

## Searching for Answers in Plato's Dialogues:

### Socrates and the Techne-Analogy

Contrary to what some scholars think, the techne-analogy in Plato's dialogues is used by Socrates to refute his interlocutors and is not intended to show that virtue is a techne. There are, however, scholars in support of this theory who interpret techne as not only "productive knowledge", but also as "theoretical knowledge."<sup>1</sup> In this essay, I will argue that techne should be defined as specialized skill and does not specifically mean those skills that produce ergon. My argument will thus attempt to reconstruct Roochnik's argument of the "techne-analogy" in a way that will better support his overall conclusion: that by using the techne-analogy Plato is in no way asserting a definition of virtue, but rather only uses it to refute interlocutors and their positions taken on this subject, as well as others.

It is my opinion that Roochnik does not provide adequate support for his conclusion; evidence exists to make his case stronger. His understanding and manipulation of language—both Greek and English—create a shortcoming.<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this essay I will focus more on his interpretations of the English language, and more importantly, his interpretation of Irwin's language.

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<sup>1</sup> The books and articles that deal with the passage in question are Irwin, Terence. *Plato's Moral Theories, The Early and Middle Dialogues*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977. Klosko, George. "The Technical Conception of Virtue." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24,(1981): 95 – 102. Nussbaum, Martha C. *The fragility of goodness, Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986. Richardson, Henry S. "Measurement, Pleasure, and Practical Science in Plato's Protagoras." *Journal of the History of Philosophy* (1990): 7 – 32. Roochnik, David. *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996. ---. "Socrates' Use of the Techne Analogy." In *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*, edited by Hugh Benson. New York: Oxford University Press, 1992: 185 – 197. Rutherford, Richard. "Unifying the Protagoras." In *The Language of the Cave*, edited by Andrew Barker and Martin Warner. Edmonton: Academic Printing and Publishing, 1992: 131 – 156. Tiles, J.E. "Techne and Moral Expertise." *Philosophy: The Journal of the Royal Institute of Philosophy* 59, (1984): 49 – 66.

<sup>2</sup>As an undergraduate, it is not within my ability to challenge the ancient Greek translations, although that is not to say that I am in agreement with them. Roochnik's translation of ergon differs from two similar translations, one from Helmbold's (action), another from Irwin (work), both which appeal to me more than Roochnik's 'product'. Also, his disagreement with Irwin's translation of techne as craft, I do not support.

The *techne*-analogy goes as follows: in many of Plato's dialogues Socrates compares *techne*, or craft, to a virtuous person during an argument.<sup>3</sup> That is, Socrates compares an employer of *techne*, such as a sculptor or a physician, to virtue. Some scholars interpret this analogy as virtue being a *techne* that can therefore be taught and regarded as a map or guideline through which to attain and lead a virtuous life.<sup>4</sup> Not so, in my opinion, as well as others,<sup>5</sup> for Plato offers no evidence from which to infer such claims. He does, however, seem to use the analogy to refute an interlocutor in order to demonstrate the interlocutor's fault in assuming he understands something he does not. The overall debate concerns whether or not the presence of the *techne*-analogy is sufficient evidence to claim the existence of a moral theory presented by Plato through Socrates.

Roochnik presents a new challenge to Irwin's argument: if he can prove that not all *technai* are productive, and Irwin's theory depends on productive *technai* for support, then Irwin's conclusion, that Plato or Socrates asserts that virtue is a *techne*, cannot be drawn. He tries to do this by showing some *technai* to be productive—having a product distinct from the activity that produced it—and other *technai* to be theoretical—having no product at all.

Roochnik goes on to say, "a preliminary step in dealing with this question has generally been overlooked,"<sup>6</sup> and calls attention to a problem in the translation of *techne*, in Irwin's case, as craft. "In English, craft connotes knowledge that is productive in nature," says Roochnik. By attaching connotation to craft he refutes Irwin, believing that if he can prove some *techne* arenon-productive, then Irwin's argument for moral theory cannot stand. This would be a valid refutation, but Roochnik fails to prove his theory of non-production with the given examples.

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<sup>3</sup> Roochnik lists (p. 194) "seven dialogues in which "techne" occurs at a rate of 1.0 times per Stephanus page or higher": *Cleitophon*, *Ion*, *Amatores*, *Statesman*, *Phaedrus*, *Gorgias*, *Sophist*, and *Republic* Book 1.

