Plato's Philosophical Method: a Unified Interpretation of Dialectic in the *Phaedrus*

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Abstract: What is Plato's view concerning philosophical method? Plato thought that we should philosophize by using dialectic. The "progressive" interpretation of Plato's dialectic holds that the word 'Dialectic' is an umbrella term to cover three distinct philosophical methods, namely, the method of *elenchus*, the method of hypothesis and the method of collection and division. Yet this interpretation leads to an unfruitful disagreement over Plato's view of dialectic that clouds our understanding of Plato's metaphilosophy. The goal of this paper is to outline a "unified" interpretation of Plato's dialectic by arguing that Plato was committed in the *Phaedrus* to the view that dialectic is the method of finding correct definitions of "controversial words", which articulates *elenchus*, hypothesis, and collection & division as dialectical procedures.

Keywords: metaphilosophy, Plato's dialectic, the *Phaedrus*, *elenchus*, hypothesis, collection & division.

1. Introduction

How should we do philosophy? According to Plato, we should philosophize by using dialectic. Yet most scholars disagree over Plato's view of dialectic. For example, Irwin holds that Plato's dialectic should be identified with the method of elenchus: "[i]n the Socratic dialogues the discussion often ends in puzzlement and apparent confusion. But in the *Protagoras* and *Gorgias*, and in many later dialogues, Plato does explicitly what he does implicitly in the earlier dialogues, using the Socratic method to argue for positive philosophical positions; he regards dialectic as the primary method of philosophical inquiry." (Irwin 1988, 7) By contrast, Benson holds that one should identify Plato's dialectic with the method of hypothesis: "we maintain that the method of hypothesis as it is described in the *Meno* and the *Phaedo* and applied in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, and *Republic*, continues to be Plato's recommended method of philosophical inquiry and learning. Indeed, dialectic is the method of hypothesis, correctly employed." (Benson 2015, 238) What leads to this radical and unfruitful disagreement over Plato's view of dialectic?

The disagreement over Plato's view of dialectic is due to a widespread interpretation, which holds that Plato used 'dialectic' as an umbrella word to cover three distinct methods of philosophical inquiry as follows:

The method of elenchus (E): it is the method that examines the consistency of our doxastic commitments. It is displayed in the *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, *Philebus* and *Charmides*.

The method of hypothesis (H): it is the method that examines a conjecture in relation to a non-hypothetical first principle. It is displayed in the *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Republic* and *Theaetetus*.

The method of collection and division (C&D): it is the method that begins by gathering into one category a concept under inquiry; then, it examines whether this categorization is in accordance with reality establishing the definition of the concept. It is displayed in the *Phaedrus*, *Sophist* and *Statesman*.

The gist of this interpretation is that Plato changed his fundamental view about dialectic at one or more points of his work in order to overcome its weaknesses and shortcomings. As Robinson (1953:70) puts it "[t]he fact is that the word 'dialectic' had a strong tendency in Plato to mean 'the ideal method, whatever that may be'. In so far as it was thus merely an honorific title, Plato applied it at every stage of his life to whatever seemed to him at the moment the most hopeful procedure".

We shall call this interpretation the "progressive" interpretation of Plato's view of dialectic and we shall formulate it compactly as follows:

(PI) Plato used 'Dialectic' as an umbrella word to cover (E), (H) and (C&D), which are three distinct philosophical methods diachronically developed.

It now becomes clear in what sense Irwin and Benson disagree over Plato's dialectic: those assuming (PI) are committed to debate over whether Plato's dialectic should be identified with either (E), (H) or (C&D). Accordingly, (PI) poses a problem concerning our understanding of Plato's metaphilosophy.

The goal of this paper is to outline an alternative to (PI) by arguing that Plato's *Phaedrus* contains the raw materials for a single coherent view of dialectic. More precisely, based on our reading of the *Phaedrus*, we propose a "unified" interpretation of Plato's dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry. We shall formulate it as follows:

(UI) Plato construed 'Dialectic' (*dialektikē technē*) in the *Phaedrus* as the method of finding correct definitions, which articulates (E), (H) and (C&D) as dialectical procedures.

We will proceed as follows. In section 2, we will argue that the *Phaedrus* (261a-266b) provides an account of dialectic as the method of finding the correct definitions of "controversial" words. Under this interpretation, dia-

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lectic is characterized by its goal. Plato's *Phaedrus* explicitly raises a question about definitions (i.e. "What is love?"). Given a certain word such as 'Love', a definition of 'Love' expresses what it is *Love* and, thus, allow us to clearly determine whether, say, 'Phaedrus loves Lysias' is either true or false. Hence, the goal of dialectic is to help us move from ignorance to knowledge by finding correct definitions of certain words such as 'Justice', 'Virtue', etc. Since neither (E), (H) or (C&D) can achieve this goal in isolation, it will become clear that none of them can be a proper method of philosophical inquiry. Yet they can be regarded as necessary dialectical procedures. Finally, in section 3, taking into account that from the fact that Plato did not *mention* (E), (H) in the *Phaedrus* it does not follow that he did not *use* them, we will make explicit how the *Phaedrus* (261a-266b) implicitly articulates (E), (H) and (C&D) as dialectical procedures.

