given. This was the hypothesis concerning the relationship of syllables and letters:

a syllable is not the letters, but rather one single idea framed out of them, having a separate form distinct from them.<sup>155</sup>

That is, the whole may be more than the sum of its parts. Plato suggested that the result was not a whole but an additional part. As Cornford has suggested, Plato regarded it as . . .

an additional element which supervenes on the putting together of the parts which make the whole. He urges that the whole

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150.        *Theaetetus* [151e ff.; 163b ff.].
151.        *Theaetetus* [187b ff.].
152.        R. Teske, (1961), p. 183.
153.        *Theaetetus* [200e].
154.        *Theaetetus* [210a-210b].
155.        *Theaetetus* [203d-203e]. (Translation by Jowett).

cannot be distinguished from the 'sum',  
 which itself cannot be distinguished  
 from 'all the parts'.<sup>156</sup>

Plato's refutation of the view that the whole was more than the sum of its parts was necessary in the specific context of the discussion in the *Theaetetus* because he was talking about a whole (Form) whose parts were themselves wholes (Forms) and the way in which such parts could be understood as fitting together. Hence despite the specific refutation, Plato was prefiguring a possible solution<sup>157</sup> to be used in another context.

This became evident in the *Sophist*, where Plato resolved the problem of definition.<sup>158</sup> This dialogue was superficially concerned with the sophistic art of making what is not appear and seem to be.<sup>159</sup> But on a deeper level it was concerned with providing the proper distinction between knowledge, true opinion, and false opinion and hence with marking out his mature conceptualisation of the philosophical form of discourse. The key to Plato's solution for the problem of definition was the issue of not-Being. Prior to the *Sophist*, Plato had treated Being and not-Being in the same fashion as Parmenides. That is, Being had existence and hence was something whereas not-Being did not have existence. This way of approaching the problem had a strong bias toward sensory entities because they clearly existed and thus must have Being. Yet if sensibles had Being, and Being was necessary for knowledge, then perception had a claim as the basis for knowledge. Although Plato had earlier attempted to refute such a claim, he was not entirely convincing. This was primarily because of his acceptance of the Parmenidean notion of Being and its existential connotations. In addition, Plato had to deal with the

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156. F. M. Cornford, (1935), p. 149.

157. R. Teske, (1961), p. 185.

158. N. Gulley, (1962), pp. 103 ff.

159. *Sophist* [238d-238e].

problem of the existential import of non-sensory entities. This had been a key assumption in all of his dialogues yet he also felt that there was some differential separating sensibles from non-sensibles. They were clearly different orders of reality. But it was a reality that he had attempted to grasp solely through the understanding of 'Being'. In the *Sophist* Plato approached the problem from a slightly different perspective using the mask of the Eleatic Stranger.

*Str.* Let us push the question; for if they will admit that any, even the smallest particle of being, is incorporeal, it is enough; they must then say what that nature is which is common to both the corporeal and incorporeal, and which they have in their mind's eye when they say of both of them that they 'are'. Perhaps they may be in difficulty; and if this is the case, there is a possibility that they may accept a notion of ours respecting the nature of being, having nothing of their own to offer.

*Theaet.* What is the notion? Tell me and we shall soon see.

*Str.* My notion would be, that anything which possesses any sort of power to affect another, or to be affected by another, if only for a single moment, however trifling the cause and however slight the effect, has real existence; and I hold that the definition of being is simply power.  
160

The important point was that sensibles and non-sensibles had a common nature, but one which was not fully rendered by the Parmenidean notion of 'Being'. For Plato, this had to be reconceptualised to encompass the sort of Being that was common to both corporeal and incorporeal entities, namely power (*dynamis*).

There was more than a passing debt to the mathematicians in this new approach. Recall that for Plato each individual Form was unitary in its essence or Being. But it was this very "oneness" that rendered a Form virtually unknowable. In the domain of mathematics, unknow-

ables such as irrational numbers became known through their relations with the powers of rational numbers.<sup>161</sup> Numbers were non-sensory entities but they certainly had existence, a fact Plato never doubted.<sup>162</sup> This could then be applied to the problem of Forms such that a Form could be known through the relations it entered into and which thus bound or defined it. This was the point at which not-Being could be postulated by Plato. Not-Being was not predicative of nothing (as in the Parmenidean view) but of Other-ness. That is, as Teske pointed out,

Each Form is the same as itself or in relation to itself; each Form is other than all the others or in relation to all the others.<sup>163</sup>

Plato's notion of not-Being made the differentiation of Forms possible without destroying the Being of each individual Form.

