

Spring 2015

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James M. Magrini  
*College of DuPage*

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## Recommended Citation

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<http://dc.cod.edu/philosophypub/43>

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# ***Facilitating an Ethical Disposition (Hexis) as “Care of the Soul” in a Unique Ontological Vision of Socratic Education***

Dr. James M. Magrini  
*College of Dupage, USA*

## **Abstract**

*This essay adopts a Continental philosophical approach to reading Plato’s Socrates in terms of a “third way” that cuts a middle path between doctrinal and esoteric readings of the dialogues. It presents a portrait of Socratic education that is at odds with contemporary views in education and curriculum that view Plato’s Socrates as either the teacher of a truth-finding method or proto-fascist authoritarian. It argues that the crucial issue of attempting to foster an ethical disposition (hexis) is a unique form of education, in terms of “care of the soul,” that unfolds only within the context of sustained dialectic interrogation. Education is a “difficult” process that entails the “turning” of the soul back to itself in an enlightened form, which is bound up with an ontological relationship of distance to the so-called “truth” of the virtues that appear in limited and dissembling ways to Socrates and the interlocutors. Ultimately, it is shown that “care of the soul” is grounded in the attunement (a pathos and deino) that locates the human being in the world in such a way that “not-knowing” is the most original way in which our Being-in-the-world unfolds, and to embrace this “difficult” truth is to at once set oneself on the arduous but rewarding educative path toward the potential development of an ethical disposition (hexis).*

Keywords: Plato, Socrates, education, dialectic, ethics, disposition, ontology, phenomenology

## **Introduction**

This paper interprets Plato’s Socrates and the crucial role that the fostering of a “good” disposition (*hexis*) of the soul plays in education (*paideia*) and the influence this has on one’s soul (*psyche*) and the disposition (*hexis*) to not only behave ethically, but to also understand that the continued, ever-renewed pursuit of the virtues is the highest task one can undertake in pursuing the *examined life*. The issue of what is involved in fostering an ethical disposition of soul receives scant, if any, attention in education or curriculum literature focused on Socratic education, and this is particularly the case with teacher education texts.<sup>1</sup> In fact, when Socratic education is mentioned it is often times limited to discussions concerning either the critique of Plato as authoritarian educator or the belief that the “Socratic-method” is applicable in the classroom for “producing” knowledge through a quasi, or mock, *maieutic* process of eliciting the students’ response to teacher-directed-questioning. Both views have their origins in epistemology: the former is concerned with *how* the possession of knowledge and its political

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<sup>1</sup> This is not the case with scholarly interpretations of Socratic education such as we find in Mintz (2010), Scott (2000), and Teloh (1986), to name three such examples.

power-structures are used to oppress the masses, and although this is a relevant concern that indeed broaches the realm of ethics, it begins as an epistemic issue with the claim, a *slippery slope fallacy*, that Plato's *idealist* philosophy sews the seeds for authoritarian politics to take root. Thus, it ignores the beneficial aspects of an *authentic* Socratic education as I later define it for the reader. The latter view also sits within an epistemological register and gives the erroneous and disingenuous impression that Socratic dialectic can indeed lead us to "correct," or what might be called, "apodictic" (propositional) results. The students acquire knowledge if the educator practices the method of the dialectic with expertise. On this account, Socrates can be read as advocating "correctness" (*orthotes*) with respect to truth, i.e., privileging propositional knowledge over "philosophical understanding" (*phronesis*) with respect to the virtues and the related view that the dialectic is a disposable method for the attainment of truth, and when truth is procured, the method is jettisoned, hence it is a *means* to the *end* of the attainment of knowledge.

I argue that both views are flawed and grounded in a "doctrinal" misreading of Plato's dialogues. In addition to epistemology, careful readers should also focus on the *ontological* and *axiological* aspects of Socratic education, which includes the necessity to fully understand the role that character development plays in the *examined life*, or the life of demonstrating, in terms of holding oneself in the *askesis* that is the practice of dialectic, the quest for better understanding the virtues, and in the process, ethically transforming the disposition of one's character (*hexis*) or soul (*psyche*). When Plato (1997) describes education (*paideia*) in terms of the "turning around of the whole soul" (*periagoge holes tes psyches*) back to itself in an enlightened manner, this cannot occur through simply "putting knowledge into souls that lack it, like putting sight into blind eyes" (518b). Rather, the "turning" required, which for Plato *is* the essence of an "authentic education," is possible only in terms of the radical change or transformation occurring in and to one's character (*hexis*), which is made possible only through the rigorous and sustained practice of dialectic in communion with well-meaning and non-competitive like-minded individuals.

I address these issues in the four sections: (1) I introduce the ethical character/disposition in Plato's Socrates and the problem associated with the "pathos of truth" (*arrogance in the perceived possession of knowledge*), which, as I show, is related to an ethically impoverished or underdeveloped character; (2) offering a non-doctrinal reading of Plato's Socrates, I explore in some detail three typical scholarly interpretations of Plato and Socratic education and show why these views emerge from problematic readings of Plato with an overly narrow and misdirected focus; (3) I analyze the problem of the "pathos of truth" in two dialogues, the *Euthyphro* and *Apology*, in order to contextualize my educational concern and address the problems associated with the both the arrogant, dogmatic belief in "knowledge possession" and the ignorance of "human limits," and these issues later become an *ontological* concern related to the nature of the "truth" (*aletheia*) of the Being of virtue; and (4) I conclude by presenting the reader with a unique vision of Socratic education, which differs radically from the three views of which I am critical. Here, my concern is analyzing Socratic education in *ontological* and *axiological* terms, which avoids reducing of education to an *epistemological* issue. Ultimately, I offer the reader a view of Socratic education, which I argue *is* demonstrating care for the potential development of a "good" disposition (*hexis*) in the continued and ever-renewed search for "philosophical understanding" of the virtues as they are instantiated in *praxis* in the community of others in dialogue.

## 1. The Ethical Character (*hexis*) and the “Pathos of Truth” *The Moral Problem of Epistemological Arrogance*

The concern (*melete*) for fostering an ethical disposition (*hexis*) represents the *educative* pursuit of moral growth and evolution of the human being. For Socrates, the “good,” excellent (*arête*), and ethical life transpires and takes shape through a process of *education-through-dialectic* that is transitory and precarious at best, and in the extreme, difficult and *painful* – as we will see, it is an undertaking that often ends in frustration and even failure. The term *hexis* is the “disposition of the soul on account of which people are said to be of a certain sort” (Cooper, 1997, 1683). In Plato (1997) we find *hexis* described as the change (*metabole*) in the constitution (*hexis*) of a thing in its development (*kinesis*), which, when completed presents “percipient beings with something to perceive” (Laws, 894a). If this is related to the realm of *praxis* and *ethike*, this indicates that when this process of “change and alteration” occurs to the soul or disposition of the individual, in and through the sustained and “well-meaning” *questioning-and-refutation* of the dialectic, the person’s behavior manifests in terms of a *self-showing* that indicates “what” that person is like based on the *presencing* of his *hexis* in *praxis*. For example, in the *Republic*, Socrates describes a man with a “good” ethical disposition (*hexis*) that facilitates the “good” organization of his soul in such a way that allows him to resist the temptation to wantonly feed the soul’s “multifarious beast and his lion,” to keep them from growing wild and strong, which would ultimately “enfeeble the man in him so he gets dragged wherever the animals lead him” (589a). In perhaps a better-known representation of *hexis*, as related to Plato’s soul in tripartite, it is possible to state that the character of the charioteer in the *myth of the winged soul* demonstrates an ethical disposition that would be consistent with a Socratic education (*Phaedrus*, 246a-257a).

Reading the myth, the charioteer demonstrates the “moral” ability to steer the “Heavenly” path while controlling the wild, winged horses - the black representing the soul’s base drives and appetites, the white representing the spirited, higher level passions. The charioteer is usually said to represent the faculty of “reason” or right “state of mind,” as in doctrinal readings of Plato, and, by analogy, this indicates that the person receiving philosophical training in the dialectic will “produce” the right or “good” state of mind that morality demands, controlling the soul’s passions and drives through reason or the intellect, thus steering the right path in a life of excellence (*arête*). However, as opposed to the faculty of reason or intellection, I suggest another interpretation focused on the ethical character (*hexis*) described by Plato as representing of mode of attunement (*Begindlichkeit*), a *pathos* and *deinos*, linked with the dialectic of Socrates, which facilitates the potential development of a disposition that manifests as a substantive and discernibly instantiated *ethical presence* in dialectical-*praxis*, revealing itself in a mode of *self-presencing* that is grounded in the pre-understanding of the human being’s limited and finite *ontological* relationship to the understanding of the Being of virtue. Kirkland (2012) is helpful on this point when stating, “*Human wisdom*, which is the sole aim of Socratic philosophizing, cannot be understood on merely an epistemological register,” this is because the “condition of acknowledged non-knowing with respect to virtue *is itself...[the] pain...[the] distress Socrates calls for*, and this pain is nothing other than suffering the being of virtue *as not known or questionworthy*” (94). This pain, or *pathos*, is an indispensable component of the process through which the ethical character takes shape and develops in the mode of *finite transcendence* in the dialectic, and without this “pain” or suffering *the burden of becoming-ethical*, the potential for a “good” character is lost.

