

Two Visions of a Paper

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When writing an introduction for a paper, knowing what we are asking is important. Meaning that we do not want to end up like poor Meno with a swarm of virtues when what we should provide is the definition of virtue.¹ The aim is to find definition throughout the paper, as definition provides opportunity for meaning. An introduction should be narrow and focused; it should give the reader the ideas that will be presented and not veer into differentiation but instead offer definition so the reader and the writer understand a shared meaning of terms.² There should also be a hypothesis of sorts, a question raised that will be answered by the paper.³ This hypothesis should indicate what will be made intelligible by reading the paper that was otherwise unintelligible. When one is in the process of writing the paper, one should be cognisant of a few key ideas, such as how to separate between reasons and rationalisations, what makes a 'see' argument from an example, why these eristical examples are insufficient for finding the truth, the purpose of carrying the argument through and the relationship of word and deed. Above these ideas runs the differentiation between the eristical and the dialectical, as either method will change the approach to paper writing and the result.

There are two competing forms for paper writing: the eristical approach and the dialectical, with one approach losing sight of the intended goal and the other understanding the meaning behind the work itself. We must not be soft and weak and instead inquire into the thing

¹ Plato, *Meno*, 72b.

² The goal of a paper is to show understanding. The goal of dialectic is to find understanding, so these things are linked as ends and means. Ends being the finished product that shows understanding, and means the dialectical process of getting there.

³ The question to be answered is the 'one' of the one and the many. The parts are the ideas that link together to reach the understanding and reveal what the one is.

in an ordered method to elicit the correct response.⁴ From eliciting this response learning can take place from the process of writing the paper. We bring forward the truth only when we follow this through with the correct intent and understanding. If we instead pursue the paper through an eristical approach, we will find a different end to the argument and will not approach the truth of the thing in question. The eristical approach misses the mark because the nature of the approach is not aligned to sorting out the truth of the thing but to persuade others to one's opinions. The eristical approach, by nature, leads us in the wrong direction. The paper quickly becomes one that shows the writer's eagerness to win an argument rather than one that investigates the subject at hand.⁵ The purpose of carrying the argument dialectically is to see the implications and the relationship of word and deed; it is not meant as a pursuit of persuasion as the dialectical is meant to reveal what is being sought out. If we take the persuasive approach, we will set ourselves up for failure from the beginning, as this approach leads to scepticism instead of clarity. We will be like dear Meno, hoping to bump into the thing in question, growing ever more obstinate.⁶ One can become susceptible to many traps if they do not understand the ideas posited by Plato when writing any paper. What is expected is that the work in writing a paper is both a representation of knowledge, and a search for the meaning of the thing in question.

The eristical approach is enticing when writing a paper, but one should be cautioned as the eristical method can easily lead to bloviation. Flashy rhetoric, at its core, is meant to win over the reader or listener with puffery and pontification rather than an honest discussion of the issue at hand. Any run-of-the-mill ultracrepidarian could make use of this kind of chicanery, especially

⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 81d.

⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 457d.

⁶ Plato, *Meno*, 80d.

if the target of the speech is rather anserine, as rhetoric need only produce belief.⁷ The ideas posited need not be right or wrong under investigation; it only matters that those taking the ideas in believe them. In keeping with the law court example posited by Gorgias, rhetoric does not need to teach the target about just and unjust action but only manufacture persuasion.⁸ So, writing from this point of view is naturally more effortless than the alternative, as it is pointed at creating belief by example rather than eliciting the truth from the subject. The ease is in the approach, as the eristical subject does not venture into confronting the meaning of their own words and from their position cannot be numbed by their own wording.⁹ There is no acceptance within the eristical subject on their own that they do not know, the numbing can only come from refutation with the dialectical subject. When writing a paper however, it is best to avoid anything resembling a gasconade, or self-aggrandisement where one postulates about things such as virtue and instead focus one's efforts on providing tight maieutic answers close to the matter at hand. It is easy to fall into the trap of grandiloquent speech-making as a means of winning an argument, but a person should pack in any positing of one's position from pieces plucked from poetry. Arguing in this manner is beside the intended purpose, and one should avoid any attempts to inveigle the reader. For winning an argument and excellent paper writing are not always congruous. Presenting one's arguments as a sesquipedalian is merely an effort on the part of the orator to cover up their lack of knowledge on the subject;¹⁰ it matters not if the argument is just or unjust; it is only really being presented for the good of the orator as the orator has the most to

⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 454e.