This step broke the Parmenidean logic that bedevilled the previous accounts of the Forms. The hypotheses concerning the participation of Forms with each other (and sensibles with Forms) presented in the *Parmenides* were restated together with a third in the *Sophist*.

Shall we refuse to attribute being to motion and rest, or anything to anything, and assume that they do not mingle, and are incapable of participating in one another? Or shall we gather all into one class of things communicable with one another? Or are some things communicable and others not?<sup>164</sup>

The first two hypotheses were shown to be impossible,<sup>165</sup> and in the *Parmenides* were shown to lead to the conclusion (if they were accepted)

161. R. Teske, (1961), p. 191.

162. *Sophist* [238b]. The words affirming the existence of numbers were spoken by Theaetetus but it can be reasonably held that, given Plato's Pythagorean heritage and his fascination with mathematics, that such was also Plato's view.

163. R. Teske, (1961), p. 193. Cf. *Sophist* [258e-259b].

164. *Sophist* [251d].

165. *Sophist* [252a-252e].

of the impossibility of discourse, and hence the impossibility of knowledge. The third hypothesis escapes that fate because it postulated that "some things communicate with some things and others not".<sup>166</sup> Participation could be accounted for without destroying the particular Being of each Form or combination of Forms.

The relations between Forms were those of sameness and difference, as the case required, and were predicated on not-Being. Not-Being became, for Plato, a kind of Being because it was other than Being. It

is distributed over all things in their relations to one another, and whatever part of the other is contrasted with being this is precisely what we have ventured to call not-being.<sup>167</sup>

Not-Being was that which could "supervene on the putting together of the parts which make the whole".<sup>168</sup> The Forms could be retained as the highest reality now that it was possible to discern the respective differences and similarities between them. Dialectic, Plato claimed, was the art required to discern the proper arrangements of Forms and to identify instances in the phenomenal world that could be regarded as partaking of a particular Form.<sup>169</sup>

The art of dialectic aimed to divide rightly and determine clearly one form pervading a scattered multitude, and many different forms contained under one higher form; and again, one form knit together into a single whole and pervading many such wholes, and many

166. *Sophist* [252e].

167. *Sophist* [258e].

168. Cf. F. M. Cornford's words cited on pp. 316-317 n. 156, *supra*.

169. *Sophist* [253d].

forms, existing only in separation and isolation. This is the knowledge of classes which determines where they can have communion<sup>170</sup> with one another and where not.

The object of knowledge thus remained the Forms but the knowledge thus arrived at was relational. And the method used to arrive at it remained dialectic, thought to be sure, it was an improved version of that elaborated in the *Republic*. It was still necessary to offer definitions or hypotheses and then explore their consequences to determine their consistency and freedom from contradiction. What had changed was the articulation of division. That is, the dividing and classifying of Forms according to their sameness and differences. This innovation enabled the philosopher to be able to explore all the divisions and subdivisions pertaining to particular groupings of Forms.

In the *Republic*, Plato had claimed that the use of dialectic would enable philosophers to make sense of the phenomenal world of changing sensibles. Yet he did not show how that could be achieved. And as was noted earlier, his theory of Forms as it was then formulated made such an eventuality unlikely. Once division could be achieved,<sup>171</sup> that task could be undertaken. However, it would be a mistake to assume that division was the radical innovation that some have claimed it to be with respect to dialectic.<sup>172</sup> Rather, the radical innovation was the postulation and subsequent proof of not-Being as an aspect of Being. The issue of division was a consequence of that breakthrough. Plato

170. *Sophist* [253d].

171. It needs to be noted that where 'division' is mentioned the notion of 'collection' is also presumed. The two go together. The process of collection had already been well established by Plato in the earlier dialogues. It was not until the *Sophist* that the earlier allusions to division could be made good.

172. For example, J. Stenzel, (1940); J. Elias, (1968); R. Robinson, (1953).

broke Parmenides' hold on the interpretation of Being whilst at the same time avoiding the equally dangerous trap (in Plato's view) of the Heraclitean doctrine of constant flux in which both Being and not-Being participated as "opposites". Plato's notion of not-Being enabled him to rehabilitate his earlier version of the theory of Forms and thus to give a more adequate account of what he regarded as the ultimate reality.

Moreover, this account did not have to invoke a leap of inspiration to bridge hypotheses and truth. This had been a problem in the earlier theory of Forms where no account could be given to show how the Forms were related to sensibles in the upward path. The accounts of dialectic given in the *Sophist*,<sup>173</sup> the *Statesman*,<sup>174</sup> and the *Philebus*<sup>175</sup> all subordinated the notion of inspiration to that of reason and the Platonic *elenchus*. This was most clearly brought out in the *Statesman*, where reason alone was the basis for a "rational account of everything".<sup>176</sup> But it needs to be noted that 'reason' in this context, was embodied in a "rational account", in discourse. Hence Plato's view of *elenchus* was also a part of 'reason'. This constituted true philosophical discourse because knowledge could only be ascertained in the actual dialogue between lovers of wisdom.<sup>177</sup> Plato's method of dialectic together with the new, relational theory of Forms made possible the certainty in knowledge that Plato had long sought.