In light of these remarks concerning the soul's ethical disposition, Nietzsche (1979) writes of what he calls the "pathos of truth" in relation to philosophers, the "boldest knights" among the "addicts of fame," who are the most ardent and misguided pursuers of emblematic immortality that comes by means of, not only the quest for truth, but more importantly, the dogmatic belief in its possession. As Breazeale (1979) informs us, Nietzsche's use of "pathos" is meant to indicate the transitory, personal, subjective, and emotional elements of an experience, and the investigation into the "pathos of truth," as opposed to an epistemological matter, is "instead concerned with man's *feelings* about truth, more specifically, with his *pride* in the possession of the same" (61), and here we might read Nietzsche as speaking critically about the inflated arrogance demonstrated by those with flawed characters who imagine themselves "wise". The position Nietzsche espouses is not to be conflated with the formal philosophical position of "moral arrogance" in ethical theory, which, as Gert (2005) observes, is the problematic view that one holds "*the correct answer to a controversial moral question that does not have a uniquely correct answer*" and the "arrogance exhibited by the morally unjustified attitude of believing oneself as exempt from the moral system that grounds the behavior of all rational persons" (368-369). Rather, what Nietzsche indicates, and this relates to Socrates, is an epistemological arrogance born of the dogmatic belief in the categorical possession of truth, which manifests the lack of an ethically developed character, the underlying assumption is as follows: *If the agent's character is developed and trained ethically, then a certain modesty is adopted in tempering any and all claims to the categorical possession of truth or knowledge.*

For Nietzsche this *pride* or arrogance in the belief that one possesses sure and certain "knowledge," and this belief it must be noted determines one's comportment, *is* quite correctly an ethical issue. The key components for understanding a Socratic education as a continued process that fosters and facilitates an ethical disposition (*hexis*) manifest when we encounter those in the dialogues with whom Socrates engages that clearly express a lack of the type of character development that is in line with an ethical education of the soul as understood by Socrates: first, those who lack moral character (*hexis*) ignore limits, or better, the radical *finitude*, bound up with the *ontological condition* of human knowledge, and this indicates that even the knowledge, or so-called "truth," of the virtues is limited and incomplete; second, they arrogantly flaunt their supposed possession of knowledge; and third, they often believe that knowledge in one area qualifies them as experts in another area. This demonstrates a "lack of modesty in failing to realize that they [do not have] the competence to pronounce with equal ability on matters outside their province" (Guthrie, 1971, 117). All of these potential moral shortcomings are linked with the "pathos of truth," which must be overcome if there is to be an authentic sense of philosophical education, which, as I have stated, is *the "turning around"* of one's *soul* in such a way that it becomes enlightened and lives out the *painful concern (melete – "care")* for the potential development and continued refinement of one's ethical disposition (*hexis*) in *praxis*.

## **2. The Traditional Critical Focus in the Analysis of Socratic Education *Problems with the Doctrinal Reading of Plato's Socrates***

I adopt a non-doctrinal reading of Plato's dialogues, thus I am reading Socrates in terms that avoid the following characteristics of traditional readings of the dialogues that Gonzalez (1995; 1998) brings to our attention: first, the dialogues are *not* expressive of a formal logic or "purely formal method of constructing arguments," which allows us to "define dialectic [as method] in

total abstraction from the *content* of Plato's philosophy" (2), and second, Plato's philosophy is *not* "completely contained in the written dialogues" and the content of Plato's philosophy is *not* systematic (3). To read Plato's Socrates in a non-doctrinal manner is to view the content of the dialogues as inseparable from their dramatic form and to resist the temptation to read Plato in a systematic manner. Based on this view, "Plato [is] much closer to Socrates than he [is] to the dogmatic metaphysicians that [succeed] him" (6). Reading Socrates through a hermeneutic lens, which includes a concern for the *ontological* aspects of Plato's dialogues, as found in the Continental scholarship of Kirkland (2012), Gonzalez (1995; 1998; 2002), and Fried (2006), radicalizes the traditional, conservative, and philosophical (analytic) reading of *Socrates-as-teacher* found in views of education, such as "structure of the disciplines," or *scholar academic ideology*, embracing the "Socratic method" (Adler, 1982). The interpretation of Plato's Socrates, as adopted and taught in many contemporary teacher educational institutions, is based on analytic, doctrinal, and "idealist" readings, manifesting on three fronts: first, texts addressing the philosophical foundations of education or "education philosophies" (Ozman & Craven, 2014); second, texts focused on curriculum studies and the aims and purposes thereof (Walker & Soltas, 1992); and third, texts advocating "critical pedagogy" or ideological critique grounded in theories of social justice, which are critical of Plato as an "authoritarian" thinker whose philosophy espouses the oppressive origins of "idealism" in education (Spring, 2001). All these views, in one way or another, limit the concern for Socratic education to a reading of Plato's "ideal" *polis*, or city-state, as presented in the *Republic*. As a result, the focus is extremely narrow and this presents a misleading and highly deceptive view of what a Socratic education *is* or *might be* like.

To my point, Spring and Ozman and Craven give literal readings of Plato's Socrates as he appears in the *Republic*, where the dialectic, as explained by Socrates, as it is to be incorporated into the education of the philosopher-guardians, no longer represents the practice of the *elenchus*, rather it has a "positive" function and is a method incorporating arguments in order to achieve a sure and true understanding of reality (*Being*). In this view the dialectic is a form of testing the explanations or definitions given for *how*, *why*, and *that* things are the way they are. Here, for Socrates, the dialectic is the philosophical method *par excellence* in achieving knowledge of the Good itself (*auto to agathon*) by giving an account of it in terms of definitions. Application of this method of questioning to hypothetical conclusions leads to a reasoned account of the ultimate knowledge of first principles and the form (*eidos*) of the Good. In the possession of ultimate knowledge, "the rulers, or philosopher-kings, are allowed to propagate myths, censor literature, and manipulate the content of historical instruction," and in addition, in claiming "knowledge of the good, philosopher-kings can claim that they know what is good for the people, which justifies their power to control what is learned by the citizenry" (Spring, 2001, 15). This reading is both elitist and authoritarian in that the possession of "true" knowledge is limited to the "ruling-class" and this knowledge allows them, with justified epistemic/moral "authority," to impose their will on the lower castes of the citizenry. This view, as Clay (1988) points out, is consistent with analytic and doctrinal readings of Plato:

For Popper, as for others of his generation, Plato's *Republic* was a totalitarian document, one that endorsed the Big Lie, advocated eugenics and infanticide, encouraged "racism," and brutally subordinated the integrity of the individual, and the integrity of Truth herself, to the unwholesome Whole of a closed and dictatorial state. (20)

This view also assumes that Plato philosophizes a systematic and dogmatic metaphysical view of the forms (*eidoi*) as *suprasensuous* paradigms that transcend but are instantiated in the sensible, terrestrial realm. This view is linked to the classification of Plato, in education circles, as an *idealist* philosopher, and this view harbors the following erroneous assumptions about Socrates as a philosophical figure that “has” (*echon*) truth as opposed to a thinker who “seeks” (*zetein*) philosophical understanding (*phronesis*) of the virtues. Thus, Socrates is cut from the identical mold as that of the “philosopher-kings” as a possessor and teacher of philosophical truths about metaphysics. As stated, in the philosophy of education, those embracing the *idealist* reading of Plato, trace his authentic education to the education of the Philosopher-kings and Philosopher-queens, i.e., his formalized and “idealized” notion of state education. Here, educators are critical of Platonic *idealism* for boasting dogmatic notions “of a finished and absolute universe waiting to be discovered,” a view that has “hindered progress in science and the creation of new ideas and processes. If one accepts the concept of absolute ideas [*eidoi*], it is not possible to move beyond these ideas without questioning and doubting their absoluteness” (Ozmon & Craver, 1990, 39).

There are also views that embrace The Socratic method of pedagogy as described and implemented by Adler in the *Paideia Project* (1982), which emerges from a view of Socrates that runs counter to Plato’s image of Socrates in the dialogues, most specifically the early *aporetic* dialogues. Within Adler’s view, Socrates represents the supreme example of what an educator should be: “The Socratic mode of teaching,” states Adler, “is a method of pedagogy that brings ideas to birth by means of asking questions, by leading discussions” (29). The Socratic method in education, which presupposes the view of *Socrates-as-teacher*, “refers to someone who teaches by asking his or her students leading questions – compelling them to think their way through to the *correct* understanding of the subject matter” (Brickhouse & Smith, 1994, 3). The fact that there is a “correct” understanding in advance of the questioning presupposes that the so-called “Socratic teacher” already has the answer, and thus the entire exercise is an elaborate ruse in order to instill a sense of “ownership” of knowledge in the student. Here, the student is brought to a predetermined destination – knowledge acquisition – but made to feel as if they themselves had the knowledge all along, and so a false sense of “self-discovery” is imparted.