2. Unifiying the Method

The goal of this section is to argue that the *Phaedrus* contains an account of dialectic as the method of finding correct definitions for certain words, namely, "controversial words". We begin by discussing 263a1. Here Plato distinguished between uncontroversial (*homonoētikos*) and controversial (*stasiōtikos*) words. For example, "when we say 'iron' or 'silver', we all understand the same thing" (*hotan tis onoma eipēi sidērou ē argurou ar' ou to auto pantes dienoēthēmen*; 263a5).[1] By contrast, when we say 'Justice' or 'Goodness', "we disagree with each other and with ourselves" (*ti d'hotan dikaiou ē agathou; ouk allos allēi pheretai, kai amphisbētoumen allēlois te kai hemin autois*; 263a10). What is the point of Plato's distinction between uncontroversial and controversial words?

Let us attempt to shed light on Plato's distinction by way of a simple example. Suppose that Jane and Joe are dinning. While eating her salad, Jane raises the question whether the fork she is using is made of silver. Plato's distinction makes clear that such question poses no issue, for the correct application of the predicate 'is a silver fork' is uncontroversial. It is clear that one can determine whether a fork is a silver fork or not by a simple method (e.g. by performing an acid test). Now suppose that Joe raises the question whether the death penalty is just. Plato's distinction makes clear that this question poses a serious issue, for the correct application of the predicate 'is just' is controversial. Indeed, in contrast with Jane's silver fork case, it is not possible to determine whether the death penalty is just or not by a simple method.

The essential point of Plato's distinction, as our comparison suggests, is that the resolution of disagreements concerning the use of certain words such as 'Iron', 'Odd', 'Older', etc., is uncontroversial while the resolution of disagreements concerning the use of some abstract nouns such as 'Love', 'Justice', 'Beauty', etc., is controversial. It is worth to notice that Plato perspicuously made the same point in the *Euthyphro* 7b-d when he presented two cases in which disagreement is easily resolved. First, Socrates says that if we disagree about "which of two numbers were the greater", we can easily reach an agreement by using arithmetic. Second, Socrates says that if we disagree about "the relative size of things", "we should quickly put an end to the disagreement by measuring the disputed quantity". By contrast, Socrates says, "Is it not about right and wrong, and noble and disgraceful, and good and bad? Are not these the questions about which you and we and other people become enemies, when we do become enemies, because we differ about them and cannot reach any satisfactory agreement?" (*Euthyphro* 7d). Hence, both in the *Euthyphro* and the *Phaedrus*, Plato suggested that the application of some words, for example, 'Justice', 'Good', etc., are a source of puzzlement and that such puzzlement is the source of philosophical inquiry. A such, philosophical inquiry is about controversial words.

How can we resolve disagreements about controversial words? In the *Phaedrus*, Plato suggested that we disagree about controversial words because words such as 'Justice' are equivocal in the sense that they signify similar but different experiences for every speaker. Hence, we disagree about the *meaning* of such words. For example, if we disagree about whether the death penalty is just, we disagree because we hold opposing interpretations of 'Justice' or, in other words, we hold opposing views of *what justice is*. Notice that by introducing a distinction concerning words (*onomata*) Plato suggested that our disagreement over a controversial word *F* can be resolved by identifying what *F*-ness is. Consequently, controversial words can become univocal by *signifying* Forms[2]. Therefore, the most plausible hypothesis concerning what would constitute the resolution of a disagreement about controversial words in the *Phaedrus* is the following:

(I) For every controversial predicate *F* there is definition *D* such that *D* correctly defines *F* and *D* resolves the disagreement about *F*.[3]

The main thrust of (I) is what Dancy refers to as the "Intellectualist Assumption" (Dancy 2004, 36).[4] Following Dancy, we shall formulate this assumption as follows:

(IA) To know that . . . *F* —, one must be able to say what the *F*, or *F*-ness, is.

"Here '. . . *F* —' is to be any declarative sentence containing '*F*' (or '*F*-ness,' or 'the *F*'). For example, if '*F*' is 'pious,' then '. . . *F* —' could be 'this action is pious' or 'piety is a good thing.'" (Dancy 2006, 72) We should note that saying what the *F* or *F*-ness is amounts to *defining* it.[5] Thus, if Plato endorsed (IA) in the *Phaedrus*, which is plausible given Plato's distinction between controversial and uncontroversial words, then dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry should help us move from ignorance to knowledge by finding correct definitions of controversial words.

