

ON THE ROLE OF DIALECTICAL GAMES IN *THE REPUBLIC*

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In [1], co-authored with Benoît Castelnérac (Université de Sherbrooke), we presented a formal characterization of dialectical games (from the standpoint of game semantics), as they were played in the Academy at the time of Plato, for which the *Dissoi Logoi* and Book VIII of Aristotle's *Topics* are the sole surviving 'textbooks', and for which Plato's dialogues provide not only a rich lode of actual examples but also a good deal of theoretical commentaries through numerous meta-discussions, e.g., at *Republic* 534b-c about the need to 'test' one's claims. (The main controversial point of our paper was a refutation of Vlastos' still very influential interpretation of the *elenchus* in [2].) This was merely the first part of an overall project, which is to apply this new approach to dialectical games to the study and explanation of more substantial claims found in Plato's dialogues. There is, however, a obvious difficulty with this approach, since one would ordinarily claim that dialectical games were indeed crucial to early 'Socratic' dialogues, while they *prima facie* are not for later dialogues such as *The Republic*, where they are often said not to play a substantive role anymore, over and above being a thin disguise for a more dogmatic form of demonstration (see, e.g., [3] and [4]). To take but one recent example, Roslyn Weiss has shown, through a discussion of passages such as *Republic* 367b-e, that this view cannot be quite right [5].

I would like to argue that dialectical games as understood and presented in [1] do play a substantial theoretical role within *The Republic*, from the standard use to test the consistency of one's claims to the more substantial role of setting limits to Socrates' own utopian view of the city. In this talk, I shall illustrate this through a discussion of the consequences of Socrates' own recognition, at 487b-d, that he cannot argue for the truth of his claims about the desirability of the philosopher-king only through winning dialectical games. The paper will press that the *elenchus* nonetheless plays a vast array of structural and epistemological roles in *The Republic*: 1) essential parts of its dramatic structure are based on various uses of the *elenchus*, by Socrates in Book I and *other characters* in Books II and VI; 2) key passages of Book VII concerning dialectical games, at 534b-535a and 538c-539d show that regardless of its shortcomings, the *elenchus* is fundamental to Plato's epistemology.

- [1] Castelnérac, B. & M. Marion, 'Arguing for Inconsistency: Dialectical Games in the Academy', G. Primiero & S. Rahman (eds.), *Acts of Knowledge: History, Philosophy and Logic*, London, College Publication, 2009, pp. 37-76.
- [2] Vlastos, G. 'The Socratic Elenchus: Method is All', in *Socratic Studies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1994, pp. 1-37.
- [3] Vlastos, G., *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1991, p. 249.
- [4] Press, Gerald A., *Who Speaks for Plato?*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham Mass., 2000, p. 214-215.
- [5] Weiss, R., 'Wise Guys and Smart Alecks in *Republic* 1 and 2', in G. R. F Ferrari (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Plato's Republic*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007, pp. 90-115.