The problem of definition had been resolved by the fact that dialectic could enable any existent, in particular the "greatest and

173. *Sophist* [253 ff.].

174. *Statesman* [286a ff.].

175. *Philebus* [16c ff.].

176. Cf. p. 278 n. 31, *supra*. where the quotation from the *Statesman* is given in full.

177. This was reiterated in the *Sophist* [261c-263b] and gave evidence of its centrality for his work over the course of his life.



grandest" (i.e. the Forms), to be defined with a precision that exceeded the pseudo-definitions (in his view) of his contemporaries and predecessors. Dialectic was not merely the "art of disputation" because for Plato dialectic alone was capable of enabling the philosopher to arrive at the truth of what was real.<sup>178</sup> Such a method was able to give full account, to demonstrate the *logos*, of the intermediate steps that sophistic and other methods ignored.<sup>179</sup> However, the mere possession of dialectic did not yield immediate or pure knowledge. Plato's view of the philosophical form of discourse was that it was a search that required effort and long training.<sup>180</sup> In many respects, dialectic was the light that guided the search for wisdom and, by its very power when properly used, made possible the gradual dispersion of the shadows of ignorance that kept humans from being able to live fully virtuous lives.

It must also be noted however, that dialectic did not constitute a "value-free" method that could be employed to discern appropriate values for right living. Such values were already embedded within the method because of the way in which Plato had defined philosophical investigation. Philosophy was face to face discourse, a dialogue in which the form of discourse and dialectic were inseparable and, for Plato, virtually indistinguishable. By marking off philosophical discourse as an appropriate, indeed the only, domain in which truth (i.e. certainty of values) could be realised, Plato denied that other forms of discourse could attain knowledge, or even express it. While poetry, drama, speech-

178. *Philebus* [17a].

179. *Philebus* [17a].

180. In this respect the views of his earlier dialogues concerning philosophical effort and activity retain their full force.

making, rhetoric, and so on, could articulate values and even make judgments about them, such expressions remained on the level of opinion rather than knowledge. They remained imitations or copies. Only philosophical discourse could transcend opinion and arrive at knowledge because it alone incorporated dialectic. More importantly, philosophers alone possessed the capacity for engaging in this method because only they, by definition, were the true lovers of wisdom. Plato thereby closed the circle of discourse on his contemporaries and, if the history of learned discourse over the past two and a half thousand years can be taken as a guide, he succeeded in enthroning the philosophical form of discourse as, quite literally, the apogee of all forms of discourse.

## Chapter 8

### On the Origins and Roots of Dialectic

It is now necessary to substantiate the view that the concept 'dialectic' can rightly be attributed to Plato. It has been shown in the previous chapter that Plato did not regard the Socratic *elenchus* as dialectic, and that in fact he re-interpreted the Socratic *elenchus* so that it would be less open to attack as a mere replica of the sophistic methods of *antilogic* and *eristic*. Hence to talk of a specifically Socratic dialectic is misleading to say the least. But where did the pre-Socratic thinkers stand with respect to this issue? It has long been common for historians of ancient Greek thought to describe the early Greek thinkers as natural dialecticians or to say that dialectic came naturally to them.<sup>1</sup>

Yet what or whose interpretation of 'dialectic' is being invoked to substantiate such claims? While it is true that many historians simply make the claim in passing and often attach no special importance to it, it is nevertheless the case that some conception of dialectic is presumed. Others, however, are explicit as to the particular conception of dialectic they have in mind,<sup>2</sup> generally proceeding to trace its origins to the specific works of those who preceded the formulation that is adopted. This anachronistic approach can be considerably improved

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1. For example, J. Burnet, (1930); G. Thomson, (1955); C. H. Kahn, (1979); G. S. Kirk & J. E. Raven, (1966). In most cases, Heraclitus and Parmenides are the most often cited examples of Greek "dialecticians".