It is crucial to note that the need for a method of philosophical inquiry reflects an asymmetry between language and reality: Forms make words meaningful and, consequently, propositions involving those predicates are true when Forms are instantiated. Yet definitions cannot make Forms be. Hence, whether the definition of *F* is correct depends on how the Form *F* is. Therefore, what is at issue is not the possibility of defining controversial words, but the existence of a *reliable* method, namely, a

method that takes into account the asymmetry between predicates and Forms. This desideratum for the method can be expressed as follows:

(II) For every definition *D* of a predicate *F*, *D* is correct if and only if *D* corresponds to the Form of *F* (i.e. *D* says what it is *F*).

However, since we do not have direct cognitive access to Forms, (II) poses a new problem: How can one determine the correctness of a definition reached by the method? For example, consider a debate over the claim that virtue is knowledge. If virtue is knowledge, a correct definition of virtue would include knowledge. As such, we acknowledge that a definition of virtue is correct if and only if such definition corresponds to the Form of virtue. Yet what is at stake in reaching a correct definition is the feasibility of the method. At this point Plato's *antilogikē technē* (*Phaedrus* 261d) takes a central role. Dialecticians begin with a candidate *definiens* (i.e. a suitable expression putted forward to define adequately some controversial predicate *F*) that must be tested by giving and asking for reasons. Accordingly, in order to conclude that virtue is knowledge, this claim must stand up to critical examination or, in other words, it must be satisfactorily defended against objections. Hence, the *antilogikē technē* is a necessary condition for the correctness of Plato's method because it is the practice of giving and asking for reasons concerning a candidate *definiens*.

Finally, based on the above discussion, it is in order to consider the following question: can (E), (H) or (C&D) be identified with dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry as construed by Plato in the *Phaedrus*? If dialectic is understood in terms of its goal, namely, to help us move from ignorance to knowledge by finding correct definitions of controversial words, it becomes clear that (E), (H) or (C&D) cannot be identified with dialectic because neither of them can meet such goal in isolation. A caveat is in order, though. One should note that (E) can help us move from ignorance to knowledge in the sense of making us aware that we do not know what we assumed to know. In other words, it achieves progress by identifying mistaken knowledge claims. Since (E) makes progress in the sense of giving us knowledge of ignorance, (E) would not be a method of philosophical inquiry *per se* but another procedure: a procedure that allows puzzlement and, thus, shows the necessity of inquiry in the presence of ignorance and legitimate controversy. Likewise, (H) can help us to conjecture a candidate *definiens*, and (C&D) can help us by postulating a genera and testing a candidate *definiens* in terms of "cutting" according to the natural joints of reality. Yet it is evident that each procedure in isolation is not enough for a movement from inquiry to knowledge.

Therefore, neither (E), (H) and (C&D) are methods of philosophical inquiry *per se*. Consequently, it is at least possible to conceive (E), (H) and (C&D) as procedures of a general method of philosophical inquiry. As such, it is possible to conceive them as *dialectical procedures*. Hence, the essential issue now is to show how these procedures are implicitly articulated in the *Phaedrus*. And this is what we shall do in the next section.

3. Articulating the Method

The goal of this section is to locate (E), (H) and (C&D) into the general picture of dialectic we are advocating. Yet it might be objected from the outset that Plato did not mention (E), (H) as dialectical procedures in the *Phaedrus*. Hence, there is no textual evidence supporting our hypothesis. However, it is important to acknowledge that from the fact that Plato did not *mention* (E), (H) as dialectical procedures in the *Phaedrus* it does not follow that he did not *use* them.[6] In order to lend plausibility to this thesis, let us consider an example, namely, Plato's use of (C&D) in *Euthyphro* (11e – 12e). After repeated failures on the part of Euthyphro to give an account of piety, Socrates remarked that one can characterize the even as that part of number which is divisible into two equal parts. Then, he invited Euthyphro to characterize piety by saying what part of justice it is. Using a different terminology, one can say that Socrates introduced above the basic roles of genus, differentia and species, respectively: number, divisible into two equal parts, and even. This becomes clear since number is a kind and Socrates proposes to treat even as a species. Then he adds to the genus "divisible into two equal parts" functioning as the differentia characterizing the species. Euthyphro tried to follow Socrates by answering that the pious is the part of the just concerned with assistance (*therapeian*) to the gods, while that concerned with assistance to men is the other part (*Euthyphro* 12e). Euthyphro failed to support such characterization since he was not able to offer a plausible interpretation of the assistance one renders to the gods. Thus, as the textual evidence from the *Euthyphro* shows, Socrates uses but not mentions (C&D), which some scholars assume to be a method developed in the *Phaedrus* and the late dialogues. Accordingly, we will examine textual evidence from the *Phaedrus* showing that Plato used (E), (H) as dialectical procedures.