⁸ Plato, 455a.

⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

¹⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 455e.

gain from speech making. This is the brilliant and alluring thing with eristical speech for paper writing. If one can employ this method, they do not need to know anything of which they are speaking; they need only to uncover the trick of persuasion to appear to be knowing.¹¹ Another aspect that may draw the writer toward the eristical method is that it creates a lengthy product from the nature of the method itself, where one can say next to nothing in a great many words. The nature of the eristical approach is that it must be verbose to have the desired effect of masking the lack of knowledge of the subject matter. To stem from knowledge would require that the reason be bound by something, that they can be looked at in such a manner that the one giving the reasons knows why they hold them, not that they simply are the correct reasons to give.¹² Quite plainly, it is the differentiation between making statements about virtues and asking questions that seek what virtue is.

In contrast, the correct pursuit is that which is dialectical, as the dialectical approach requires one to inquire into the thing in question. Inquiry makes the paper worthwhile for both the writer and the reader, as inquiring necessitates searching for the truth and an omission that one does not pretend to know the answers from the beginning. If we inquire about the thing in question, we may find it, whereas the eristical paper cannot because it does not even begin to look; it merely posits a set of opinions as ‘true.’ To differentiate between each method, we can put the process and the writer to a test.

In order to test a soul or write a paper, the same three things are needed: frankness, kind regard, and knowledge.¹³ One cannot possibly know everything they will write before sitting

¹¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 459b.

¹² Plato, *Meno*, 98a.

¹³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 487a.

down to write it. There has to be a frankness with the self regarding its limits. One cannot know everything; instead, one needs to seek to elicit the correct response through precise, repetitive work. One needs to be open to contradiction and refutation as this is part of the process of crafting a paper, it is forming and carrying out any argument to the limit with another; in this case, the writer and the paper, discourse with the self to elicit the correct response. One line draws out the next seemingly out of a void; where each line comes from, we do not know, but they come forth nonetheless. We are like Meno's slave, drawing the answers seemingly out of nowhere. Kind regard for the self is necessary because it is the bulwark against shame; shame of not knowing, or shame of not wanting to put forward what one knows because of contradiction. If one is ashamed of coming to the point of contradiction, as Polus is in the *Gorgias*, they will lack the requirements to see the argument through fully and gain a deeper understanding from the process. The moment shame is allowed to outweigh inquiry, the searching stops.¹⁴ As Plato demonstrates with Socrates' inquiry into Callicles' 'the strong and the better are the same argument.'¹⁵ This shame is really a lack of virtue; it is a fear of not wanting to confront what one does not know. It demonstrates a lack of conviction and a lack of courage. The fear of contradiction is the fear of realisation of one's disharmony, knowing that one's words and deeds are at contention, one against the other.

This fear is why Gorgias and Polus relented in their discussions with Socrates as so many before them, and this fear is why the eristical approach to paper writing is so enticing, for it allows the writer a disconnect between their words and deeds; they are allowed to avoid a

¹⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 480e.

¹⁵ Plato, 488d.

possible confrontation with themselves.¹⁶ When we do not inquire, we can stay on the surface.

We can point at examples and the opinions we mirror from others and exclaim that these are true and logical because we refrain from reflecting on anything under that mirrored surface to see the flaws, as Callicles refrains in his vision of a life.