Both these views as presented, one critical of Plato and the other extolling the “Socratic Method” as instructional tool to shape the educational experience, embrace a view of Socratic education grounded in the ability to apply the method of dialectic to practical situations in order to arrive at a form of “truth” that would be consistent with definitions of an apodictic, or propositional, nature (locutions that are either true or false) and *not* in terms that are consistent with Socrates’ precarious and often troubling philosophical search for the understanding of the virtues that seems to elude both him and the interlocutors. In doctrinal readings of Plato, it is common to find the search for the so-called “definitions” of the virtues, a “conception of knowledge which has received the most philosophical attention in modern times: propositional knowledge, or knowing that such and such is the case” (Brickhouse and Smith, 1994). This is a view expressed by analytic philosophers such as Fine (1979), who claims that the Socratic search for definitions, or reasoned accounts (*logous*) of the virtues, is ultimately a search for propositional truths, where *a* knows *x*, is translatable into *a* knows what *x* is, into *a* knows “that” *x* is *F*. Gonzalez (1998) informs us that the view of propositional knowledge as related to the Socratic knowledge of the virtues is inseparable from an understanding of the dialectic as a sure and certain “applicable” method of investigation into ethical “truths,” and this view suffers from

two erroneous assumptions, which were intimated above and will now be formalized: “The first assumption is that the knowledge which philosophy strives to attain is the knowledge of propositions (7). This indicates that we can both express the “object” of our inquiry clearly and that the expression of said object is accomplished without distortion, in and through the providing the necessary and sufficient reasons for its “truth-value.” In this view, it is the case that “we can not only form propositions about fundamental principles of reality, but also that these propositions can express these principles as *they really are*” (8). The second assumption focuses on “method” or methodology, and believes that the “philosophical *method* [dialectic] is subordinate to, and terminates in, some final result. Apart from the method of inquiry, a system exists which is thought to be the end (in both senses of the word) of the method” (9).

If we relate propositional certainty with the virtues, in the service of becoming ethical, and we take Socrates at his word when he states, “virtue is knowledge,” then in order to be virtuous we require a correct definition of virtue in order to properly embody and instantiate it, and additionally, once we have arrived at the “definition” of said virtue, we can potentially discard the method (Guthrie, 1971; Gonzalez 1998). Education that embraces the tenet that “knowledge *is* virtue” becomes an issue of epistemological concern as opposed to primarily an ethical concern, for here, at the heart of ethics, there is a strict methodological concern for how to in the most fortuitous and “logical” manner acquire knowledge of the virtues. This view is insufficient to address the crucial issue of the practice of “care of the soul,” for even if we grant that knowledge of the “nature of virtue [is] sufficient to make a man virtuous,” we must admit that “there [is] little chance of his learning the truth of it if he [has] not subjected [*pathein*] his body to the negative discipline of resisting sensuous indulgence [*askesis*] and his mind to the practice of dialectic, the art of discriminating and defining” (Guthrie, 1971, 137). To subject oneself to the practice of dialectic, to hold oneself within the unfolding of the discourse despite moments of *aporetic breakdown*, is an instance of “*pathos*,” and to experience the *pathos* of the dialectic in pursuit of the virtues is to undergo, in and through a mode of attuned *transcendence*, which is an *originary* mode of “learning,” the process of facilitating the ethical development and formation of the human’s disposition (*hexis*).<sup>2</sup> What is required for the potential of ethical character development is a sustained and ever-renewed philosophical *praxis*, for the dialectic is not a disposable method for acquiring truth, but “is needed at every stage of philosophical inquiry to overcome the ever-present temptation to think that we know what we do not know” (Gonzalez, 1998, 276). As Kirkland (2012) emphasizes, and this will be addressed in the final section, in order to potentially facilitate an ethical disposition (*hexis*) we require

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<sup>2</sup> The reader will note the marked difference between Nietzsche’s critical expression of the “pathos of truth,” as an inflated and arrogant belief in the possession of knowledge and my use of the Greek term *pathos* as related to the Socratic dialectic and education. The use of *pathos* in this instance is defined by Kirkland (2012) in the following manner: “*Pathos*, insofar as it derives from *paschein*, is explicitly an ‘undergoing’ or a ‘suffering’ of something, the grammar of the term insisting on the ‘intentionality of the experience’ or the ‘givenness’ of what is undergone or suffered” (44). *Pathos*, in this sense is beyond one’s “mere emotions and feelings, for they are essentially named as a mode of being in contact with whatever provokes them and imposes them upon us” (44). The *pathos* occurring in the dialectic is the “suffering” experienced and “undergone” that is connected with the human’s *ontological* relation to truth as one of *distance*, in terms of the *existential-estrangement* from full disclosure or unconcealment (*aletheia*) of the Being of virtue. According to Kirkland, “*Pathos* itself seems to establish a legitimate and necessary connectedness between us and what is intended or given in the *pathos*, such that the breeching of the boundary between the internal and external has already occurred in experience” (44-45). *Pathos* in this sense, as opposed to the reckless and arrogant “attitude” we find in Nietzsche, is rather an authentic form of attunement (*paschein*) that is essential and necessary to the process of the soul’s development that must be “undergone” and “borne up” if the potential for an ethical disposition (*hexis*) is to manifest.

the constant, elenctic, *aporia*-producing and sustaining questioning of Socratic philosophizing, and thus even a certain self-conscious way of *not possessing knowledge or wisdom* of “*what virtue is,*” is what is supremely good for humans...an interpretation that finds this benefit *within the elencus itself*...speaks directly against the possibility of any human being ultimately *possessing* some real extra-elencus product, some kind of knowledge or wisdom about the issues addressed by Socratic questioning. (11)

Moving forward, a non-doctrinal conception of the Socratic dialectic and education is developed, which stands opposed to the foregoing educational (doctrinal) interpretations of Plato. I read Socrates in a way that is expressive of and consistent with the understanding that Socrates is “not a dogmatic moralist but an inquirer, who [believes] that an honest search after the truth about principles governing human behavior [is] most likely, simply because of a better understanding which it would ensure, to lead to an improvement in behavior itself” (Guthrie, 1971, 119). This view, as articulated by Guthrie, reveals a view of Socrates that shares *family resemblances* with Gonzalez’s (1995, 1998); Kirkland’s (2012), Fried’s (2006), and Gallagher’s (1991) interpretations, wherein knowledge, or the philosophical understanding of the virtues, is *not* equated with “objective truth” that stands in the end beyond both method and inquirer. Instead, giving a *definition* indicates a form of “philosophical understanding” that is neither a *techne* nor an *episteme* proper, which might be expressed in terms of propositions or assertions. Thus, it is a form of understanding that defies transfer from one inquirer to another (i.e., teacher to pupil) in such a way that avoids ambiguity, confusion, or dissembling. It is possible to describe the characteristics of “philosophical understanding” in the following manner: (1) it is a form of *insight* that, although emerging from the discursive process of dialogue, is itself non-discursive; (2) it is *non-propositional* and cannot tell us that something is the case, rather it is a knowledge of “how,” but is not on that account reducible to any form of practical knowledge (e.g., knowing how to ride a bicycle), but rather understanding of what we *ought* to do that is *exhibited* and *embodied* within the dialectical inquiry into virtue; (3) it is *manifest* and *presences* in the midst of philosophical inquiry and it is not *describable*, where describable means communicating propositional truths without distortion; and (4) it is neither wholly subjective nor objective in nature, rather it *mediates* both of these realms, but it is intensely “reflexive” in nature, i.e. it is a form of self-knowledge, wherein self is known, and in varying degrees, transformed in relation to the Being of virtue (Gallagher, 1990; Gonzalez, 1998).

### **3. The “Pathos of Truth” in the *Euthyphro* and *Apology* The Impoverished Dispositions (*Hexeis*) of Socrates’ Interlocutors**

In the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology*, we encounter a fairly typical situation in Plato’s dialogues: a person of authority lays claim to a certain expertise in one or another area based on his perceived superior store of knowledge. This person, in the encounter with Socrates, is then shown to lack the knowledge originally claimed, and as a result, becomes embarrassed, uncomfortable, agitated, and might even demonstrate anger because his lack of knowledge is exposed. These are reactions all too common throughout the dialogues and are related to an underdeveloped ethical character or disposition (*hexeis*) of the soul that results from what Socrates views as an absence of “education” or self-examination in the company of others, which is indicative of the *unexamined* life, if we are to define Socratic “philosophy” in terms of the *examined* life as inferred from the *Apology*. For Socrates, “the greatest good for a man is to

discuss virtue every day,” which demands that he relentlessly test himself and others (Plato, 1997, 38a). The task, vocation, and philosophical burden Socrates assumes (from the god at Delphi) calls for him, as he indicates, to persuade “both young and . . . not to care for [the] body or wealth in preference to or as strongly as for the best possible state [*hexis*] of [the] soul” (30b). As stated, the problem of the human’s underdeveloped moral character is often approached in terms of a lack of knowledge, or perhaps, a lack of ability to give proper epistemic justification for truth-claims related to the virtues. However, as stated, it is an ethical concern first and foremost that can be traced to the type of “moral” education one has received, or better, one has endured and continues to undergo (*pathein*). Although the choices are numerous, I have selected the *Euthyphro* and the *Apology* as dialogues where the reader encounters interlocutors that sorely lack a philosophical education as conceived by Socrates, which manifests in the form of an impoverished moral disposition that not only prevents them from behaving ethically, but also, and this is even more crucial, occludes the exigent drive to pursue and hold oneself in the rigorous interrogation of the virtues in community with other like-minded individuals, which is the necessary to potentially facilitate a philosophically sound ethical character.