<sup>4</sup> See Terence Irwin, *op. cit.* (esp. chapter 3, p. 37 – 101), and Martha Nussbaum, *op. cit.* (esp. chapter 4, p. 89 – 121).

To connote, in the English language, is to signify or suggest (certain meanings, ideas, etcetera) in addition to the explicit or primary meaning. I find connotation problematic in this case, in that Roochnik attaches to “craft” his personal experience with and own understanding of the term: “craft” represents a productive skill. This, however, should not be applied to his argument, because he is dealing with “craft” as defined by someone else. It was not Irwin’s intention, in my opinion, to refer to craft as anything more than a *specialized* skill. I am in agreement with this point in Irwin’s argument and believe that Roochnik has defined “craft” too narrowly.

Assuming the position that craft connotes something productive in nature, one must be able to find the end result of each and every *techne*. Roochnik’s attempts to refute Irwin’s moral theory by proving that some *techne* are not productive in nature, but are rather, by nature, theoretical. He then subdivides *technai* into the productive and the theoretical. There is, in my opinion, no strong evidence that *techne* has or needs a subdivision. “Theoretical *techne*” such as mathematics and chess are productive in nature,<sup>7</sup> and therefore fall into the productive category which places all *techne* under the same subheading. This seems unnecessary. If one defines *techne* as “specialized skill,” then there is no need for distinction, since the word applies to any activity requiring a special knowledge or understanding of what is needed to perform the skill properly.

When Socrates compares a sculptor, physician, and sophist (311b – e) to find out what Protagoras claims to teach, he does not consider the distinction between the product of each *techne*, but rather acknowledges all three as *technai*. In the *Gorgias* (450c-d), Socrates speaks of the different kinds of *technai* and their use of speech, some requiring little and others requiring

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<sup>5</sup> For information on this position see Roochnik’s “Socrates’ Use of the *Techne*-Analogy.” p. 186.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, p. 190.

much, making distinctions between the nature of painting, arithmetic, and chess. He still, however, refers to them as *technai*. Painting, arithmetic, and chess all have different products: the *techne* of painting produces a painting, the *techne* of arithmetic produces an answer, and the *techne* of chess produces a winner. Although these *technai* have different products they are nevertheless *technai*. Each *techne* has its distinct qualities; one could not discern between them, and thus the *technai* could furthermore not exist. There are many differences between the *techne* of painting and the *techne* of arithmetic, but they are similar in that each requires a specialized knowledge to perform his skill correctly.

Roochnik defines the Greek term *ergon* as product.<sup>8</sup> Whether or not a *techne* produces *ergon* should have little impact on defining *techne*. If one defines *ergon* as product, it should be understood as the result of employing that specialized skill; after doing that which one knows how to do well, there will be a result. *Ergon* describes not just the result of *technai* that produce physical products but also those that have theoretical products, meaning the distinction that Roochnik makes is unnecessary. Again, one can note that some *technai* are more physically oriented than others, and some more theoretical, but such are the distinguishable qualities of *technai*. Using the subdivision as a device to refute is acceptable; however, Roochnik's argument has room for improvement.

Roochnik uses mathematics as an example of a theoretical *techne*. This *techne* falls outside his productive category, and thus lacks a final product. His comparative example of a physical *techne* (carpentry) versus a theoretical *techne* (mathematics) is less than convincing. A house “speaks for itself” as the final repository of all that the carpenter knows” and “without

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<sup>7</sup> I will argue this position later in the paper.

<sup>8</sup> I have come across more than one meaning for this word See Irwin (*ergon* = work) and Helmbold's (*ergon* = action) translations in the *Gorgias* (450c – d). Again, I am not a scholar of ancient Greek, so for the purpose of this essay, I will work with his definition. That is not to say that I agree with this translation; quite on the contrary, I

houses the carpenter (qua carpenter) is both meaningless and without worth.” The mathematical equation differs, for “ $4+12+19=35$ ” is necessary, not contingent, and 35 can therefore exist without the mathematician. Such a point is plausible, since 35 without representation is simply theory. But this particular 35 is spoken for: the equation “ $4+12+19$ ” represents its origin, and the mathematician represents the technician that created the simple equation. But Roochnik does not think that 35 speaks for itself as all that the calculator knows. Nor do I.