In the sequel, in order to show how the dialectical procedures are implicitly articulated, we shall consider two methodological movements. First, the movement from puzzlement to inquiry, which concerns how Plato's distinction between controversial and uncontroversial words relates to (E). Second, the movement from inquiry to knowledge, which concerns *procedural* questions concerning the method of finding correct definitions of controversial words.

3.1 From puzzlement to inquiry: *Elenchus*

Here we will elaborate on the relation between the notion of controversial words and (E), namely, puzzlement. Let us begin by briefly describing how (E) is usually practiced in Plato's dialogues: let Proponent and Opponent be two speakers and let them start from a thesis, *A*, accepted by Proponent. Then, Opponent should ask questions that Proponent can answer by "yes" or "no" leading Proponent to accept further theses, say *B* and *C*. By using *B* and *C* as premises of an argument concluding $\neg A$, Opponent intends to show that although *A*, *B* and *C* are individually plausible, together constitute an *inconsistent* cluster of

theses. As a result, Proponent and Opponent reached an *aporia*.

Is (E) a refutative technique? We agree with Castelnérac & Marion (2009) that (E) does not aim at *refuting* the initial thesis. As such, (E) puts the emphasis not on whether the theses under examine are true or false but rather in whether we can find an *inconsistency*. Following this view about (E), it is plausible to claim that its purpose is to help proponents to realize that they need to examine critically the beliefs at stake. This is a key element involved in philosophical inquiry: if belief revision in respect to a topic is unnecessary, there is no point in inquiring about it.

Plato's point concerning belief revision is not superfluous because speakers standing from the first-person perspective would consider their opponents to be mistaken since they presume their own beliefs are true. That is why we need a distinction between uncontroversial and controversial *words* and a technical way to help those who presume their beliefs are true to realize that they are committed to inconsistent beliefs. Hence, the rationale of (E) is not to claim victory over an opponent by refutation. On the contrary, its rationale is to make us realize that our beliefs concerning a controversial word like 'Justice' are inconsistent. This means that those who employ (E) help their opponents to realize that they only know that some or all of the individually plausible propositions at stake are false, because together they conform an inconsistent premise-set. So constituted, (E) is relevant for inquiry as far as it makes us aware of the fact that we held inconsistent views and thus motivates us to revise our beliefs. As such, (E) shows us the origin and motivation of philosophical inquiry. Thus, we agree with Politis' interpretation that definitional inquiries "are set in motion by an *aporia* – in the sense of a particular problem – and it is the inability to answer the *aporia* that motivates and justifies the demand for a definition."[7] (Politis 2015, 2).

Therefore, Plato's distinction between uncontroversial and controversial words articulates the relevance and importance of (E), one of the main aspects of dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry since it ignites a movement from puzzlement to inquiry. How to move forwards from inquiry to knowledge?

3.2 From inquiry to knowledge

Let *F* be a controversial word under dispute and suppose that Proponent and Opponent reached an *aporia* concerning *F*. Then, their inability to resolve the *aporia* puzzles them and motivates them to start inquiring about the nature of *F*. Proponent and Opponent aim at defining *F*. Given this goal, we should ask three procedural questions:

(i) How one is to find the category to which *F* belongs?
(ii) How one is to find a suitable candidate *definiens* for *F*?
(iii) How one is to assess *F*'s suitable candidate *definiens*?

In the sequel, we shall show that the answers to (i), (ii) and (iii) are Collection (hereafter (C)), (H) and Division (hereafter (D)) respectively.

3.2.1. How one is to find the category to which *F* belongs?

Where does an investigation into a controversial word such as 'Love' begin? Plato told us in the *Phaedrus* that skilled dialecticians seek to concur about the Form to which they apply the predicate 'Love', and they aim to find a correct definition of 'Love'. This means that they aim to find a definition that is exhaustive and informative. If a definition is exhaustive and informative, it should help us grasp the property or set of properties that make a Form, say, the Form of Love, what it is.

What sorts of individuals does a general terms pick out? In the Socratic dialogues, Socrates asks "What is *F*?", where *F* stands for general terms such as 'Justice', 'Virtue', etc., and the interlocutor often answers by listing items he regards as instances of the general term under inquiry. Evidently, a definition in terms of a list is neither exhaustive nor informative. The point is that Socrates wants to know the common feature that all the items on the list share and what makes all the items on the list instances of one Form. Following this point, inquirers should "see" or "grasp" the common feature of the objects falling under certain kind.