Euthyphro is a priest who intends to prosecute his father for the murder of a laborer who killed a family slave, this requires that Euthyphro has an understanding of “piety” in order to determine “whether the killer acted justly or not,” and, as Euthyphro concludes, “if he acted justly, let him go, but if not, one should prosecute” (Plato, 1997, 4c). However, immediately a problem arises, because as a priest Euthyphro’s actual area of expertise is limited to what the Greeks called “*hosion*,” which is the knowledge of ritual and sacrifice or knowing “what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice” (14b). However, after declaring this to be representative of the knowledge of “piety,” it becomes clear that Euthyphro actually extends, and perhaps distorts, the meaning of piety to include “justice,” but he cannot defend such a claim – indicating that he is under the false belief that his knowledge extends beyond the parameters of its field. Socrates asks Euthyphro whether or not he is fearful in mounting the prosecution of his father, especially if Euthyphro’s “ideas of the divine attitude to piety and impiety are wrong” (4e). Euthyphro’s rejoinder in the following exchange immediately demonstrates the dogmatic and arrogant belief in the possession of knowledge, which I have introduced as the *moral problem with epistemological arrogance*:

SOCRATES: By Zeus, Euthyphro, you think that your knowledge of the divine, and of piety and impiety, is so accurate that, when those things happened as you say, you have no fear of having acted impiously in bringing your father to trial?

EUTHYPHRO: I should be of no use, Socrates, and Euthyphro would not be superior to the majority of men, if I did not have an accurate knowledge of such things. (4e-5a)

Socrates, in a somewhat ironic fashion, insists that Euthyphro should “teach” him about piety and justice, since Euthyphro claims to be an expert in the matter and has declared himself superior to other men. It is here that Socrates establishes the *doxastic requirement* of the dialectic by asking Euthyphro to “state what you believe” to know about the virtue in question. However, the definition offered by Euthyphro turns out to be a subjective and vacuous account:

EUTHYPHRO: I say that the pious is what I’m doing now, to prosecute the wrongdoer, be it a murderer or temple robber or anything else, whether the wrong doer is your father or your mother or anyone else; not to prosecute is impious. (5e)

Euthyphro goes on to relate his definition to stories about the gods, which begins to move the discussion away from the definition of “piety” and Socrates questions him about the validity of believing such tales of the gods. At this point Euthyphro attempts to amaze Socrates with his vast store of knowledge concerning divine things. Veering off topic, Euthyphro claims knowledge about many “surprising things, of which the majority have no knowledge,” and adds that if Socrates will agree, he will stun and amaze him with his vast erudition (6c). Socrates states that he would be open to hearing about such things at another time, but for now he wants to direct the conversation back to the topic at hand, for he complains to Euthyphro: “You did not teach me adequately when I asked you what the pious was, but you told me that what you are doing now, in prosecuting your father for murder, is pious” (6d). As the dialogue progresses the difference between two positions becomes a concern, an issue that escapes Euthyphro: whether the gods love pious things because they are intrinsically “pious” or whether it is the gods’ love that imbues things with “piety” and value. As the dialogue moves towards its unresolved conclusion, Euthyphro is shaken, he becomes agitated and impatient, accusing Socrates of allowing his arguments “to go around and not stay in the same place” (11d), for Euthyphro would rather retain his original position than to suffer the *pain* or *pathos* of dialectic interrogation, which calls for the eventual amendment or even rejection of the various positions Euthyphro holds and might adopt.

As stated, Euthyphro becomes visibly upset in the midst of the dialectic’s unfolding as Socrates continually calls his responses into question. However, despite Euthyphro’s confusion, this in no way shakes the steadfast belief in his own position to which he returns in the end of the dialogue. His soul has indeed turned back to itself, but it is no wiser than before, his understanding of “piety” has not changed in any way, and may have even become somewhat more confused. Thus, Euthyphro demonstrates *apaideusia* (non-education), which is indicative of an impoverished ethical character associated with the *unexamined life*. Despite “not-knowing” and thus demonstrating a lack or privation of knowledge, which Socrates has exposed through his questioning, Euthyphro believes he is “pious” and that he possesses the knowledge of the virtue that is necessary to close off the *ti esti*; question concerning, *what is piety?* and “*what is justice in relation to both gods and men?*”:

EUTHYPHRO: I told you a short while ago, Socrates, that it is a considerable task to acquire any precise knowledge of these things, but, to put it simply, I say that if a man knows how to say and do what is pleasing to the gods at prayer and sacrifice, those pious actions such as preserve both private houses and public affairs of the state. The opposite of those actions are impious and overturn and destroy everything. (14b)

But, when further pressed by Socrates, the dialectic returns to the inadequacy of the definition as it is related to the earlier issue of *essentialism* and *nominalism* with respect to the gods and the virtue of piety.

SOCRATES: Do you not realize that our argument has moved around and come again to the same place? You surely remember that earlier the pious and the god-loved were shown not to be the same but different from each other. Or do you not remember?

EUTHYPHRO: I do. (15c)

Socrates then suggests at this point, in the moment of *aporetic breakdown*, that the dialectic must begin again, for if Euthyphro has no clear understanding of piety it would be unethical and represent a heinous miscarriage of justice if Euthyphro were to prosecute his father in the court. However, Euthyphro rejects the prolongation of the discussion and promptly *flees-in-the-face* of Socrates' challenge to continue on in the philosophical interrogation of "piety":

EUTHYPHRO: Some other time, Socrates, for I am in a hurry now, and it is time for me to go.

SOCRATES: What a thing to do, my friend! By going you have cast me down from a great hope I had, that I would learn from you the nature of the pious and impious (15e).

Thus, in this early dialogue of Plato we encounter the belief that if one possesses an expertise in one area that this is sufficient grounds for claiming expertise in another area, e.g., if a man knows of sacrifice and ritual, that man also understands what is both just and unjust; the "pathos of truth" or the moral arrogance in the dogmatic belief in the possession of knowledge; and the resistance to continue on in the interrogation of the virtues when one's beliefs are put into serious question, especially troubling when those beliefs are essential to one's ethical comportment in *praxis*. In short, what we encounter in the *Euthyphro* is the lack of ethical character (*hexis*) as conceived by Socrates in terms of the *examined life*.

Moving to the *Apology*, we find that Socrates is in search of a so-called "wiser" man, so he sets out to interrogate the various members of Athenian society, the politicians, poets, and craftsmen. Socrates is concerned not only with whether or not the forms of knowledge they endorse or represent - (*episteme*, *aisthesis*, and *techne* respectively) - can withstand his relentless form of questioning in the context of the dialectic exchange. Importantly, as related to the "critical" aspects of the dialectic and the notion of Socratic education as the continued and ever-renewed ethical development of the soul or disposition (*hexis*), Socrates also demonstrates the ethical concern for the *attitude* the Athenians adopt, or the attuned stance they take in relation to truth and knowledge (*hexeis tou aletheuein*). In the *Apology*, the "pathos of truth" is present, but here I want to also introduce into the discussion the notion of, which is bound up with the "pathos of truth," radical human *finitude* in relation to the knowledge of the virtues that the Socratic dialectic makes possible, and this, as stated above, is an issue with the *ontological* context within and from out of which all human inquiry emerges and returns. The understanding of "human limitation" as dictated by the overarching *ontological* condition must be understood in order to fully grasp the inner workings of an authentic Socratic education as "care of the soul". For example, when Socrates questions the politician, he reports to the jury the following regarding the encounter, and it is Socrates' recognition of *radical human limitations* that sets him at a "slight" advantage over the politician who places no bounds on his knowledge:

SOCRATES: When I began to talk to him, I could not help thinking that he was really not wise. Although he was thought wise by many, and still wiser by himself; and there upon I tried to explain to him that he thought himself wise, but was not really wise; and the consequence was that he hated me. . . . So I left him, saying to myself. . . . Well, although I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really beautiful and good, I am better of than he is – for he knows nothing, and thinks he knows; I neither know nor think I know. In this latter particular, then, I seem to have slightly the advantage of him (22b).

Here, the politician demonstrates the typical reaction to being told that he is not in the possession of the knowledge he is claiming and his arrogance gives rise to “enmity” toward Socrates, which was demonstrated to a lesser degree by Euthyphro. Socrates then informs the jury that he examined the poets and later the craftsman, and again, as in the encounter with Euthyphro, there was an instance where expertise in one area qualifies that person as an expert in many other areas, e.g., the poets, who “on the strength of their poetry,” Socrates observes, “they believed themselves the wisest of men in other things in which they were not wise” (22d). Finally, when approaching the craftsman, Socrates admits that they know “many fine things” of which Socrates is ignorant, but once again the problem arises concerning the ignorance of the *limits of human knowledge*, and they, like the others, demonstrated an underdeveloped ethical character because they lack a rigorous philosophical education.