There are several problems with this section of the argument. First  $4+12+19=35$  as all that the mathematician knows seems absurd. Roochnik believes that also, but for a different reason. He asserts that since there are many ways to arrive at 35, it is not “the unique product of the unique process that produced it.”<sup>9</sup> Not so for the mathematician. There are many paths to 35, I agree, but also many different ways to construct a house. A house still stands in the end, regardless of which way the carpenter chooses to build. So, if the carpenter employs one of the various ways to get to the house, so does the mathematician when using  $4+12+19$  to reach 35.

The examples in their original form are incomparable. The house representing the skill of the carpenter is a decent example. Although we do not know what type of house, and therefore cannot fully comprehend the level at which the carpenter’s skill resides, it better demonstrates a carpenter’s knowledge of his craft than, say, a footstool. On the contrary, one expects any child over a certain age to perform successfully the mathematical techne Roochnik supplies his readers with; that does not mean the child possesses a techne comparable to the carpenter’s. The answer to the equation given in his essay,  $4+12+19$ , does not then compare to the house, for such a level of skill relates more to that of the footstool.

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believe ergon to possess a definition that would, again, cause his conclusion to be more guarded. Perhaps more can be written on that subject in the future.

<sup>9</sup> Roochnik, p. 188.

The initial point of attack presents dissimilarity between the carpenter's house and the calculator's 35. Instead of beginning with the calculator in the calculative example (as in the example of the carpenter), Roochnik starts with the end product, the result, the *ergon*, 35, and moves then to the equation of which 35 is the answer to,  $4+12+19$ . To make the structure of the mathematical example parallel to that of the carpenter, one would need to say that the calculator chose the numbers 4, 12, and 19, added them, and rendered an answer of 35, just as the carpenter gathered his materials, organized them, and rendered a house.

While these examples seem more comparable, Roochnik's idea of nonproductive *techne* has not been proven. He quotes Socrates in the *Gorgias* as evidence of the distinction between productive *techne* and theoretical *techne*: "Of all the *technai* some consist mostly of production (*ergasia*) and require little speech, some require none at all but accomplish their work in silence, such as painting and sculpture (450c7-10)." Roochnik also refers to "others of the *technai* which accomplish their purpose entirely through speech and, one might say, are in need of little or no product (*ergon*) in addition, such as arithmetic, logistic, geometry, and draughts" (450d3-7) as a passage that sufficiently establishes the "central thesis" of his argument, that some *technai* are productive and others are theoretical.

Again, a problem arises with his translation, this time of *ergon*, for translated as 'work' or 'action,'<sup>10</sup> an entirely different meaning of the passage presents itself.<sup>11</sup> However, Roochnik's translation of the passage remains questionable. Roochnik uses the passage from the *Gorgias* (450c – d) to support his theory of *techne* and its subdivisions. But in context, Socrates uses the *techne*-analogy to understand Gorgias and his assertion that he is a "rhetor". By claiming that he

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<sup>10</sup> See W.C. Helmbold (*ergon* = action) and Terence Irwin (*ergon* = work) for alternate translations (450c – d).

<sup>11</sup> If action is substituted for product, as done in Helmbold's translation of the *Gorgias*, all evidence to support Roochnik's idea of a separation between productive and theoretical *techne* is erased. The same occurs when one

teaches men the art of rhetoric, Socrates is able to compare the profession to that of a weaver and composer (449d – e), as they are all *technai*, and *technai* can be taught. Gorgias must then describe in terms of Socrates' analogy, what it is that a "rhetor" does, since he has already subscribed to the base parts of the analogy. Socrates distinguishes between the *techne* in terms of speech (some *technai* use language more than other *technai*), not of *ergon*. In this instance, Roochnik seems to take a position similar to Irwin's: that an assertion by Socrates can be taken out of context and have a larger significance. If Roochnik holds such a position, yet in other parts of the essay argues against that same idea (accepting the dialogue as significant out of context) that Irwin uses to support his theory of virtue as craft, then he contradicts himself and the position taken in his essay.<sup>12</sup> He has charged Irwin with distortion; however, by using the quote from the *Gorgias* he has done the same.

But what does all this mean anyway? What is *techne*? What is craft? One might define *techne* as the knowledge of how to do something, any knowledge pertaining to a craft, art, or practice; *technai* are teachable. Carpentry is a *techne*. So are dancing, journalism, and research. Consider chess: to play, one cannot simply rearrange the pieces or play checkers; one must possess the *techne* of chess to play both correctly and well. Understanding *techne* in terms of production is not necessary, though if one were to go that far, one could find that each *techne* produces something, be it physical or in theory. The shipbuilder's *ergon* is the ship; that of the sailor is reaching the intended destination. To understand the product of a *techne*, one must not

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substitutes work for product, as Irwin does. The exact meaning of *ergon* is, to my knowledge, unclear at this point in my academic career.