In the *Phaedrus*, Plato called the technique to grasp the common features of the objects falling under a predicate (e.g. red roses falling under the predicate 'Red'), and the common features of predicates falling under a category (e.g. '*x* is a cat' falling under the category '*x* is a feline'), *sunagōgē*[8]:

> That of perceiving and bringing together in one idea the scattered particulars, that one may make clear by definition the particular thing which he wishes to explain; just as now, in speaking of Love, we said what he is and defined it, whether well or ill. Certainly by this means the discourse acquired clearness and consistency. (*Phdr*., 265d).[9]

The first point to note about (C) is that it can happen from the outset of an inquiry and, as we shall show later, in the course of any division. By employing (C), a dialectician gathers a number of separate objects or types of objects (*ta pollachēi diesparmena*) into one Form (*mia idea*).[10]It becomes clear that the dialectician uses (C) to establish the Form or category to which the *definiendum* (*hekastos*) belongs. For example, consider the controversial word 'Love'. Its *mia idea*, the Form to which *love* belongs, is *mania*. Our interpretation of 263a is that both (C) and (D) are concerned with general terms, and specifically, controversial words. Now, the phrase "*eis mian te idean sunorōnta agein ta pollachēi diesparmena*" is about gathering a plurality into "one form''. However, for the method, only controversial words involving certain plurality are relevant. In addition, predicates convey Forms or categories rather than particular objects.

Paragraph 265d indicates that what is dispersed in many ways is joined in order to establish a *mia idea*. The concept of *mia idea* is a relational one. A *mia idea* is always the *mia idea* of a *definiendum*. For example, *mania* is the *mia idea* of Love. As this example illustrates, the *mia idea* of *F*-particulars is a common feature share by all of them. In turn, the *mia idea* of the Form *F*, the Form that collects all *F*-particulars, is a common feature shared

by all kinds to which *F* belongs, say, the *G*-Form. For example, consider a bouquet of red roses. The *mia idea* of the rose-particulars is denoted by the word 'Rose' and the *mia idea* of 'Rose', a Form, is denoted by 'Rosaceae'. Of course, the *mia idea* cannot be an accidental common feature, for example, redness, but a general and essential feature.

How (C) is articulated as a dialectical procedure? Our position takes as starting point a corollary of the notion of *mia idea*: the *mia idea* of *F* is a necessary condition to be an *F*, but not a sufficient condition. For example, it is necessary to be a feline to be a cat, but it is certainly not sufficient. In other words, the goal of (C) is to guarantee that our definition is *exhaustive* (i.e. that it includes *all* instances of *F*). As such, (C) is akin to a process of categorization. For example, dialecticians grasp instances of love by inspection and generalize that every instance of love is also an instance of *mania*. However, the converse does not hold. Thus, love is *not* every other type of mania. Hence, to say of love that it is a *mania* is to say that *mania* is the *mia idea* of love. However, the Form of Mania is divided into two sorts: beneficial and harmful. Thus, if one compares all instances of love and all instances of gluttony, but one does not specify which sort of *mania* is each one of them, then it is uninformative both to say "love is *mania*" and "gluttony is *mania*".

It becomes clear that the *mia idea* of *F* is not its definition but rather certain part of its definition: in defining *F*, the *mia idea* of *F* satisfies the condition of exhaustiveness but not the condition of informativeness. For example, the definition of love is not mania *simpliciter* but "certain form of mania" (*manian tina*, *Phaedrus* 265a6), of course. Evidently, this means that *F* is a part of its *mia idea* and what is left of the *mia idea* is *not F*.

3.2.2. How one is to find a suitable candidate *definiens* for *F*?

In this section, we shall argue that (H) is the procedure to find a suitable candidate *definiens* for certain controversial predicate *F*. Hence, we begin by defending that (H) is the meeting point between (C&D) in the *Phaedrus*. Our hope is to show that if one accepts this thesis, one can offer an organic picture of the method, and that this picture is attractive enough to lend plausibility to our contention. We base our case for the thesis that (H) is the meeting point between (C) and (D) on *Phaedrus* (236b), (237b7-d3) and (238d8-e2).[11] Our strategy is to show that in these passages Plato *uses*, but not mentions, (H) in order to make a transition between (C) and (D).

We shall begin by assessing (236b): "I will allow you to take it for granted [*hupotithesthai*] that the lover is less sane that the non-lover […]".[12] Plato does not mention the noun 'hypothesis' here, yet he uses the verb *hupotithēmi* to convey "to take for granted". In addition, it is clear that the candidate *definiens* that Socrates is going to take for granted is that lovers are less sane than non-lovers. The essential point we would like to draw from the above passage is that in order for the speech to take course it is required to postulate a candidate expression that defines adequately the *definiendum*. And this requisite is satisfied by postulating a candidate *definiens* for examination

Next, we would like to draw attention to Plato's use of *mia archē* and *homologiāi themenoi horon* in 237b7-d3.[13] According to Socrates, it is a mistake not to agree upon a candidate *definiens* from the outset of the speech. The parts involved in the discussion should not assume that they already know the subject matter since the aim of the method is to reach a correct definition. Accordingly, the first step in this direction is to find the *mia idea* of the *definiendum*. However, as we have shown in the previous section, the *mia idea* of *F* satisfies the condition of exhaustiveness but not the condition of informativeness. As a result, we need a candidate *definiens* in order to start a process of deliberation. The reason for this is that without such candidate *definiens* it would be impossible to start dividing in order to find a correct definition. Hence, the point we have attempted to draw from (237b7-d3) is that dialecticians reach the candidate *definiens* by way of (H).