SOCRATES: I observed that even the good artisans fell into the same error as the poets; - because they were good workmen they thought that they also knew all sorts of high matters, and this defect [lack of ethical *hexis*] in them overshadowed their wisdom...I asked myself on behalf of the oracle, whether I would like to be as I was, neither having their knowledge nor their ignorance, or like them in both; and I made my answer to myself and to the oracle that I was better off as I was (23a).

When Socrates determines that *he is better off as he is*, this indicates that he is fully aware of, in advance of any and all questioning of the virtues, the severe limits of human understanding, and as opposed to primarily an *epistemological* concern, it is first and foremost an *ontological* insight of no small consequence as related to the soul in its course of developing its ethical disposition, which is inseparable from the sustained and renewed “daily discourse about virtue” (23b). The so-called “wisdom” in the *Apology* that concerns Socrates, which I have related to “philosophical understanding,” is a form of “wisdom such as may be attained by man,” which is finite in nature and thus always falling short of the unlimited knowledge possessed by the gods. For Socrates understands far better than those around him that human wisdom “is in truth worth nothing” (23c). To understand what Socrates means when proclaiming that human “wisdom” is worth nothing, we must consider the following hypothetical situation where it is possible for the knowledge of the virtues to be complete, in such a way as to provide us with the technical-practical expertise to “be moral,” in terms of virtue grounded in *technical instrumentality*, i.e., we can “produce” definite and beneficial results through the application of knowledge. In such an imagined scenario it is possible to compare “philosophical understanding” to such sure and true technical knowledge (*techne*), and label the former “worthless,” for it produces no substantive and predictable results. As we move into the final section, I argue that although the philosophical understanding of the virtues that emerges from the dialectic falls short of producing *substantive* and *predictable* results, it is, as Socrates believes, the most important form of “knowing,” or better, “non-knowing,” that we encounter in the pursuit of an ethically developed character in and through Socrates’ philosophical education.

#### **4. Socratic Education as Caring for the Development of a “Good” Disposition (*Hexis*) The Search for the “Truth” of Virtue in the Community of Others**

As argued, the notion of the ethical character or disposition (*hexis*) in Socrates cannot be understood in terms of the *directionality* that moves from “knowledge” acquisition

(epistemology)  $\Rightarrow$  “ethical” behavior (axiology), which assumes the *deductive* form of “If *P*, then *Q*,” for this wrongly indicates that epistemology is antecedent to all ethical concerns in a way that erroneously stresses chronology and causality; ethics in this view is dependent upon knowing, in no uncertain terms, the “truth” of the virtues. In addition, the type of reading that literally endorses the truth of the Socratic epigraph, “knowledge *is* virtue” intimates a *relationship of identity* and thus introduces a host of ethical quandaries that seriously threaten the concern for the facilitation of the soul’s disposition as I am conceiving it. For example, as Guthrie (1971) observes, “If virtue is knowledge, and to know the good is to do it, wickedness is due to ignorance and therefore, strictly speaking, involuntary” (139). Here, we encounter the following two problems: first, it is assumed that those who are moral “possess” or have (*echon*) knowledge in order live out an excellent or “good” life, but if my reading of Socrates is accurate, as a philosopher eschewing the belief in “knowledge possession,” we must admit, along with Clay (1988), that the numerous challenges found in reading Plato “should shake our confidence in the closure of any Socratic argument” (23); and second, on this view, those who behave immorally are not fully culpable for their actions because of an epistemological deficit, namely, they are ignorant of the knowledge of virtue. This, as Wilson (2008) argues, is not only a psychologically naïve conception of morality, it is also a highly dangerous position to adopt. This naïve view, as Wilson contends, in relation to the position I am defending, “neglects habit [*hexis*] – which Aristotle would later see as central to moral psychology,” for it is necessary to recognize that “it is largely through practice that behavior patterns are learnt,” which importantly takes into account an *ontological* way of Being-in-the-world that is grounded in human *facticity*, i.e., “the fact that we live in time and space, and that we are not purely rational beings” (52).

Moving into the analysis of the dialectic and its relation to the potential facilitation of an ethical disposition, I ask the reader to keep in mind the following thoughts Guthrie (1971) offers regarding the connection or correlation between knowledge and virtuous behavior, because he stresses the precise issue of my concern: “Some degree of *moral discipline* is a necessary *prerequisite of all knowledge*” (136), and we find this position espoused by Socrates in the *Charmides* when speaking of the necessity for an education that is grounded in the “science of good and evil,” i.e., dialectic inquiry into the virtues. In this early dialogue, Socrates claims that it is possible to possess all the technical and scientific skills in the world, in terms of the “perfect knowledge” of one or another craft (*techne*), and still lead an ethically impoverished existence in terms of a society bereft of morality. Here, Socrates’ expresses the necessity to pursue the virtues in order to enhance the other activities in our lives, and his point is expressed in the following manner: if the dialectic art of interrogating the virtues, which is simultaneously the art of caring for the soul’s development in terms of the “science of good and evil” is lacking, although technical skills in medicine, cobbling, weaving, ship-building, and the martial arts would still produce sure and true results, “our chance of getting any of these things *well* and *beneficially* done will have vanished” (Plato, 1997, 174d).

The explicit sense of how a Socratic education is inseparable from the facilitation of the disposition (*hexis*) is present to Socrates’ description of what is required in order to understand the virtue “courage” as it is related to martial arts training in the *Laches*. The discussion in this *aporetic* dialogue is ultimately focused on education and the development of the young men’s souls and the indispensable question concerning *who* is the most worthy expert in such matters. For when the general Nicias asks whether or not they are “investigating the art of fighting in armor and discussing whether young men ought to learn it or not” (185d), Socrates redirects the

inquiry in order to consider the topic of ethically developing the character, desiring that “the boys’ souls should become as good as possible” (186a). This is a markedly different concern than merely seeking out an expert trainer in combat techniques, for Socrates is searching for the values representing the *essence* of *all* education, and so emphasizes that prior to considering the expert in the martial arts, we should concern ourselves with a different type of expert:

SOCRATES: So do we now declare that we are considering a form of study for the sake of the souls of young men?

NICIAS: Yes.

SOCRATES: Then the question whether any one of us is expert in the *care of the soul* and is capable of caring for it well, and has had good teachers, is the one we ought to investigate. (185e)

This indicates that what is ultimately at stake is not merely a technical issue of searching out an expert in martial arts training, but rather to answer the *ti esti*; (“what is it?”) question related to “courage” requires an investigation into what is necessary in order to be “good” and excellent at any task we would pursue, and this is the ultimate concern for an education that has for its objective the development of the character as related directly to the virtues. In order to conceive of an expert in education, we must locate a person who is trained in the philosophical art of *caring for the soul*.

In relation to the above discussion concerning technical skill and philosophical artistry, Kirkland (2010) argues against the view embracing “propositional” knowledge of the virtues in Plato’s dialogues and claims that if we conceive Socrates’ quest in terms of the drive to “understand” the essence or Being of virtue, Being cannot be equated with “objective reality,” and so the view that the “true, certain, and philosophically required mode of grasping, or better, relating properly to [objective] reality is *objective knowledge*” is rejected (13). In Kirkland’s reading, which is *non-doctrinal* and *proto-phenomenological*, Socrates does not carry out his philosophical project in terms of an objective *ontology* linked with *substance dualism*, which, according to Vernant (1995), would have been an *ontological* view foreign to Socrates. Rather, the Socratic project embraces an *ontological* view of the world where the human’s Being-in-the-world is inseparable from the “bodily” immersion in that world. Vernant contends that for the ancient Greeks the world was “not an objectified external universe, cut off from man by the impassable barrier that separates matter from the mind, the physical from the psychic” (12). This is because the Greeks experienced a Being-in-the-world wherein they were in a “relationship of intimate community with the animate universe to which everything connected [them]” (12). This *holistic ontological* view sets the human being within an existence that it is suspended between *finitude* and *finite transcendence* (Fried, 2006). Transcendence, or becoming *other* in the process of deepening our understanding in community with *others*, is a valuable and authentic instance of education and “learning” wherein the character (*hexis*) is formed and developed in and through the unfolding of the dialectic as an *educative* and *generative* “form of discussion that promotes both a philosophical orientation [*hexis*] and the development of an autonomous (philosophical) subject” (Mittelstrass, 1988, 126).

Socratic education as “care of the soul,” which is an *interpretive* project, as it is set within the *ontological* condition described above might be understood in terms of Socrates’ recognition of or *attunement* (*Befindlichkeit*) to, as introduced through my reading of the

*Apology*, the fact that all instances of human understanding are limited. For to be suspended or stretched out between *finitude* and *transcendence* indicates that the horizon within which human learning occurs is marked out and bounded by *nothingness* or primordial “concealment” (*lethe*). Learning in and through the revelation of the understanding of virtue is always partial because it is grounded in and determined by the essential *concealment* that lies at the heart of all revelation or *aletheia* as “unconcealment” (Heidegger, 1993; Gadamer, 1989). If we consider what might be termed the “proximity to truth” in the Platonic dialogues, an *ontological distance* separates Socrates and his interlocutors from the full disclosure or essential uncovering of the truth of the Being of the virtues they are interrogating. Thus, the participants in the dialectic through sustained questioning reveal what might be described as fleeting glimpses or *intimations of the truth* of the virtue. Although it is a revelation within which the dialectician and interlocutors participate, and beyond, an understanding that they instantiate in *praxis*, the relationship between Socrates and the truth of the virtues, the “proximity to truth,” is always highlighted by an *ontological distance* that cannot be outstripped or overcome (Kirkland, 2010). However, this in no way diminishes the importance of the Socratic project, for the acknowledgement of the *attunement* to this *ontological* condition represents the “truth and supreme benefit” of Socratic philosophy and the practice of the dialectic (87). For in and through the dialectic there occurs the encounter with and exposure to the “excess” that constitutes the human’s proper relationship to the ethical life and the understanding thereof. As expressive of the *ontology of distance* and the “proximity to truth,” the dialectic represents the mode of inquiry whereby a “distant relation, but a relation nonetheless, to the being of virtue” (87) is potentially established and reestablished through “Socrates affecting the unconcealment of previously concealed [essence of virtue] *as such*, which is to say *as concealed, hidden, and, thus, questionworthy*” (55).