<sup>12</sup> "By describing the function of the analogy as dialectical, I mean that it can only be understood within the context of the dialogical argument in which it is used. As a result, to isolate it from its context and treat it simply as a conceptual schema is to distort it." Roochnik, p. 190.

think strictly in terms of the physical. The ergon (again, using Roochnik's translation) should be understood as the intended product of employing a specialized skill.<sup>13</sup>

As I understand Irwin, craft should be defined as specialized skill. So the specialized skill of a journalist is transforming an interview or information into convincing material, making it audience-accessible. The specialized skill of the sailor includes an understanding of how to operate a ship in every type of weather. These jobs require more than a basic understanding or "common knowledge." They require an intense study or apprenticeship of the particular techne.

If techne were to be understood in terms of production, why should some have products and others not? Techne achieves a result, sometimes physical, like the house, and sometimes theoretical, as in the solution to an equation. A separation of techne between the productive and the theoretical should not be made, since each produces something. Rejecting the idea that all technai have a product on the basis of some producing physically and others not seems absurd; because the chess player's win is not a physical product does not mean that employing the techne of chess lacks a product, or is not productive in nature. I think Roochnik understands the word 'product' to connote a physical result, and not just product as the representation of a technician's skill.

How does a product represent the technician's (employer of techne) level of skill? Does the house accurately represent all that the carpenter knows? "There is no measure of the carpenter's skill other than the house."<sup>14</sup> Is that the position maintained by a person unskilled in carpentry? Or could all, including carpenters, recognize truth in such a statement? Surely not all carpenters possess the same level of skill; some must be more knowledgeable of their techne

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<sup>13</sup> Irwin uses the English word 'craft' to represent techne. Roochnik rejects this because of the connotation he attaches to it. I accept Irwin's craft as a translation of techne, but again, I do not understand ancient Greek, and therefore cannot truly have a solid opinion of his translation either. Yet I will stick to Irwin's side of the matter, as Roochnik has not convinced me to accept his.

than others. Can the house truly represent all that the carpenter knows; can he do no better? Although these questions remain unanswered for Roochnik, and no distinctions are made, one should understand his example as house *representing* the best work that a carpenter can do.

Roochnik proposes that a house “speaks for itself” as the carpenter’s *techne*. Without houses the carpenter is meaningless. But this is true not only for *technai* that produce physical results. Without the product, or end result, all *technai* would lack meaning. Without the performance, what meaning or purpose would the dancer have? The same for the writer, the geometer, the chess player; without the products, the results of their *technai*, each of these technicians are also meaningless and purposeless.

So what is the product of a theoretical *techne*? Using the example of the calculative *techne*, the calculator represents the technician, the *techne* itself involves choosing and manipulating numbers and numerical phrases, and the product is the specific outcome or answer to the equation. Why should one consider this example a productive *techne*? According to Roochnik, three elements shape the productive *technai*: the technician, the *techne* itself, and the *ergon* (product). Each element represents one piece of the calculative *techne* example above; following the formula, the calculative *techne* is also a productive *techne*. If one deals with *technai* in terms of production, then theoretical *technai* are examples of productive *technai*; therefore, all *technai* are productive.

What is the significance of the *techne*-analogy? Again, some scholars understand the *techne*-analogy to have moral significance.<sup>15</sup> Irwin understands moral virtue as a craft, based on the analogy. From the analogy Socrates presents of, for example, Zeuxippus of Heraclea, a

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<sup>14</sup> Roochnik, p.186

<sup>15</sup> See Irwin, *op. cit.* and Nussbaum, *op. cit.*

painter, and Protagoras, a sophist claiming to be a teacher of virtue (318b-e), Irwin infers that Socrates holds the position that as painting is a *techne*, so is the practice of virtue.

Irwin takes his theory even further, to argue that since virtue is a craft, it must have an end product, namely happiness. “If virtue is a craft, then all man’s choices must conform to this pattern; for if all his desires aim at the final good, and moral knowledge tells him what contributes to the final good, then this knowledge is sufficient for virtuous action.”<sup>16</sup>

But before deciding whether or not the *techne*-analogy asserts “Plato’s Moral Theory”, one must understand the meaning of virtue. Such is the purpose of the *Protagoras*: Protagoras asserts that he is a teacher of virtue, and Socrates questions Protagoras about the nature of virtue. Protagoras, like many of Socrates’ interlocutors, cannot answer his question directly, as he does not realize he accepts money to teach something he knows next to nothing about.