Finally, let us connect this last point with (238 d8-e2). In (237d3-4), Socrates agrees with Phaedrus that the *mia idea* of love is *epithumia* (desire), which is evident and commonly accepted (*hapanti dēlon*). However, it is clear that simply saying that love is desire is uninformative. Accordingly, Socrates continues by putting forward a candidate *definiens* (*eirētai te kai hōristai*, 238d8): love is irrational desire upon beautiful things (see 238b6-c4). Hackforth remarks about this *definiens*:

> It is not said that ὕβρις is a Form of ἐπιθυμία: rather it is the name of that psychical state which results from the victory of irrational desire for pleasure over rational belief, which aims at good; nevertheless the connexion of ὕβρις with ἐπιθυμία is so close that the speaker treats the species of the one as species of the other, and in the end arrives at a definition of love which, as were led to expect at the outset, makes it a Form of desire, and carefully states its specific difference" (1952: 40-41).

The crucial point, as Hackford remarks, is that Socrates reaches a candidate *definiens* of love that carefully includes its specific difference. Yet we contend that this particular move, which is made possible by (C), is the product of (H). The purpose of using (C) is to find the *mia idea* of the *definiendum*. In turn, the purpose of using (H) is to find a suitable a candidate *definiens*. For it is clear, and this is the essential point here, that without such candidate *definiens* it would be impossible to start dividing in order to find a correct definition. Indeed, in the *palinode* Socrates makes Phaedrus realize that the candidate *definiens* he putted forward in 238d8 is incorrect.

In sum, (H) is in the *Phaedrus* an interim step between (C), the process of agreeing concerning the *mia idea* of the *definiendum*, and (D), the process of testing the candidate *definiens* advanced in (H) by dividing it "according to the natural joints" of the Forms. Thus, it is necessary to clarify the import of (D) in what follows in order to get a clearer picture of the general theory of the method of philosophical inquiry in the *Phaedrus*.

3.2.3 How one is to assess F's suitable candidate *definiens*?

In (264c), Socrates introduces a criterion of adequacy for a good speech in order to clarify his criticisms of Lysias' speech, namely, "organic unity". He says: "But we do think you will agree to this, that every discourse must be organized, like a living being, with a body of its own, as it were, so as not to be headless or footless, but to have a middle and members, composed in fitting relation to each other and to the whole."[14] There are "two procedures", which contribute to the organic unity of a speech. First, one should begin, as Socrates did in his first speech, with a *definiens* of the controversial predicate under discussion because this allows for "the speech to progress with clarity and internal consistency" (265d). Of course, there is no *definiens* without a *mia idea*. Hence, a candidate *definiens* purports adequately to define the predicate under discussion and is comprised of both a *mia idea* and a difference that corresponds to the *definiendum*; we have argued that dialecticians make this step by means of (C) and (H). Second, one should proceed to test the correctness of a *definiens* by dividing it "according to the natural joints" of the Forms (*kat' arthra hēi pephuken*) (*Phdr*., 265e-266b). The goal of this final section is to elaborate on this claim and, hence, attempt to understand how (D) works.

We shall take as the starting point of our discussion of (D) Plato's image of the butcher in *Phdr*.265e-266b: dialecticians should perform (D) at the natural joints of a Form. Otherwise, it is like hacking off bits like a bad butcher. Accordingly, dialecticians divide the *mia idea* according to the Form into two parts: a sinister part (*skaios*) and a proper part (*dexia*). Plato's use of the terms *skaios* and *dexia* is evocative of opposition. For example, since madness is the *mia idea* of love, love is a Form of madness (*manian …tina* 265a8). Then, in order to know what kind of madness love is, dialecticians should cut madness itself at its natural joints. The outcome of this cut gives us the proper positive part of love or "divine madness", and, by opposition, its *sinister* negative part or "human madness". Yet the Form of divine madness divides into four parts, namely, prophetic, inspirational, poetic and erotic. Therefore, love is erotic (divine) madness (*erōtikē mania* 265b2).

Plato used the verbs *diatemnein* and *temnein* to refer to the action of dividing. If we give primacy to the verb *temnein*, the cuts can be in two, three or more parts. By contrast, if the verb *diatemnein* prevails, the cuts must be in two parts. Therefore, 265a8-265b2 lends plausibility to a polytomous view about (D) while 265e-266b lends plausibility to a dichotomous view about (D). In order to avoid contradiction, we shall lend plausibility to the following interpretation: every division is dichotomous in a *logical* sense but further polytomous divisions could be made depending on the nature of the Form in question. Let us elaborate on this proposal.