2. For example, G. E. R. Lloyd, (1979), p. 61 n. 14 and pp. 62-65, derived a definition of dialectic from Aristotle's definition and used it as a sort of yardstick to show the concept's (often rudimentary) use by Greek thinkers prior to Aristotle. Another example would be H. D. P. Lee, *Zeno of Elea*, (Adolf M. Hakkert, Amsterdam, 1967) who is discussed in more detail below.

by starting not with the concept itself, nor with particular thinkers who might be favoured as the preferred "inventors" of the concept, but with the particular form of discourse in which such a concept has historically become embedded. This is the approach that has been adopted in this study. Certainly, one must go to the earliest extant statement of the concept in order to get one's bearings, not to obtain a ready made, self-serving explanation, but rather to find a benchmark: evidence of a point at which the concept had emerged in a conscious fashion. Then one must attempt to reconstruct the earlier and contemporaneous ways or means of thinking about knowledge and values (i.e. the particular forms of discourse in which such thinking is articulated and expressed), starting from the ground and working up to the concept as opposed to starting with the concept and reading it back into earlier discourse.

One of the most notorious examples of determining the origins of dialectic is presented by Hegel.<sup>3</sup> According to Hegel, Heraclitus brought forth dialectic. Using his own special theory of dialectic, Hegel interpreted the Heraclitean use of opposites as the forerunner to such a concept. Yet the fact remains that at no special time did Heraclitus use the word 'dialectic', nor is there any evidence to suggest that his contemporaries thought he said anything of the sort. The fact that he used opposing ideas and contrary formulations to articulate his views is not sufficient to establish him as the originator of dialectic unless one has, like Hegel, already defined 'dialectic' in that fashion. Moreover, some caution must be exercised with respect to Hegel's historical grasp of the period because some evidence suggests that his

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3. G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the History of Philosophy*, trans. by E. S. Haldane, in three volumes, (Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., London, 1892) Volume I, p. 279.

knowledge of the pre-Socratic philosophers was limited.<sup>4</sup> Hegel's authority, great philosopher that he was, cannot therefore be invoked in favour of Heraclitus as the originator of the concept 'dialectic'.<sup>5</sup>

A more promising candidate would appear to be Zeno of Elea. A general argument to support Zeno's position as the originator of dialectic was given by Lee.<sup>6</sup> If one looks at the extant texts of Zeno, the word 'dialectic' is not used. Furthermore, there is no evidence to suggest that Zeno himself thought of the word 'dialectic',<sup>7</sup> nor is there any evidence that his method involved *elenchus* as understood by Socrates, Plato and Aristotle.<sup>8</sup> Admittedly, *elenchus* was understood differently by these three philosophers, but in Socrates' case at least, there is no danger of anachronism because, although method of formal argument was similar, their method of philosophising was different. Socrates' method presupposed the dialogue situation whereas Zeno was a writer of prose. One of Zeno's antinomies has survived in a question and answer form but it is unlikely that the extant fragment is in the original form that Zeno wrote.<sup>9</sup> The formal method of argument that Zeno used can be described as *reductio ad absurdum*. Like the Socratic *elenchus*, it consisted of taking

some hypothesis held by his opponents,  
and ... [deducing] ... from it conclusions  
that were self-contradictory.<sup>10</sup>

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4. Lewis A. Richards, (ed.), *Heraclitus of Ephesus*, (Argonaut Inc., Chicago, 1969) p. 6.

5. This does not mean, however, that Hegel was wrong to point to the similarities between his and Heraclitus' use of opposites as a means of articulating their particular views.

6. H.D. P. Lee, (1967), pp. 111-123.

7. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 91.

8. *ibid.*, p. 91.

9. *ibid.*, p. 91.

10. H. D. P. Lee, (1967), p. 117.

Zeno was also famous for being able to argue both sides of any question and in many respects his method provided the basis for the sophists' development of *antilogos*. All that can be said of Zeno's method is that he was an exemplary exponent of the argument form of "reduction to impossibility".<sup>11</sup> Similar remarks also apply to other pre-Socratics like Xenophanes, Parmenides, Melissus, and so on who used similar argument forms in demonstrating their ideas.<sup>12</sup>

One of the ancient commentators, Diogenes Laertius, made the claim that

Aristotle says that Zeno was the  
inventor of dialectic.<sup>13</sup>

However, as Robinson pointed out, such a remark by Aristotle cannot be found in any of his extant works.<sup>14</sup> If one turns to Aristotle's *Topics*, as Lee did, for supplementation and clarification of Diogenes' remark one finds an explication of how Aristotle construed the notion of dialectic. No direct evidence can be found there that Aristotle attributed it to Zeno as Diogenes claimed. The interpretation offered by Lee (in support of Zeno) focussed on Aristotle's views "on the functions of questioner and answerer".<sup>15</sup>

There is admittedly some degree of similarity (as has already been noted on the previous page) between Zeno's method and the method of questioning and answering given by Aristotle in that both involved the attempt to elicit contradictions or paradoxes from the positions put for-

11. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 92.