Socrates also does not appear to hold a position on whether or not one can teach virtue. In the *Protagoras*, after a lengthy dialogue with his interlocutor, he stops short of drawing a conclusion about the teachability of virtue.

My only object, I said, in continuing with my questions has been the desire to ascertain facts about virtue and what virtue itself is. For if this were clear, I am very sure that the other controversy which has been carried on at great length by both of us—you affirming and I denying that virtue can be taught—would also become clear. The result of our discussion appears to me to be singular. For if the argument had a human voice, that voice would be heard laughing at us and charging us: “Socrates and Protagoras, you are strange beings; there are you, Socrates, who were saying earlier that virtue cannot be taught, contradicting yourself now by your attempt to prove that all things are knowledge, including

justice, and self-control, and courage—which tends to show that virtue can certainly be taught; for if virtue were other than knowledge, as Protagoras attempted to prove, then clearly virtue cannot be taught; but if virtue is entirely knowledge, as you are seeking to show, Socrates, then I cannot but suppose that virtue is capable of being taught. Protagoras, on the other hand, who then hypothesized that it could be taught, is now eager to prove it to be anything rather than knowledge; and if this is true, it must be quite incapable of being taught.”(361a-c)

The end of this dialogue can conclude nothing about virtue, certainly not that virtue is a *techne*, since Socrates and Protagoras arrive at neither of the possible conclusions they asserted. One conclusion can be drawn from the dialogue: Socrates uses the *techne*-analogy as a dialectical strategy to find out what Protagoras actually understands not only about the nature of virtue, but also about his teaching in general. My belief is that Socrates uses the *techne*-analogy because Protagoras has asserted that he is in the business of making men virtuous; that is his profession. A teacher of sculpture is comparable to a teacher of medicine in that they are both teachers of the *techne* they possess. One can then conclude that a teacher of virtue is analogous to a teacher of sculpture or medicine because they are all teachers of their *technai*. If virtue is what Protagoras claims to teach, then he should be able to define virtue for Socrates without difficulty. Since he cannot, it demonstrates to Protagoras, in addition to his audience and paying customers, that what he claims to know and teach about virtue, he does not, for he cannot define virtue when asked.

In seeking an answer from Protagoras regarding what he teaches young men, Socrates slings him the *techne*-analogy. He mentions the sculptor and the physician, and then asks what

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<sup>16</sup> Irwin, p. 82.

Protagoras does. Protagoras is tricked into defining his profession in a way that parallels the first two techne. By using this form, Protagoras must supply Socrates with a certain kind of answer, namely, that what he teaches men to do is not something that he simply knows, but something that he learned himself. Protagoras' most direct answer—that when a man comes to him “he will learn only that which he comes to learn. And this is prudence in affairs private as well as public; he will learn to order his own house in the best manner, and he will be able to speak and act most powerfully in the affairs of the state” (318e – 319a)—is altered by Socrates. Protagoras then agrees with Socrates' reformulation of his answer, that he is a teacher of virtue. By accepting the premises, Protagoras has placed himself in the hands of Socrates; it is Socrates who will direct the dialogue, for Protagoras stands in a position of vulnerability.

Had Protagoras asserted that he takes the money of wealthy young men to turn them into good speakers, perhaps the dialogue would have come to a close. But such was not the case. It was therefore necessary for Socrates to learn the nature of virtue, as Protagoras agreed to know, or to show Protagoras that he did not understand or have knowledge of the things that he thought he did.

In my experience with Plato's dialogues<sup>17</sup>, Socrates constantly searches for knowledge and understanding; he engages in what we today call philosophical thought. When Socrates encounters a character who claims to possess knowledge of a subject, be it piety in the *Euthyphro*, the nature of the soul in the *Phaedo*, or the nature of virtue as examined in the *Protagoras*, he always seems eager to learn of the knowledge they possess, if in fact they possess any. Whether or not the person encountered by Socrates really possesses the knowledge he claims to will be determined by the dialogue in which he participates. If the person encountered

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<sup>17</sup> The following dialogues have been studied for the purpose of this essay or for another purpose: *Euthyphro*, *Apology*, *Crito*, *Meno*, *Phaedo*, *Protagoras*, *Phaedrus*, *Theaetetus*, and *Gorgias*.

does not possess such knowledge, then Socrates, through their dialectical exchange, will show that character his ignorance. Stronger evidence is needed to support the notion that the techné-analogy demotes more than Socrates' rejection of an interlocutor.