Socrates and his interlocutors enter the context of the dialectic with an initial everyday understanding of the virtue in question, i.e., it has appeared to them in a manner of *self-showing* that allows them to know it in such a way that is already connected, albeit obliquely, to virtue’s essence, its Being. This initial *self-showing* emerges directly from everyday experience and might arise through an intuitive grasping or might have been imparted through one or another form of instruction, e.g., sophistic didactic teaching, but it is, nevertheless, vague and incomplete. The “interrogation of *doxa*, proceeds through the clarification and bringing to light of that which always already appears in our initial and pre-philosophical opinions about virtue” (54). As this everyday, or *pre-philosophical*, notion of virtue is questioned other aspects are brought to light in the discussion that had hitherto remained concealed, there occurs a partial revelation to the understanding of the truth of the Being of virtue (*aletheia*), and this represents a moment of *enlightenment*, indicating that a transformation in the characters of those involved has occurred, albeit in a limited manner, and, in some instances, this change to the soul remains hidden to the participant. However, since there are always aspects of virtue’s *self-showing* that will remain hidden from full disclosure, because the movement of truth (un-concealment) is grounded in concealment, further interrogation and questioning is demanded. In moments when further interrogation of virtue is required, as we witnessed in the discussion of the *Euthyphro*, it is possible to state that the participants in the dialectic experience *aporetic breakdown*, moments when the interrogative questioning reaches an impasse. However, for Socrates, these problematic, troubling, and difficult moments do not signal the end, breakdown, or failure of the dialectic, far from it, rather these *aporetic* moments demonstrate the *exigency* and compelling need to forge ahead in the inquiry in order to wrest from concealment further aspects of the Being of virtue that might potentially contribute to further deepening the understanding of those

involved, which occurs, much like the original moment of unconcealment (*aletheia*), in terms of partial revelation, the *intimation of truth*, which opens Socrates and his interlocutors to new and unforeseen aspects of the virtue in question that have been wrested from concealment.

Plato (1997) describes the dialectic process and clarifies what I have termed the *intimation of truth* in the *Seventh Letter*, insisting that the dialectic is a process wherein the participants must hold themselves fast in the “well-meaning” pursuit for truth, all the while attuned by the understanding that sure and certain knowledge can never be “acquired” and “communicated” in terms of propositions. Philosophy, focused on the virtues, remains the type of “subject matter” that “cannot be expressed in words as other subjects can,” however, as Plato assures us, it *is* possible “in living with the subject itself in frequent dialogue” that the light of truth, in terms of a “light kindled from a leaping flame,” the *intimation of truth*, might come “to be in the soul where it presently nourishes itself” (341b). As related to Plato’s description above from the *Seventh Letter*, Kirkland’s (2010) reading indicates that

the truth [*aletheia*] or unconcealment of human virtue that this elenctic philosophizing accomplishes need not entail stripping the being of virtue completely of its concealment via a propositional definition and grasping it by means of a *techne* or *episteme*. Indeed, it might involve instead bringing virtue to light *as concealed*, as essentially and necessarily exceeding or withdrawing from our human grasp. (56)

This moment of truth in terms of the *leaping flame* is an instance of *aletheuein*, or movement into truth’s revelation, it is the essential *educative event* in which the *soul turns back to itself* as enlightened in terms of the “turning” that instantiates the change occurring to the disposition (*hexis*) of the individual in the phenomenon of *transcendence* – in this moment, the soul *becomes other* to itself, and it is now possible to understand that Socratic education, based on the understanding of the sustained and renewed nature of the dialectic, always requires “another turning,” which indicates that education *as* the facilitation of the “ethical” *hexis* in *praxis* always requires *further education*, and this need or *exigency* for continued and sustained education is *immanent*, found only in the very activity of the dialectic itself. In its essence the dialectic is an authentic form of education, and Plato reminds us of the necessity of “*living with the subject matter itself in frequent dialogue*” (341c), and this practice, or more accurately, this *ascetic way-of-life* is focused not only on pursuing the understanding of the virtues, it is also the supreme way of potentially developing the characters (souls) of those involved, and what is established, is the ongoing, renewed, and ever-deepening “relationship” to the Being of virtue in such a way, that through *intimations of truth*, the participants “embody” or “instantiate” the virtue in *praxis* (Kirkland, 2012; Gonzalez, 1995; 1998). The greatest “good” for the human being is not, as it is often thought, to achieve the knowledge and truth of virtue. Rather, the greatest good is found in the “*daily, repeated, always frustrated, and thus endless discussion of virtue* that we find portrayed throughout Plato’s works” (Kirkland, 2010, 11).

In light of this reading, Fried (2006) offers a consistent view of Socratic education that is open-ended, and this indicates that Socrates is a *zetetic* skeptic, and the “term derives from the Greek, *zetein*, meaning to search, to seek. Philosophy for Socrates is a searching, a seeking, a yearning – an *eros* – for wisdom” (162). This is not to imply that Socrates is a Phyrhronist skeptic, endorsing and enacting a radical nihilistic form of skepticism, for Socrates does offer arguments, or *logous*, in defense of his claims, for Socrates is always prepared “*rationally* to defend and criticize his own intimations, as need be” (163). The interpretation of Socrates as a *zetetic* philosopher is antithetic to doctrinal readings focused on the philosophical ideal of the

philosopher-kings who have grasped true Being, or reality. The Philosopher-kings are “*echonic* philosophers (from the Greek, *echein*, to have, to hold),” for they alone “*possess* the truth” (164). This “seeking” (*zetein*), which is “*skepsathai kai suzetesai* (to examine and seek together) what virtue is” (174) requires that the participants “hold” themselves within the context of the dialectic, and this suggests, according to Kirkland (2012), the following crucial understanding about Socrates and the “care of the soul” as related to my concern with the facilitation of the individual’s ethical disposition (*hexis*):

Indeed, it would seem that the constant, elenctic *aporia*-producing and sustaining questioning of Socratic philosophizing, and thus even a certain, self-conscious way of *not possessing knowledge or wisdom of “what virtue is,”* is what is supremely good for human beings...any interpretation that finds the great benefit of the elenchus in knowledge or wisdom *beyond* that activity must be rejected in favor of an interpretation that finds this benefit *within the elenchus itself*. Thus, it speaks directly against the possibility of any human being ultimately *possessing* some real extra-elenctic product, some knowledge or wisdom about the issues addressed by Socratic questioning. (11)

In Section two I introduced the characteristics of “philosophical understanding,” now I attempt to show, by turning to Gonzalez (1995; 1998), *how* this form of insight arises and is instantiated within the context of the dialectic, within the *praxis* of Socrates and the interlocutors questioning virtue. I focus on the definition of “courage” in the *Laches*, which, to reiterate, presents the Socratic concern for the virtuous education of the soul. Within this dialogue, philosophical understanding is set between the two extremes of knowing represented by the generals Laches and Nicias. The former defines courage in terms that are intuitive and experiential and the latter defines it in terms of a sophistic understanding, or on what he believes he has heard Socrates teach. Thus, the understanding of the Being of courage resides at a distance from both “unreflective intuition (which characterizes everyday experience)” and the “knowledge of propositions (which is what the sophists claim to have)” (Gonzalez, 1998, 21). By attempting to move beyond both these forms of knowledge, which indeed represent the initial “tell-me-what-you-believe” requirements (*doxastic requirement*) of the dialectic, the process of question and refutation begins. As in Kirkland’s (2010) reading, Gonzalez (1995) also claims that the Being of the virtue and the understanding thereof, which presences in the midst of the discourse, does so only when those involved are dedicated to holding open the discussion, i.e., the so-called definition of courage emerges, and indeed is embodied within the unfolding of the discussion, and does not live beyond the space of the discourse as would an instance of objective knowledge. The meaning of the virtue in question is to be found in the very process of dialectic, inseparable for the practice itself, and not in some answer that would terminate the process, i.e., “if we inquire properly into the nature of virtue, our inquiry will itself exhibit virtue” (162).