12. See Chapter 4, *supra*, for the arguments of the pre-Socratics, Heraclitus and Parmenides in particular.

13. *Diogenes Laertius*, Book IX: 25.

14. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 91.

15. H. D. P. Lee, (1967), p. 117 where the view of Aristotle is cited in full.

ward by the protagonists. But as already noted the similarity involved the use of *reductio ad absurdum*. Zeno did not use the format of question and answer which was what Aristotle's discussion focussed on. The support for Diogenes' remark that Lee sought from Aristotle's discussion in the *Topics* must therefore be regarded as unsubstantiated. Furthermore, the veracity of Diogenes' testimony cannot be taken as absolute. As Robinson has suggested, Diogenes was not always right in his claims about what philosophers thought about their predecessors.<sup>16</sup> The lack of evidence notwithstanding, even if Aristotle did think that Zeno invented dialectic, the notion that Aristotle had in mind was his (i.e. Aristotle's) own. He may well have read his own views back into the past to find them in Zeno's work, a habit that Aristotle engaged in on more than one occasion.

Aristotle's *Metaphysics* provides further evidence against Lee's position.<sup>17</sup> There Aristotle said of Plato,

His divergence from the Pythagoreans in making the One and the Numbers separate from things, and his introduction of the Forms, were due to his inquiries in the region of definitions (for the earlier thinkers had no tincture of dialectic. ...<sup>18</sup>

Later, in Book XIII of the *Metaphysics*, Aristotle said of those who "first maintained the existence of Ideas" that:

The supporters of the ideal theory were led to it because on the question about the truth of things they accepted the Heraclitean sayings which describe all sensible things as ever passing away, so that if knowledge or thought is to have an object, there must be some other and permanent entities, apart from those which

16. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 91.

17. What follows is based largely on the argument outlined by R. Robinson, (1953), pp. 90-91.

18. *Metaphysics* [A 6, 987b.30-33]. (Emphasis added).

are sensible; for there could be no knowledge of things which were in a state of flux. But when Socrates was occupying himself with the excellences of character, and in connexion with them became the first to raise the problem of universal definition (for of the physicists Democritus only touched on the subject to a small extent, and decided, after a fashion, the hot and the cold; while the Pythagoreans had before this treated of a few things, whose definitions — e.g. those of opportunity, justice, or marriage — they connected with numbers; but it was natural that Socrates should be seeking the essence, for he was seeking to syllogize, and 'what a thing is' is the starting-point of syllogisms; for there was as yet none of the dialectical power which enables people even without knowledge of the essence to speculate about contraries and inquire whether the same science deals with contraries; for two things may be fairly ascribed to Socrates — inductive arguments and universal definition, both of which are concerned with the starting-point of science): — but Socrates did not make the universals or the definitions exist apart; *they*, however, gave them separate existence, and<sup>19</sup> this was the kind of thing they called Ideas.

It is clear from both of the cited passages that Aristotle thought that dialectic was, at the very least, something that had not made its appearance prior to the work of Socrates. There is also a strong suggestion that it was a Platonic rather than Socratic innovation.

The claim that Aristotle thought that it was Plato rather than Socrates who was responsible for dialectic is borne out by the context. In the first passage from Book *A* (I), Aristotle was clearly referring to Plato.<sup>20</sup> Hence the phrase 'earlier thinkers' must be understood as including Socrates among their number. Moreover, the theory of Forms was a Platonic innovation as Aristotle acknowledged. Plato needed the theory of Forms to solve the problems he inherited from

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19. *Metaphysics* [M 4, 1078b.13-32]. (Emphasis in original).

20. This is borne out by the fact that from [A 6, 987b.4-36] the focus of the discussion is Plato who is named at [A 6, 987b.4].



Socrates' quest for sound definitions, a quest endorsed and pursued by Plato as is also confirmed by Aristotle at [A 6, 987b.4]. Hence, Aristotle's view that Plato's "introduction of Forms were due to his inquiries in the region of definitions". This in turn was brought about by the fact that "earlier thinkers" did not have the use of 'dialectic'. The sense of 'due' in the above passage (i.e. [A 6, 987b.32]) is clearly argumentative in its intention and hence should be understood as meaning 'because'. The implication is that Plato needed the notion of dialectic and hence had to invent it himself.

In the second of the two quoted passages, the phrase "at that time there was as yet none of the dialectical power which enables" clearly refers to "the time when Socrates was doing his work".<sup>21</sup> Robinson does not argue this point<sup>22</sup> but the reasons for that conclusion would appear to be as follows. The passage attempts to explain why the "supporters of the ideal theory" (i.e. those who advocated the theory of Forms) arrived at such a view. In so doing, Aristotle made explicit reference to Socrates and the Socratic project. But Aristotle also made the clear distinction that Socrates' method ("syllogizing" as Aristotle described it) did not include dialectic. In addition, Socrates was described as not making definitions "exist apart" ([M 4, 1078b.30-31]).<sup>23</sup> But Aristotle said that "they" did. The "they" referred to the "supporters of the ideal theory" which meant Plato and his school. This had already been established by Aristotle (c.. [A 6, 987b.4-33]). It has

21. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 90.