In conclusion, the purpose of this essay was to interpret Socrates' use of the techné-analogy, mainly in the *Protagoras*, and by doing so prove that the analogy was not used to show virtue as Plato's moral theory or Socrates position on the subject of virtue. While it would be nice to assert Plato's or Socrates' position on a subject, it is just not possible, as the literary couple notoriously leaves out the answers. Whether they have the answers or not are questions that one can only speculate about. Scholars must take care to draw from the dialogues only that which they offer, and be careful not to take everything at face value, as this essay illustrates the fault in such a practice. A scholar can take away from Plato's dialogues a philosophical guide, an understanding of knowledge, particularly the knowledge that others, and quite often even the readers themselves, claim to have. As Socrates tells Gorgias (453c), "It is not really for your sake, but for that of the argument, in order that it may advance with both of us being informed as clearly as possible about the matters under discussion."<sup>18</sup>

There is nothing wrong with Irwin's assertion that all technai are productive, as the purpose of techné is always to achieve an end result, or in Roochnik's language, a product. The problem with getting into specifics occurs when the assertion ends up on the other side of the analogy, assuming that virtue has a product. Well, what is virtue? Socrates certainly never held a position on virtue for more than an instance within a dialectical conversation with his interlocutor of the moment. So, to then assert that Plato was trying to convey, through Socrates, his moral theory, or ideas, or position taken on virtue, seems questionable.

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<sup>18</sup> Taken from Helmbold's translation of the *Gorgias*.

Then Roochnik takes it one step further. Even though my position of Socrates' intent when using the techne-analogy agrees with his own, the support for his conclusion is less than convincing. He focuses on a distinction not recognized by Socrates in any of the dialogues. To subdivide techne into that which is productive and that which is theoretical refutes Irwin's moral theory in an interesting way, but remains far removed from the position taken by Socrates in the dialogues he uses for support. I do not believe that readers of Plato can know what positions he truly held, and therefore cannot know the thoughts of Socrates on these subjects either. The positions are not stated; Plato has left his readers perplexed and still searching for the answers they were hoping to find at the end of the dialogue. Whether or not techne is productive provides no sufficient evidence to conclude that virtue is a techne. Even if all techne are productive (my position), I find no reason for crossing to the other side of the analogy. The techne-analogy is a dialectical stratagem used for professors of knowledge; it is a test. Socrates tests both Gorgias (450a – e) and Protagoras (318b – e) with it. The interlocutor either passes or fails (in the case of both examples, they fail); the point is to come away understanding more than one did before entering the argument.

So what is the techne-analogy's connection to virtue? Virtue is a concept, similar to others in the Platonic dialogues, which many people (not only scholars) understand but cannot define if asked. Irwin, interpreting the analogy as Plato's moral theory, defines virtue as a kind of knowledge. Adhering to a technical conception of virtue means that it can be taught. But what is virtue and who can truly teach it? Using the techne-analogy can help to prove false knowledge of virtue, but can also prove true knowledge on the subject, if it in fact exists.

How could Roochnik have better supported his conclusion that the techne-analogy is used only as a device for refuting interlocutors and their positions on certain subjects? Perhaps with

more convincing examples, or by avoiding using connotations, for these weaken his argument. But more importantly, by rejecting Irwin's argument, by showing that whether or not *techne* is productive, one can not reasonably infer a moral theory conveyed by Plato. There is no evidence to support a connection from one side of the analogy to the other.

And so, one ought to understand the *techne*-analogy used by Socrates in Plato's dialogues as follows: although Socrates uses *techne* such as sculpture and medical practice in comparison to the practice of virtue, he in no way asserts that the two former are similar to the latter. If an interlocutor asserts—as in the *Protagoras*, that he is a teacher of virtue—Socrates can assume that since virtue can be taught, it is a *techne*. Whether or not virtue can be taught is still in question by the end of the dialogue; for if Protagoras cannot define virtue, he obviously cannot teach it. So virtue therefore cannot be compared to *techne*, and then understood to be Plato's moral theory, for the position that virtue can be taught never acquires sufficient support.

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