It is helpful here to recall the definition of Socrates as *zetetic* philosopher, because in adopting the attitude that philosophical understanding is limited, finite, and fleeting, with its tendency toward modes of dissembling, Socrates enters the dialectic focused on “seeking” to reveal the Being of courage with the pre-understanding that the path will be arduous and difficult with no guarantees of success in the form of knowledge acquisition or possession, and in this way, as Gonzalez (1995) contends, Socrates already instantiates the virtue and thus “exhibits courage in the very process of inquiring into it” (Gonzalez, 1995, 171). Despite the dialogue’s various turns and *aporetic breakdowns*, Socrates maintains the courage to hold

himself and inspire others to maintain their persistence in the pursuit of truth, there is an understanding of courage that manifests, and it is unlike the knowledge of courage displayed by Laches, for Socrates' understanding of courage "does not hurl itself into the unknown or give itself over to misology"; conversely, Socrates' understanding of courage is unlike the knowledge of courage displayed by Nicias, for it "does not tenaciously hold on to formulas but is willing to abandon a statement if the truth reveals itself to be elsewhere" (171). The philosophical practice of dialectic as envisioned by Socrates, as outlined above, "*shows* rather than *proves*" and "*manifests* rather than *describes*" a unique form of understanding of courage that is an *intimation of truth* that retains the *ontological* proximity to the Being of virtue grounded in the *distance* highlighting the human's relationship to all modes of world-disclosure, and thus "courage," in this instance is

the courage of confessing one's ignorance, one's own vulnerability before the truth...it is a courage open to contingency, i.e., which knows that it cannot anticipate the truth or capture it once and for all in certain rules or definitions...it is willing to argue and venture a hypothesis, knowing that in its very ignorance it has a share of wisdom. Both skepticism and dogmatism are forms of cowardice. The tension between knowing and not knowing, the desire to be good without the possession of any skill that will guarantee goodness, *this* is the proper sphere of courage" (171).

This manner of embodying and demonstrating courage in dialogue with others, which is facilitated, and indeed made possible, by the form of philosophical understanding of virtue as discussed, is precisely one of the most difficult aspects of Socrates' unique understanding of education (*paideia*), but this is also, and herein lies the tragic-double bind of Socratic philosophy, that which makes philosophy the most worthwhile of all life-pursuits, and this is expressed by Fried (2006) as the "burden," or the ultimate struggle (*polemos*) of the *zetetic* philosopher to engage and sustain himself in discourse. One possible explanation for the difficulty in sustaining oneself in Socratic dialogue is that it is a *painful* experience that was related earlier to the *pathos* of the dialectic, which is not to be conflated with Nietzsche's notion of the "pathos of truth" in terms of an ethical character flaw, but rather *pathos* in this instance is a mood or mode of attunement inseparable from the soul's potential ethical development.<sup>3</sup> For as the *soul turns back to itself* enlightened, the *pathos* of the dialectic is *affectively modified* by what Kirkland (2010) identifies as the *deinos*, which "is first and foremost" the human being's encounter with what is "awe-*inspiring*, wonder-*provoking*, or terror-*inducing*" (49). Indeed, this is consistent with Heidegger's (2001) translation of "wondrous" from the Greek in the choral "Ode to Man" from Sophocles' *Antigone*, where the encounter with the *deinon* "induces panicked fear, true anxiety, as well as collective, inwardly reverberating reticent awe" (159/114-

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<sup>3</sup> The crucial difference between Nietzsche's conception of the "pathos of truth" and the excess of "truth" inspiring or eliciting *pathos* in the dialectic of Socratic education is that the latter interpretation represents an authentic mode of attunement (*pathein*) to the *ontological* condition of truth's excessive character and *presence*. To be attuned, here, indicates that when exposed to the *pathos* of the dialectic – *pathein*, "to suffer" – we undergo an *educative* transformation to our Being, in that we see, interpret, understand, and discourse in new and different ways. As opposed to the belief that we can master and overcome the *pathos* or pain of the dialectic, in and through the categorical possession of knowledge or truth, we are, in the grip of the *pathos*, which is *deinon*, humbled and rendered diffident in the midst of its awe-*inspiring presence* of truth as an "excessive" phenomenon, which is always highlighted by its recalcitrant nature, i.e., its *ontological* propensity to conceal itself in the recession into *finitude*.

115). Kirkland go so far as to equate Socratic philosophical understanding, or “truth,” with the *deinos*, which relates to what was stated regarding truth’s propensity to outstrip full disclosure because we are set at an *ontological distance* from experiencing truth in a complete mode of unconcealment. Truth, thus conceived, represents the “dramatic exceeding of the limits of the familiar, the ordinary, the everyday. That which is *deinos* presents itself by shocking and destabilizing the structures of intelligibility according to which our experience of the world is usually unreflectively being ordered” (49).

Such instances might be experienced in terms of a “waylessness,” or what I previously introduced as moments of *aporetic breakdown*, moments when one or another opinion (*doxa*) to which we hold fast is called into question and rendered fallacious and untenable. To reiterate, in such moments we are at a loss and find ourselves at an impasse. Beyond this, however, and in the extreme, the *deinos* is the force as related to the “excessive” nature of truth that radically calls into question those things that “we presumed to be the limits of ‘what is,’ even of the possible” (49), and it is against this awe-*inspiring* and excessive force that our dogmatic and long-standing views are destined to *shatter!* Thus, the notion of *aletheia*, the “flashing light” that grants partial revelation into the Being of virtue, is at once the revelatory potential to challenge courageously the “proximity” of *ontological distance* related to the Being of virtue and at once an “ominous” reminder of the limits and radical *finitude* at the heart of the human’s *ontological* condition: truth thus conceived will be “*excessive, overwhelming, and disruptive,*” and it is here that it generates “*a certain truthful pathos or suffering*” (50). In essence, the *asketic* process of “care of the soul” as the transformation of the soul’s disposition (*hexis*) in and through education requires this disruption of our “comfortable, entrenched, presumed understanding of virtue,” thereby exposing the participants in the dialectic “to what exceeds that understanding” (55). In Kirkland’s descriptive interpretation below we find the essence of the “care of the soul” in the Socratic dialectic, which is grounded in the *ontological* relationship of the human being to truth and the Being of virtue. The radical change in the soul’s disposition through *transcendence*, demands that an authentic Socratic education must be concerned with the

truth we experience via *pathos* [attuned by the *deinos*], a condition of being exposed to and affected by this excess. In contrast to the *pathos* of rhetoric, this philosophical *pathos* would also entail a certain self-recollection [reflexivity]... a recollection of one’s distressing position over against the now unconcealed concealment of “what virtue is”... Socratis, elenctic investigation of “what virtue is” does in fact accomplish this radical form of *aletheia*, the excessive truth or truthful excess, and its *pathos*. (56-57)

It is now evident that character development *as* the striving toward the ethical betterment of the soul’s disposition (*hexis*), which is the essence of a Socratic education as defined herein, is a difficult and precarious endeavor that is wrought with dangers and pitfalls. Although I examined the presence of the “underdeveloped” ethical character displayed by Euthyphro and the various groups of citizens that Socrates examines in the *Apology*, there are many well-known instances of unscrupulous characters that were resistant to devoting and exposing themselves, and, in a sense, releasing themselves over, to the extreme difficulty and “burden” that is required for the ethical education of the soul in the practice of the dialectic. For example, the immoral conduct of several of Socrates’ followers demonstrates that their fleeting associations with Socrates was not enough to facilitate an ethical character (*hexis*), and in addition, this aptly demonstrates that Socrates, in terms of a traditional educator (*didaktikos*), could not “teach”

them much of anything about virtue: Charmides and Critias infamously governed during the bloody reign of the thirty tyrants (404-403 B. C. E.) and Alcibiades was a sacrilegious traitor to Athens, betraying his countrymen in the Peloponnesian War by defecting to Sparta, and in addition to treason, he profaned the Eleusinian Mysteries.

However, as related to this interpretation, perhaps Alcibiades reveals crucial insight into the authentic nature of Socratic education when he intimates, within the encomium to Socrates in the *Symposium*, that “care of the soul” cannot be taught through the imperatives of ethics, conveyed through axioms of moral conducts arising from knowledge of virtue that comes by means of either a *techne* or *episteme*. At best, it seems that Socratic philosophy induces an uncomfortable and inconvenient interruption to Alcibiades’ escapades by causing a fleeting yet burdensome sense of shame for his ambitious endeavor. Although these men greatly admired Socrates, the enactment of a philosophical life dedicating to improving the soul’s disposition, devoted to tireless and intensive *zetetic* self-examination, ultimately proved beyond their powers of self-discipline, and thus their souls their dispositions (*hexeis*) remained underdeveloped. As related to the interpretation of Socratic discourse in Gonzalez and Kirkland, when they were no longer in the company of Socrates, they slid back into the *unexamined* ethical mores of the *polis*, of the many (*hoi polloi*), content and self-assured in the security afforded by their opinions that went untested. In a shockingly frank admission, Alcibiades describes the intense and disturbing “pain” (*ho deinon idein pathos anthropois*) that is associated with “holding” oneself in the company of others in the authentic pursuit of the “care of the soul”:

ALCIBIADES: Socrates is the only man in the world who has made me feel shame – Yes, he makes me feel ashamed: I know perfectly well that I can’t prove he’s wrong when he tells me what I should do; yet the moment I leave his side I go back into my old ways, I cave into my desire to please the crowd. My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I am doing nothing about my way of life, though I have already agreed with him that I should (Plato, 1997, 216b).