22. Robinson goes straight on to conclude that 'dialectic' arose after Socrates' death and was therefore regarded by Aristotle as Plato's brainchild. Robinson was then concerned with showing (1) that it was Plato's dialectic and (2) that the inventor was Plato. (*ibid.*, p. 90).

23. This point is re-emphasised by Aristotle in *Metaphysics* [M 9, 1086b.2-4].

already been demonstrated that positing Forms as separate existents in their own right required the notion of dialectic. Since Plato was responsible for the theory of Forms he must also have been responsible for the concept 'dialectic'. That conclusion also takes care of the two possible objections considered by Robinson; namely that the notion of dialectic developed by Plato does not preclude an earlier form of dialectic from being present in Socrates' work, and secondly, even if Aristotle did believe that the concept was absent from Socratic thought, it was not necessarily the case that "he thought the inventor was Plato".<sup>24</sup> But as the preceding discussion has shown, Aristotle accepted that the concept was a distinctly Platonic creation.

Of course, simply because Aristotle thought that something was the case does not necessarily mean that he was right. It might be argued that the Socratic *elenchus* prefigured the notion of dialectic. However, it has already been established that Socrates and Plato diverged in their treatment of *elenchus* and that the Socratic *elenchus* was not what Plato meant by 'dialectic'. More significant, however, is the fact that the word 'dialectic' does not make an appearance in any of the Socratic dialogues. The first mention of dialectic occurred in the *Meno* and then became a substantial feature in "the *Phaedo* (without the name),<sup>25</sup> the *Republic*, the *Phaedrus*, the *Sophist*, the *Statesman* and the *Philebus*".<sup>26</sup> As Robinson argued, Plato presented his views on dialectic as if the characters of his dialogues were familiar with them but at the same time needed to have them spelled out. Robinson

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24. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 90.

25. As has already been established (p. 275 n. 15, *supra.*), the *Phaedo*, though dealing with Socrates' last hours was nevertheless Platonic in terms of its ideas.

26. R. Robinson, (1953), p. 89.

concluded that Plato wanted

both to describe his new method and  
to represent it as practised in the  
Socratic circle.<sup>27</sup>

The ploy of representing it as a feature of the "Socratic circle" of his dialogues made it possible for Plato to present a radically unfamiliar method in familiar surroundings.

The "Socratic circle" raises the question of the sophists. Did they practise dialectic? As far as Plato was concerned they did not. It was partly in response to their methods of arriving at knowledge and partly to their view of knowledge that Plato developed his notion of dialectic. As discussed in Chapter 6, the sophists' forte was rhetoric and *antilogos*, neither of which can be regarded as dialectic. In addition, nowhere in the extant works of the sophists is there any mention of dialectic either as a method or as a word. The only possible exception might be *dialexis* which was once the title of the anonymous sophistic work now known as the *Dissoi Logoi*.<sup>28</sup> This was a handbook of argument forms, all of which can be regarded as instances of *antilogos*. The words *Dissoi Logoi* are generally translated as 'twofold arguments',<sup>29</sup> or 'double arguments' the basic structure of which "clearly consists in setting up opposing arguments".<sup>30</sup> It would thus seem reasonable to conclude that *dissoi logoi* was more akin to the method of *antilogos* and hence cannot be regarded as dialectic.

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27. *ibid.*, p. 90.

28. See R. K. Sprague, (1972), for the text of this work.

29. *ibid.*, p. 279; H. D. Rankin, (1983), p.34.

30. G. B. Kerferd, (1981), p. 54; W. K. C. Guthrie, (1969), p. 316.

Since Plato was combatting what he regarded as the intellectual bankruptcy of the Sophists, especially where political and social issues were at stake, it is consistent that he should develop a method that enhanced his own views while providing a means to undermine the sophistic techniques as they related to the issue of knowledge.<sup>31</sup> That method was dialectic.