Callicles wishes to make the argument about justifying who should rule within the Athenian demos or, more accurately, who should have a right to rule and reap the benefits of power.¹⁷ The argument is based on nature and how Callicles regards those stronger and thus better by nature, should have more than the weak.¹⁸ Callicles desires this mode of rule because he views himself in the better and superior category and would benefit from this system, as opposed to a system where the weaker and the stronger are equals. What began as "the stronger should rule the weaker and have a greater share,"¹⁹ where Callicles conflates many terms: strongest, best, and superior as one thing, quickly changes, for Callicles sees his position playing out and the realities of what he is saying set to a test. If it is the stronger, what kind of strength must we consider? What qualifies this remark? Some slaves are surely physically strong, but Callicles could not possibly mean that they are superior to the Athenian gentleman of old age, immense wealth, sound mind and frail body. Outside of the shallow confines of Callicles' statement, his choice of words can be quickly diminished, as he has not reflected on the reasons for this opinion. He has seen the consequences of his statement, the implication of his remarks and how they would impact the demos if they were realised. If he had reflected on this statement,

¹⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 482d.

¹⁷ Plato, 488b.

¹⁸ Plato, 484a.

¹⁹ Plato, 483d.

he could have avoided this argument with Socrates. Statements such as Callicles' are why Socrates is so insistent on carrying through the discussion to see the meaning behind the words, and to differentiate between the terms. When this process is carried through, we see the issue with the statement that was put forward, and the inherent flaws in the logic as what he is saying lacks a criteria or a measure, a means of how the better are better.²⁰ Instead, he quickly has to revise his position. Refutation leads him to correction and provides a moment for learning. Better, stronger, superior becomes better and superior quite quickly.²¹ The testing of the statement and how the argument plays out when the general needs to be applied to the particular case shows the flaws in the statement, but at this point in the dialogue, Callicles maintains his fortitude and does not relent like those who came before him. Callicles does not allow shame to overcome his willingness to inquire with Socrates. The movement through this section of the dialogue shows the eristical versus the dialectical at play. How the statements made from opinion, set to a test, break down as the meaning of the words becomes defined and clear. The dialectical at work is Socrates challenging the reasons for Callicles' position. It is a test of the boundaries of his opinions. Excellent papers do this; they provide sharp discussion of the arguments so that the key points are brought down and refined further. Ideally only what is salient should remain. They are not, however, sets of take-it or leave-it statements where one purports to know what virtue is, or justice or what have you.

²⁰ Editing a paper as one writes is reflecting on one's reasons. The arguments one posits for their paper must be bound by something, and we can only really understand ideas through reflection. Why do we hold an idea as true or not? Why do we do X in situation Y instead of Z? Knowing what makes it applicable or not is the knowledge we should be after. When we edit, we are forced to go through our words and reflect on why we said them. In this reflection, we see how the words relate to each other and if they truly represent our intentions.

²¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 489d.

The problem with making these uninvestigated statements is that they attempt to stretch to too broad a base and, with little inquiry, can be shown to be flawed. The idea that better, superior and stronger are all the same requires having a standard of measure that creates the equality of terms. If we have a competition to see who is physically weakest, the strongest cannot win and is thus inferior and worse than the weakest. The statement lacks any criteria that would define the intention behind the statement and why the better, stronger, superior should be taken as the same.

Callicles' entire position is one based firmly in belief, he believes what he is saying because it is his life's position. Callicles views himself as superior and thus would gain if Athens worked as he claim it should, but he does not have the ability to work through the problem of his beliefs and does not understand why his general claim cannot function once it is put to the test of particular situations, such as that of the strength of the slave. The student should aim to work through their papers like Socrates does with his interlocutors. No one is going to hold the subject to a kinder regard than the subject; so, it is imperative that the subject be frank about their own writing and orient themselves towards knowledge.