Just as we have seen that in an important way the attunement to “non-knowing” is an essential precondition for the dialectic pursuit of a potential ethical disposition of the soul, it is also, as intimated, linked with “suffering pain and needfulness,” which in some way “might be *eudaimonia* or ‘true happiness, flourishing for human beings’” (Kirkland, 2010, 96). This, as related to Alcibiades’ telling remarks, indicates that those who shun the dialectic or seek to extricate themselves from the context of its “difficult” unfolding, might in fact feel “shamed if they do not suffer this pain,” which, according to Kirkland, is what “Socrates wants for the ones he loves and *all* that he wants for them” (96). If we understand “care of the soul” in terms that are consistent with my reading throughout, *melete* (“care”) is not merely the demonstration of concern or interest for a thing or person, beyond this, it is a “*painful* concern with respect to virtue,” *the most important and difficult of all things*, and this theme “has been largely neglected in the secondary literature, surely because taken for a merely emotional [over rational], subjective [over objective], or preliminary aspect of the epistemic [over *ontological* and *axiological*] condition at which Socratic questioning is understood to be primarily directed” (97).

### **Concluding Remarks *On the Absence of Difficulty in Standardized Education***

As I have argued the following points: first, we cannot understand virtue without the sustained and ever-renewed process of the dialectic, and this process is inseparable from our undergoing a profound transformation to our soul or disposition (*hexis*), and second, “philosophical understanding” of the virtues through the *intimations of truth* is non-transferable through traditional pedagogical means. Here, bound up with this unique form of philosophical understanding, is a crucial reason why the traditional educational model of *Socrates-as-teacher* that emerges from a doctrinal reading of Plato’s dialogues must be put in question, for, as we have seen, one who is in the possession of “doctrines [of truth] could easily pass them on to another and “store them away without being personally transformed by them,” and yet this is precisely what Plato considers to be impossible with respect to philosophical understanding, namely, it resists all attempts to be made “objectifiable as a set of doctrines” (Gonzalez, 1995, 174-175). Even though no sure and certain knowledge arises, in that Socrates can give no necessary and sufficient reasons for adopting his ethical stance, as we have seen, the questioning inquiry itself instantiates the virtues in *praxis*, albeit in a manner where the ethical “stance” requires the continued establishment and reestablishment of its tenuous and transitory ground. Temperance, piety, courage, and justice are all aspects of the dialectic itself and therefore essential to education, for virtue, to reiterate, “is to be found in the very process of dialectic and not in some ‘answer’ that would end the process” (171), and “Socrates in the very way he inquires into himself [and others] *shows us what it means to be good*” (167).

Jardine (1998), writing on curriculum, phenomenology, and hermeneutics also talks of the *difficulty* of learning when it represents the supreme instance of “interpretive work,” and Jardine, much like the portrait of Socrates I presented, is convinced that “education” means pursuing *interpretive work* as “a potentially *painful* process, because it is not produced of a method which (ideally) will keep everything under control by severing all the tendrils of sense that can pull in so many different, often incompatible ways” (49). But the rewards of the difficult endeavor of interpretation are many and varied including the potential “recovery of a sense of self that is different than the one with which we begin such inquiries” (94). Although not interpreting Plato’s dialogues, Jardine echoes our discussion of the soul’s *turning back on itself* enlightened in a mode of *transcendence*, which instantiates the process of an ever-developing and changing ethical disposition (*hexis*). Here, education is not concerned with either seeking out or passing along to the student truth of an “objective” nature, it is also not dealing with a ready-made subjectivity that has been forged and *reified* through one or another of the processes of standardization in educational and curriculum research. There are no generalizations that are related to or emerge from the Socratic dialectic as might be linked with the “care for the soul” and the individual’s ethical development. Contrary to standardized views of education, in terms of teacher standards, student achievement, or the school’s efficiency rating based on test scores, the *interpretive work* of the Socratic dialectic is in its *essence* perhaps the most pure and *originary* form of education we might conceive. Jardine states the following about the educative or pedagogic nature of *education-as-interpretation*:

There is a straightforward sense in which interpretive work is pedagogic: it is concerned with the regeneration of meaning and is therefore disruptive of fossilized sedimentations of sense, desiring to open them up and allow “the new” to erupt and thus allowing the old and already established and familiar to regenerate and renew itself...it moves against the *stasis* inherent in objectivism and literalism. (49)

Contemporary education would view the “difficulty” - the *pathos* and the *deinon* of Socratic inquiry - as a problem to be eradicated through scientific-technical means. This is because standardized education works from out of the attunement, for it is not merely a world-view as it represents a much deeper form of entrenchment in a way-of-life, that fosters the erroneous understanding that we cannot properly know the world unless it is revealed through scientific and technical modes of disclosure. For example, in quantitative educational research, the precise form of research that *AERA* (American Educational Research Association) endorses unequivocally, we witness the “relentless proliferation of research data on every conceivable feature of the child’s life,” and this appears to “engender the feeling of knowing less and less, of being more and more unable in the face of such proliferation, so that the only way to survive is to diligently attempt to ‘get on top of things’ and try to ‘pin them down’” (Jardine, 2000, 121-122). By turning education, curriculum, educators, and students into “problems” to be solved through the application of empirical or social scientific methods, the “existence of technical knowledge as a possibility creates the need for the possibility by engendering the anxiety for which it sets itself up as the remedy, not the cause” (122). Education, in this day and age, seeks to outstrip any and all difficulties encountered in the processes of education because it begins from the misguided view that life should somehow be without *difficulty*. It is the work of *interpretive activity*, according to Jardine, much like the Socratic project of “care of the “soul,” that seeks to “recover the original difficulties of life, difficulties that are concealed in technical-scientific reconstructions, concealed in the attempt to render human life objectively presentable” (118).

For example, if we look briefly at the Common Core State Standards Curriculum (US) it is clear that any “philosophical” aspects of the students’ course of study is reducible to cross-curricular “skill sets” associated with problem-solving “techniques” related to *critical thinking* and the application of *metacognitive* techniques for assessing the efficacy of the thinking process and perfecting the skill sets required for deft retrieval and application of knowledge (Drake, 2008; Jensen 2004; Bransford, 2000). Here, as Taubman (2009) notes, one of the assumptions about learning is that the “content of learning is learning itself,” i.e., as opposed to authentic curriculum subject-matter, “learning strategies, thinking skills, critical thinking, decision making skills, and adaptive expertise, all of which are often grouped under metacognitive strategies, become the content” (185). *Metacognitive* skills are important to the learning sciences because they provide *thought-templates* that are transposable, for the *metacognitive* skills and strategies are portable from context to context. This view presupposes that the human is primarily directed toward its world in terms of a knowing and calculating mind, a tightly ordered neural-web of information/data and that these skills can be transferred from expert (educator) to novice (student). This, as we have seen, adopts a view of knowledge, knowledge acquisition, and transfer that Socrates vehemently argues against, for recall Plato’s insistence in the *Seventh Letter* that education as “care of the soul” could never be accomplished by means of *filling* up the soul with knowledge as if it were an empty vessel (518b).

What might contemporary educators take from my discussion of Socrates, education, and the potential facilitation of an ethical disposition (*hexis*) that might be of value to their pedagogy? My immediate rejoinder reminds educators that what we have discussed resists codification and application as if it were a tried and true method of “educating,” as in teaching “using” the so-called “Socratic Method,” and, as we have seen, this is what certain educators have envisioned and attempted to enact in the classroom. Based on my critique, this is an erroneous and problematic approach to understanding what I have described as an “authentic

Socratic education.” Socratic education brings our attention to the notion of *ontology* over *epistemology* and *virtue/ethics* above *technical skill*: Ultimately, the encounter with Socrates should inspire educators to focus on the type of human being that standardized education is both envisioning and forging, and these are issues that have been expressed by curriculum theorists and philosophers of education such as Pinar (2001) and Bonnett (2010), but require our continued and concerned attention: is the human to be properly understood according to a behavioral or neural-cognitive model? Is the human being a passive *tabula rasa* upon which the datum of experience impresses itself? Or, is the human an autonomous subject in transition that requires a form of “learning” or “education” that is essentially concerned with the most difficult components of developing an ethical character?

To conclude, I return to the *Charmides*, where Socrates might well have been speaking of contemporary quantitative research in education when warning of the dangers associated with privileging the *instrumental* drive for technical superiority over the philosophical pursuit of the understanding of the virtues, for if this quest for technical-scientific knowledge is taken to the extreme, as in *scientism* - which is not only the belief that scientific methods are best equipped to explain the world, it also demonstrates the *epistemological arrogance* expressed in Nietzsche’s understanding of the “pathos of truth” - what is lost is the “human,” or *humane*, elements of education (Gray, 2004). The *ontological* and *humane* elements of education for Socrates, represent the “essence” of an authentic education, which, stretched out *ontologically* between *finitude* and *transcendence*, transpiring in the dialogues, is a human life engaged in the philosophical and *asketic* task of facilitating the continued development of the soul or disposition (*hexis*), which is a “lifelong, ongoing task, one that when properly understood, far from causing us despair, opens us to the richness of the human condition” (Fried, 2006, 172).

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