How to interpret philosophically Plato's image of the butcher and Plato's use of the terms *skaios* and *dexia* in (265e)? We interpret these elements as meaning that the dialectician must divide methodically, that is, with certain rational principle in mind. Accordingly, if a dialectician "cuts" correctly, he will find the "sinister part" of a predicate F, which is its contradictory, namely, not-F, and "the proper part" of a predicate F, which is its content. In other words, the proper part of the definition of a controversial predicate F is identical with itself and thus none of the objects that fall under F also fall under not-F.

Hence, we interpret the "sinister part" of a predicate F and the "proper part" of a predicate F as contradictory opposites. One should distinguish between two kinds of opposites. The first kind is contrary opposites, for example, "the rose is red" and "the rose is green". The second kind is contradictory opposites, for example, "the rose is red" and "the rose is not red."[15] A pair of contrary opposites are mutually inconsistent but not necessarily exhaustive. Hence, they may be simultaneously false but they cannot be simultaneously true. For example, it is not true that all apples are red or green. Some apples are yellow. However, no apple can be red *and* green in respect of the same part of it and at the same time. By contrast, a pair of contradictory opposites are mutually inconsistent and necessarily exhaustive. Hence, they cannot be simultaneously true nor simultaneously false; one must be true and the other must be false. For example, an apple is either red or not red in respect of the same part of it, in relation to the same thing and at the same time. Thus, the difference between contrary and contradictory opposites is that a pair of contrary opposites are exclusive, but need not be exhaustive while a pair of contradictory opposites are exclusive and exhaustive.

Our point is that a positive "proper" part of a predicate, its content, always stands correlative to a negative "sinister" part. In other words, to define a predicate in some way or other is to contradistinguish it from that to which that definition does not apply. It makes no sense to attribute a feature to something if this feature does not "cut", divide, or distinguish what it involves from what it does not involve. Now, if the "proper part" and the "sinister part" of a predicate F are contradictory opposites, that is, the "proper part" involves what F is and its "sinister part" involves what F is not, then the principle behind (D) is the principle of non-contradiction (PNC). This principle says that contradictory predicates cannot belong to the same object at the same time and in the same respect. In other words, contradictory opposites are mutually inconsistent.

Hence, (PNC) is the principle granting correct cuts or cuts according to the "natural joints". The reason this seems to be so is that if one cuts like an inexperienced butcher, one might include in the definition of F features that are not part of the content of F. In other words, one might conflate what F is with what F is not. This confusion is in a sense "sinister" or negative for cognition and action since entertaining in the meaning of F *what* F *is not* derives a contradiction. For example, consider a proponent and an opponent inquiring into the definition of 'Whale'. They both agree that if x is a whale, then x is a marine animal. Then, the proponent proposes the following "cut" to the candidate *definiens*: if x is a whale, then x is a fish. The opponent rejects this "cut" as inadequate. Indeed, he claims that although all whales are marine animals, whales are not fish but mammals: whales are warm blooded while fish are cold-blooded. Whales use their blowholes to breathe air with lungs while fish get oxygen

directly from the water through their gills. Whales have follicles and hair on their smooth skin while fish have scales. Whales milk their babies while fish cannot.

As our example illustrates, a bad dialectician is like a bad butcher: they both make wrong cuts by including in the definition of *F* features that are not part of the content of *F*. Therefore, in a *logical* sense, every cut is dichotomous.

The view that every cut is dichotomous in a logical sense has notable advantages over the view that every cut is dichotomous in a metaphysical sense. First, it does not contradict the textual evidence showing polytomous cuts. Second, if one accepts that every cut is dichotomous and it reflects the ontological nature of the Form in question, it follows that every Form is a complex object having a positive part and a negative part and that those parts are ontologically substantial. A moment of reflexion shows that these consequences entail serious problems. On the one hand, one would be committed to negative Forms; hence, one would be committed to assign truth-values to sentences containing negative predicates such as "There are non-dogs". On the other hand, the endorsement of negative Forms generates a multiplication of entities without necessity.

Finally, having explained the logical sense of dichotomous divisions, let us consider the sense in which it is possible to admit polytomous cuts by returning to a previous example. The Form of divine madness divides into four parts, namely, prophetic, inspirational, poetic and erotic. Hence, this is a clear case of a polytomous cut since there are undeniable instances of prophetic madness, inspirational madness, poetic madness and erotic madness.[16] Thus, a dichotomous cut would be subject to counterexamples. For example, if one were to cut divine madness into two kinds, say, prophetic and inspirational, rather than in four parts, an interlocutor could offer a counterexample, say, a case of poetic madness, and show that the use of (D) has been inadequate. Therefore, cuts can be polytomous in a metaphysical sense.