The student orients themselves toward the wrong thing. They love the grade they are after, the demos, more than they love the idea of knowledge. The student should orient themselves such as to elicit the meaning from the paper and, through the proper orientation and practice of writing the paper, the true meaning. The love of seeking knowledge must supersede the love of the grade. Oriented towards the grade, the student will act like Callicles, giving an ever-changing account, a differing list of reasons with nothing to link them together once the refutation begins. Callicles' orientation, towards the demos is why he gives a changing account,

and will always give a changing account until he re-orientes himself. He cannot be one thing if he is trying to be everything at once, he cannot possibly please everyone and trying to do so pleases no one. The demos is a pluralistic body, so he manages the multitude instead of his own being. He cannot contradict the demos.²² Callicles' account changes through the process of Socrates' elenchus (488-489). When there is no link between reasons, the paper jumps from A to B to C as separate entities. Only through the correct orientation, the dialectical, can A-B-C become linked, as inquiry demands.²³ Inquiring carries through the argument by clarifying the meaning of each item, rather than stating a meaning of the item.²⁴ Any number of things could be or are right when it comes to the item, but what is right is based not on the thing itself but on convention.²⁵ All accounts should be able to be refuted, and the idea that one's account can be and should be refuted is an acknowledgement that the argument is not based as A to B to C, but rather A-B-C, as only through scrutinising our beliefs do we understand why we hold to them or let them go. The typical 'see' method of argumentation is building a case through closed statements that are somehow posited as irrefutable.²⁶ It is meant to show that 'I,' the subject, am correct, because the object that I can hold up is 'true', so its 'true' property transfers over me by association. But what

²² Plato, *Gorgias*, 481e.

²³ A-B-C denotes the linking of parts throughout the paper, A to B to C is a fragmented version that lacks this quality.

²⁴ Plato, *Meno*, 75c.

²⁵ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 76.

²⁶ Socrates' examples are still dialectical. The Proof of Recollection (81e-86c) is an example of creating an example to illustrate a concept that works through the issue rather than stopping at a statement of fact. Polus' proof that men who do injustice are happy with his Archelaus example (470d) contrasts with the Proof of Recollection. Socrates works through the problem to show how recollection takes place.

this lacks is an understanding that the particular, the object in question, does not apply to the general; we can only do this in the inverse, and only if we have phronesis.²⁷

Polus uses the 'see' method of refutation in his Archelaus example.²⁸ The sophistic method of refutation is the "cloud of false witnesses," the summoning of others to substantiate one's claims.²⁹ Arguing based on 'see' only works if the orator and the audience both hold the same belief, or the orator knows the beliefs of the audience and builds their argument to capture the beliefs. Because Socrates does not hold to the same conceptions of what is just or not as Polus posits with his argument, it does nothing to capture belief in Socrates. It is only an applicable method when the orator can frame the argument to adhere to the beliefs of the audience. Socrates through his refutation of his interlocutors' points, is not capturing belief within the other individual, but illustrating that the beliefs behind their contentions are unfounded. The perplexity comes into play as they work through the meaning of the words.³⁰ There is a split between the two methods, where the rhetorician utilises the other person's beliefs to create persuasion and the Socratic account, where the beliefs are tested. The reasons relating to belief are also why the truth by all accounts does not matter; as the true or untrue positions can be equally believable.³¹

²⁷ The virtue of Phronesis is the ability to discern about our practical situation which is bound by our finitude. We have to be able to think through our actions as what we can know has limitations.

²⁸ Callicles does the same, bringing Euripides into his speech (484e) as if to say that because Euripides said it, it must be valid and is a definitive statement. Euripides is not there and cannot be refuted, so what he said does not matter in this instance. It is simply another form of weak mimesis, where we lose the reasons for what was said initially; anything below the reflective quality of the imitative statement that is meant to be a proof of some kind lacks the original rationalities for the imitated person saying it.

²⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 472b.

³⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 80a.

³¹ This is one reason why Gorgias believes that the unjust orator is dangerous (461a) as they will have to change their stance, and are thus capable of saying anything to create the desired effect, whether it is right or not.