Another reason why Plato should be regarded as the originator of dialectic concerns his conception of the philosophical form of discourse. Philosophy was the living word, the winged word, pursued by those who genuinely loved wisdom. It was not to be found in books or treatises where the words were dead and inflexible. The method of philosophical discourse had, for Plato, to be compatible with the living words of dialogues between actual people. The only method in existence before Plato's time that approximated this requirement was the Socratic *elenchus*. Yet the Socratic *elenchus* was inadequate because it often left a bitter feeling of scepticism or perplexity. Its emphasis on refutation and negative critique meant that it often became indistinguishable from *eristic* and *antilogos*. Plato's requirements for *elenchus* as employed within his notion of dialectic were designed to enhance the mutually cooperative nature that he felt was essential for the dialogue format.

Plato's preference for the dialogue of the spoken word between living persons was not merely a reflection of his debt to Socrates. It also reflected his reverence for the past glory of Greece—the seemingly stable great truths of the oral period articulated and preserved by winged words — as exemplified in the epics of Homer and his predecessors. Such truths provided the guidance for action in the world.

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31. The fact that many sophists maintained that knowledge was impossible and used their methods to demonstrate this irked Plato considerably. If knowledge was not possible in any definitive and certain fashion then action could not be adequately informed. Anything goes. The quest for certain knowledge was predicated on restoring the primacy of ideas (compatible with Plato's politics) to political life in Athens.

However, they were not absolutes, in Plato's sense, nor were they ephemeral. Knowledge and values in the oral period were constantly being modified both to shape and be shaped by the actual experiences of the Greeks. Such modifications were generally not radical or sudden, but general. Because there was no permanent record of the values of past generations outside of the oral mode there were no sudden contradictions brought out between past and present knowledge and values. Within the oral mode of discourse, there was only the "forever living present" in which everything was created anew to be in accord with the present of the lived experience. In the oral mode of discourse, the preserved knowledge and values had all the appearances of providing a stable basis upon which human conduct could be based. For one such as Plato, living in a society that was, for all intents and purposes, increasingly under the political and moral sway of a literate mode of discourse, and which was experiencing an overt disjunction between the bases of knowledge and requirements of social conduct, the seeming stability of orally preserved knowledge must have posed an immense attraction. Both Socrates and Plato were perhaps extremely nostalgic about the winged words of orally preserved knowledge and values.

This is borne out by Plato's deliberate and frequent use of what Fisher described as the symbol of the wing,<sup>32</sup> most pronounced in the dialogues of the middle and later periods (e.g. the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium*, the *Protagoras*, the *Phaedo*, the *Republic*, the *Timaeus*).

The wing is the corporeal element which is most akin to the divine, and which by nature tends to soar aloft and carry that which gravitates downwards into the upper region, which is the habitation of the gods. The divine is

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32. John Fisher, (1966), p. 165.

beauty, wisdom, goodness, and the like;  
and by these the wing of the soul is nourished.<sup>33</sup>

Plato's use of the wing was a definite hearkening back to the frequent use of the same figure in Homer's epics with respect to words. The overriding characteristic of this figure of speech was that words with wings were always to be directed at some person, whether mortal or divine, with the *specific* intention of eliciting a response.<sup>34</sup> In Homer,

winged words do not merely fly between persons, they penetrate the indifference of men and make it impossible to be inattentive to the meaning. Wings take dead words and make them live, by transporting them to the responsive soul of the hearer, the part of man closest to the divine.<sup>35</sup>

The Homeric use of the wing motif was not lost on Plato if his numerous allusions to Homer can be taken as any guide. It was precisely that imagery which informed Plato's notion of philosophy. For Plato, the philosophical form of discourse required winged words if it was to have any chance of aspiring to knowledge, of nourishing the soul in "the upper region which is the habitation of the gods", a destination that could only be approached by "soar[ing] aloft".

Plato's deprecation of the written word derived from this and helps to explain his preference for writing dialogues as an attempt to represent actual philosophical discourse.<sup>36</sup> It also sheds some light on Plato's notorious quarrel with poetry.<sup>37</sup> It was not just a

33. *Phaedrus* [246e]. (Translated by Jowett).

34. John Fisher, (1966), pp. 166-168. Note also his reference to Homer's treatment of unwinged words (p. 168).

35. *ibid.*, p. 168.

36. Cf. n. 86 p. 296, *supra*; John Fisher, (1966), p. 171; D. Hyland, (1968); Herman Sinaiko, (1965), pp. 6-9. In contrast see W. H. Desmond, (1960), pp. 389-406.

37. For an over view of this quarrel see E. A. Havelock, (1963), Chs. I & XIII.

a matter of poets and dramatists expressing ideas or values without regard to truth or morality as Plato understood those terms. Much of his criticism of the poets (and *pari passu* dramatists and rhetoricians) centred on the fact that they allowed no dialogue between themselves (or at least their works) and their intended audiences. The words of the poets could not defend themselves. Nor could the poets *demonstrate* that their words were based on a definable and defensible notion of the truth. If they could their creators would be deserving of another name.