One might object that the example of madness can be interpreted as a counterexample to the claim that every cut is dichotomous in a logical sense, for there is no obvious "logical cut" in such example. However, this objection falls short because there is a trivial dichotomous cut in such example: one can cut divine madness into erotic divine madness and non-erotic divine madness. Indeed, love is *neither* prophecy, inspiration *nor* poetry. In this sense, it is clear that the proper part of love concerning divine madness is erotic in *opposition* to everything that is divine madness but is *not* erotic. Hence, Socrates defines love this way.

4. Conclusion

In this paper, we have argued that (UI) is a suitable interpretation of Plato's view of dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry. Starting from Plato's distinction between controversial and uncontroversial words, we proceeded to characterize dialectic in terms of its goal, which is to help us move from ignorance to knowledge by finding correct definitions of controversial words. We noted that the need for a method of philosophical inquiry reflects an asymmetry between words and Forms: Forms make words meaningful but definitions cannot make Forms be. Accordingly, we concluded that since neither (E), (H) or (C&D) can achieve this goal in isolation, none of them can be a proper method of philosophical inquiry. Then, we made explicit how the *Phaedrus* (261a-266b) implicitly articulates (E), (H) and (C&D) as dialectical procedures. In particular, we showed that dialectics involves two cognitive movements: a movement from puzzlement to inquiry and a movement from inquiry to knowledge. We showed that the inability of speakers to resolve an *aporia* about a controversial word such as 'Justice' puzzles them and motivates them to start inquiring about the nature of 'Justice', and that speakers can achieve this change by way of (E). Once speakers have acknowledged that they should start inquiring, they aim to move from inquiry to knowledge by defining 'Justice'. Given this goal, speakers should proceed by identifying the category to which 'Justice' belongs, finding a suitable candidate *definiens* for 'Justice', and, finally, assessing the suitable candidate *definiens* for 'Justice'. We showed that speakers can fulfill these tasks by using (C), (H) and (D) respectively.

In sum, we have attempted to show that (UI) eliminates an interpretative gap that obscures our understanding of dialectic as Plato's philosophical method. In this sense, we have attempted to show that (UI) is more economic and more explicative than (PI). To be sure, exploring further implications and objections to (UI) are much more intricate projects. Here we hope only to have offered some reasons to believe that (UI) can shed light on Plato's view of dialectic as the method of philosophical inquiry.

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Notes

[1] "263a3-4 τῶν τοιούτων: the reference is initially unclear, as Ph.'s response confirms (a5); but S. clarifies in a moment (a6) that he is talking about words (i.e. nouns, ὀνόματα)'' Yunis (2011: 190).
[2] This conclusion suggests the view that Forms are meanings, which means that Forms are discovered by answering the question "What general terms are meaningful?". As such, a meaningful general term signifies a Form, which is indeed the meaning of that general term.
[3] One shall note that (I) does not entail that philosophical disagreement is *merely* about meaning. The crucial point is that if one does not understand the meaning of 'Justice', then one cannot determine whether the proposition expressed by the utterance of, say, "The death penalty is just" is true or false. As this example illustrates, it is necessary to understand the meaning of controversial words in order to determine whether the sentences in which they occur are *true* or *false*.
[4] This assumption is also referred to as the "Principle of the Priority of Definition".
[5] See Benson (1990) for another compelling defence of (IA).
[6] As we saw in the introduction, Irwin used this type of argument concerning (E); see (Irwin 1988,7).
[7] We shall note, though, that Politis restricts his interpretation to Plato's early dialogues.
[8] This is the aspect of the method we have referred by '(C)'.
[9] Many scholars approach *sunagōgē* in relation to paragraph (249b-c), which concerns *anamnēsis*. Both 265d and 249b-c display the verb *sunaireō* because both refer to the action of assembling the manifold in a unity. The difference is that the paragraph including *anamnesis* presents a general description of *sunagōgē*, without considering it as a method or a procedure. Although the act of gathering consists in unifying the manifold by reasoning, in 249b-c it is not mentioned how this occurs. We agree with Griswold (1986:116), who have strongly argued against identifying "recollection" with "collection". For a discussion of this issue, see (Author, 2017).
[10] Collection has been interpreted as "intuition" by F. M. Cornford (1960: 186-7, 267) and W.K.C. Guthrie (1975). Richard Robinson (1953) has interpreted (C) as a systematic procedure accompanied by intuition. W.D. Ross (1951), Hackforth (1952), and David White (1993) have interpreted collection just as a systematic procedure.
[11] Scholnicov (1992) holds this view.
[12] Hackforth (1952:34).
[13] Hackforth (1952:38).
[14] Hackforth (1952:128).
[15] See Horn (1989).
[16] And, as Ackrill (1997) remarked, this is not an exceptional case for Plato; see *Philebus* 16d and *Statesman* 287c.