Socrates, in the dialogues, approaches his interlocutors in a way that exposes to the interlocutor that their beliefs are likely based neither on something that can be empirically true, or false,³² nor do they have the ability to decipher between the reasons given, good or bad. They would need practical reasonableness, the ability to discern between options, and if they had phronesis in the first place, they would not have crafted their arguments as such. Hence, the implication is his interlocutors are unvirtuous. If they had phronesis, they could back up their reasons and illustrate their argument in a thought-out, serially ordered way rather than holding up examples as illustrations of why the particular should apply to the general. Polus makes this very point, holding up Archelaus as a particular example of how the general rule of justice should apply.³³ Refutation is the only way towards meaning, and exposing the flaws in our beliefs is a big step in this process.³⁴ Refutation reveals meaning, as it allows us to differentiate or assimilate our conceptions. The German word *Aufheben* once again comes to mind, as the revealing of meaning does not happen magically but is part of the thing in question and partly from us. It is a sublation, where a part is left behind, and another part integrates with the subject. Like melting marshmallows in a pot of butter. The marshmallows are not destroyed by the process, but become synthesised as part of a greater whole. The meaning is not derived explicitly from either, but has to come from both the object and the subject through synthesis. Refutation is a challenging of our position, and our hidden biases. Whether we are crafting a paper, or forming our conceptions about our world we need to be aware of what makes up this structure. Plato's

³² Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 71.

³³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 470d.

³⁴ Hans-Georg Gadamer's 'Tyranny of Hidden prejudices comes to mind in these dialogues, as the fore-meanings of the interlocutors are tested (*Truth and Method*, 282).

work in illustrating who the characters of Polus or Callicles are, not just in their words but how the things are said and what contributes to them as a person all matter because that background information is what informs and makes up who they are. We are our words and deeds, and Plato makes this very clear in the dialogues as he creates an image of the interlocutors.

Through refutation, better and superior either become different entities or have shared meaning; the only way to know which it is is to see the argument through for each case. Simply stating one or the other is not enough. The wrong motivation can still lead one to reach the intended grade on occasion; it cannot, however, lead one to understanding. Sophistry, because of its aim at attaining objects, produces the wrong kind of goals in the subject to compete with the aims of Plato's teachings. In the sense that those who participate and have been educated to mimic sophistry will be inherently unjust, lack temperance, and lack phronesis. Sophistry is undoubtedly proficient at what it aims for, which is the attainment of objects such as wealth or power, but it is not ultimately excellent at producing understanding. If one is excessively appetitive, they will necessarily be intemperate, as they will lack moderation to tame their desires. Meaning that those who are intemperate will have the wrong conception of virtue as the limit of good things. If one feels it is "just for the better to have a greater share than the worse"³⁵ they will not understand the contentment that comes from a well-ordered life. Nor would they understand who benefits more, the ruler or the ruled. The wrong education creates the wrong type of individual. If one is taught the best way of living is maximum flow,³⁶ they will be malcontent at the notion of limit. In an anachronistic perception, education is simply the set-up

³⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 483d.

³⁶ Plato, 484b.

of a fore-structure and how our beliefs or pre-judgements will naturally sway our decision-making. The wrong education then creates the wrong fore-structure and inhibits the subject's ability to find understanding in their world. The measure for how we determine what is best, philosophy or sophistry changes the outcome of the discussion and the result of the test; just as the strongman will not be best in the weakness competition, the measure used to weigh the variables will alter the outcome and change the conception. The aim of each thing, philosophy and sophistry, is opposed by the nature of each mode of thought. There is a time and a place for both, but only one is truly worthwhile in the pursuits related to knowledge, and by allotment, paper writing should only be pursued through the philosophic mode as the aim should be higher than the attainment of use-objects such as a grade. There is usefulness to find in sophistry, but just like virtue, it has limit.