*Soc.* ... Go and tell Lysias that to the fountain and school of the Nymphs we went down, and were bidden by them to convey a message to him and to other composers of speeches — to Homer and other writers of poems, whether set to music or not; and to Solon and others who have composed writings in the form of political discourse which they would term laws — to all of them we are to say that if their compositions are based on knowledge of the truth, and they can defend or prove them, when they are put to the test, by *spoken* arguments, which leave their writings poor in comparison of them, then they are to be called, not only poets, orators, legislators, but are worthy of a *higher* name, befitting the *serious* pursuit of their life.

*Phaedr.* What name would you assign them?

*Soc.* Wise, I may not call them; for that is a great name which belongs to God alone, — lovers of wisdom or *philosophers* is their modest and befitting title.<sup>38</sup>

Although what such writers said often offended Plato, it was the manner in which the content was organised and presented that was critical.<sup>39</sup> Their works were conceived by other methods than the one designed to attain the truth. Only a thorough knowledge of the art of dialectic enabled words to be properly organised as philosophical discourse. That was why Plato's formulation of the notion of dialectic had to retain some

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38. *Phaedrus* [278c-278d]. (Translated by Jowett, emphasis added). Cf. also Plato's discussion of poetry in the *Ion* and the *Republic* (especially [607b-608b]).

39. *Phaedrus* [269b-270a].

element of *elenchus*. It had to embody the living word. Or rather, it had to enable the written word to grow wings so that the written word could be freed from the bonds that imprisoned it, thereby enabling it to soar upwards to its goal of knowledge.

Dialectic became for Plato the means to break the impasse presented, on the one hand, by his belief in the necessary relationship between winged words and knowledge, and on the other hand, the cultural fact that orally preserved discourse in all its traditional rôles was being overtaken by the written word. Plato was himself a writer and it was not possible for him to ignore that the literate mode of discourse had by then become the predominant means for the articulation and preservation of knowledge and values. This dilemma was a constant source of tension for Plato. Fisher has summarised aptly what dialogue meant for Plato.

Thus it remains that dialogue has a double meaning, corresponding to the spoken, winged word and the written, unwinged word. True philosophy is a social activity, its language is living and responsive, its words winged. It asks and answers. This is living dialogue with a live philosopher. Plato's written dialogues are not dialogue in this sense, but the record of how perhaps the greatest of philosophers did philosophy: the portrait of the man, the structure of the activity. Dialogue in the first sense is a necessary condition for doing philosophy. Dialogue in the second sense is an art form. Yet under the masterful hand of Plato, the art form reached a height and a grandeur never equaled. Nevertheless the written word remains unwinged. The only way to do philosophy is to go out and find a philosopher. Unless Plato is completely mistaken, his words alone have wings.

Plato felt that his words had wings because his conception of philosophy incorporated, formally and for the first time, the notion of dialectic. James Notopolous once remarked that if one wanted to discover the origins of dialectic one had to go beyond Plato and seek the answer in the period



of totally oral discourse.<sup>41</sup> Such a quest for origins is wide of the mark if it is true, as has been demonstrated above, that the concept of dialectic was a Platonic invention. Yet there is a sense in which Notopolous's words have a ring of truth. To understand how and why Plato was led into forging such a concept, one must try to understand the dilemmas that confronted Plato. But to have such an understanding one also needs to comprehend the heritage that produced those dilemmas. One needs to know not just what Plato's re-conceptualisation of philosophical discourse entailed but also the forms of discourse that Plato presupposed and which he attempted to preclude. One must therefore not ignore the significance and importance of the oral mode of discourse and its subsequent transformation into a literate mode—with the consequent changes to expressive powers and social functions of every form of discourse. This study has attempted to do full justice to those considerations.

Plato can be correctly regarded as having stood at an important cross-roads in the development of the philosophical form of discourse. In many respects, Plato was fighting a rear-guard action against the influence of the written word and what he saw as its inherent shortcomings. Although Plato was confident he had succeeded, the subsequent historical development of the philosophical form of discourse indicates otherwise. Ironically, his very success in establishing philosophy as the pre-eminent form of discourse for the discussion and evaluation of knowledge and values resulted in the failure of his orally based view of philosophy to be retained. Despite Plato's efforts, the written word increased its grip on philosophy and has retained it ever since.

Nevertheless, his achievements cannot be denied. Foremost among them was his redefinition of the philosophical form of discourse,

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41. James Notopolous, (1938), pp. 465-493.

and central to that redefinition was his concept of dialectic. While Plato may be properly regarded as the author of this concept, the roots for its successful fruition extended beyond his own time and reached back to the oral mode of discourse.

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