Because words are our tools for obtaining objects, the way in which we employ our words can effect the outcome, and cause differences in our understanding of our world and how the world understands us as a subject. The usefulness of sophistry for attaining objects, and the reason that Meno for example is the way he is are intrinsically linked. Meno, taught by the sophists learned the knack of attaining objects, money, status, and power. He is the product of his type of education and is quite capable of producing eristical answers that would gain him favour from the right kinds of people to gain these objects from.³⁷ The motivations of the sophists are appetitive at best and self-indulgent at worst, as demonstrated in the Gorgias with the orator who is unjust.³⁸ How one is taught will either guide them towards or away from the love of the good.

³⁷ Plato, *Meno*, 72a.

³⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 460e.

The Road to Larisa section of the *Meno* is an example of this phenomenon, of the product of learning to produce eristical answers.³⁹ In the narrative, both knowledge of the road and possessing the correct opinion of the road can rightly guide the traveller to Larisa. So, as demonstrated by Socrates' example, we have a differentiation between inquiry (dialectic) and opinion (eristical). This differentiation also shows us the separation between motivation of knowledge and motivation of the grade, as one set of means and the other can both attain the same ends, but what is behind the means is quite different. The love of knowledge versus the love of power, or the demos, or money making or so forth. Both motivations, or loves, can lead to Larisa (the A grade), but knowing how to get there and stumbling upon it from opinion are quite different. There is a higher end that the student should be after, not simply their desire for a grade but the understanding of the things themselves and the practice in the experience of working out the meaning behind the words. If we wish to attain our specific ends, whatever they may be, we either need doxa or phronesis. If doxa is all that is available, we would have to possess the correct opinion every time to reach Larisa; alternatively, the ability to rationalise between differing reasons does not have this qualifier of needing to possess the correct thing each time preemptively. Because we are finite individuals, our ability to have correct opinions for all situations and reach Larisa, or in this circumstance, attain the grade we want, is unlikely. Due to our finitude, it is better to align ourselves with the alternate means of reaching Larisa and use our practical reasoning whenever possible.

There are no perfect arguments that cannot be refuted on some basis, there are no perfect collections of examples that we can hold up to explain a given situation as an ultimate truth and

³⁹ Plato, *Meno*, 97a.

this is especially true when we consider things such as academic papers from students.⁴⁰ Any number of factors detract from what one can do with the argumentation, from where one can draw information to the content limitations, such as word counts or requirements for a particular number of citations or sources. With each introduced element, the likelihood that one veers farther away from finding understanding increases. Each introduced part requires further assimilation into a unified whole. The additions inevitably make the task of differentiation harder to accomplish. Each element added would require that the student make a deliberate choice (phronesis), and inherently the 'correct' deliberate choice as the decisions are being weighed by the reader. It requires that the student introduce and then serially and, in order, move through the reasons, and give a rational account for those reasons they included. The additional reasons from citations then open the student up to further avenues for refutation, because not only do they need to be able to explain their own decisions, but the decisions of others and why they included those ideas from others in the paper.

Each individual part needs to be discussed and put forward so that it speaks towards a unified whole that the hypothesis shows our intentions of uncovering. If each individual part does not speak towards the unified whole it will only speak for itself, and will run into the issue of the A to B to C paper instead of the A-B-C where the parts are linked. If the parts are linked, it speaks towards a greater whole and we have proceeded through the dialogue with the correct intentions. We should have demonstrated frankness, kind regard of the self, and knowledge. The goal is to construct a paper through our words that constructs the thing within another person.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?* 71.

⁴¹ Hans Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 104.

This necessitates that the writer is able to create recollection within the reader, to summon up all the necessary information like the slave boy in the *Meno*. For a single idea posited by a paper is not knowable on its own, as any insight requires an entire nexus of ideas to be involved.⁴² The writers words have to be carefully linked to draw out the correct meaning and the sum of the ideas needs to unify as the whole. The paper is at once on two levels. First between the writer and the paper, where the writer must work to elicit the correct meaning for themselves, and then again where the ideas must be conveyed in such a way as to draw out the same meaning for the reader.

⁴² Hans Georg Gadamer, *Dialogue and Dialectic*, 119.

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