

**Plato's Problem: Word of truth and Word of untruth  
Apology: a starting point of the problem**

Pari Sousahabi<sup>1</sup>, eza Davari Ardakani<sup>2</sup>

1. Phd in western philosophy, Islamic Azad University Science and Research branch, Philosophy Department, Tehran, Iran.
2. Phd in western philosophy, Islamic Azad University Science and Research branch, Philosophy Department, Tehran, Iran.

[Pari\\_sousahabi@yahoo.com](mailto:Pari_sousahabi@yahoo.com) . [rdavari@ias.ac.ir](mailto:rdavari@ias.ac.ir)

**Abstract:** Accepting Gadamer's words, Philosophy begins with Plato's coherent works and that all philosophers have benefited from his works to present their thoughts throughout the history of philosophy. Yet it seems that a crucial point in Plato's works has been neglected even though he himself has paid attention to it and it would be word of truth and word of untruth. What is word of truth? What is the Wrong word? Who is the speaker of the word of truth? Who is the speaker of word of untruth? What are the characteristics of each one? During the last two thousand and five hundred years, philosophers have not paid proper attention to the subject, whereas it seems to be more fundamental and significant than it is at the first sight to such an extent that one could consider it as Plato's main problem. During fifty years of his life he scribed more than thirty works concerning this problem. This article tries to illustrate Plato's problems/concerns particularly in his earlier writings. This is an excerpt from my doctoral dissertation under the supervision of my honored professor doctor Reza Davari Ardakani.

**[Pari Sousahabi Reza Davari Ardakani. Plato's Problem: Word of truth and Word of untruth - Apology: a starting point of the problem. J Am Sci 2012;8(6):475-478].** (ISSN: 1545-1003). <http://www.americanscience.org>. 61

**Keywords:** word of truth / honest, word of untruth, Socrates, Plato, the Public/common people

### Introduction

Plato's works mark the beginning of philosophy and with his writings he places Socrates as the beginning of philosophy, "Socrates is the philosophy" "he is the teacher of all the philosophers and the paragon of philosophy"; reading Plato's works is as if one has walked into the class of two great masters in the dawn of philosophy.

Philosophers throughout the two thousands and hundred years of history of philosophy have reaped Plato's abundant harvest based on their time and context. The Author has tried to tackle Plato's works impartially, as a student of philosophy as a lover of philosophy and I came across a point that seems to be Plato's main problem which in spite of its significant importance happens to be neglected: Word of truth and Wrong word. What do we mean by Word of truth? Who is the speaker of the Word of truth? Who is the speaker of the wrong Word? What are the characteristics of each one? What consequences does each of them have on their time? And why is it so important to Plato at all?

It all begins with Apology, the beginning of Plato's oeuvre during fifty years in which he wrote more than thirty works. Apology is the starting point for Plato and in it he presents the first encounter of Athenians with Socrates which is also Plato's main concern; the confrontation of Word of truth with widespread Wrong one.

### Word the most important product of human being

In his works Plato describes two crafters: Devine and Productive therefore there are two kinds of crafting, Devine and productive. Crafting or art (Tekhnê) is the product of man but among his products one stands elevated to the extent that it can form the foundation of his other products, crafting of words.

Crafting word is the most significant of man's crafts which not only comprises his other crafts but also, more importantly, individual forms, polis, governor and type of government and even crafts his time and era. For instance, if a wrong word crafted by the crafters of word becomes embodied in the hearts every man and turns into a public belief and acting like a pseudo law and consequently it will shape characteristics of people and also the polis and the government of it. In Politeia he describes that all governments correspond to the morale of the people since governments do not pop out of nowhere but stem from the spirit of the people of that polis." (Politeia : 544)

Therefore a dictating government denotes a dictating spirit in the mind of people living in that polis. That is to say the majority of people in that polis are dictators. And if it is otherwise or any other form of government it means people are projecting their beliefs to the government.

### The Public/common people

It seems that according to Plato the mass could be divided into two unequal parts:

- 1- The minority who produce the word
- 2- The majority who believe and spread the words.

Plato believes that Sophists, poets, Politicians and Philosophers are among the producers of the word. And The Public are among the believers and propagator

Believers of the words are more in number therefore and consequently more in power therefore "they can kill anyone suspicious".

Plato's Socrates is the true philosopher, the only crafter of the Word of truth since his words accords with the divine words (logos). On the other hand the sophist acts as the opposite role since he crafts wrong words and his words not only discords with Logos but also is a detriment to the polis.

According to Plato crafter of the words especially the sophists are the one who craft and garnish it with mesmerizing words and sell it for money. They are the businessmen of the soul. Quiet contrary to what sophist have spread among the people, Socrates is not the one who mislead the youth but it was the sophist themselves who beguile the people using deceitful words. They are diametrically opposed with Socrates, they seek their benefits by crafting and selling their words to gain fame and wealth and they are indifferent to their fellow citizens. However for Socrates people are the main concern and never desire wealth and fame. It's possible to say that he is the only person who enlightens his fellow citizen's by having dialogue with each of them and never ask for money in return. Sophists on the other hand sell their pretentious words for high prices and never stop to wonder if their words is to the benefit of the people or not. Profit is the mere thing they care about.

This is the main reason that Plato Recurrently refer to the sophists' deceitfulness. They make wrong words believable by quoting words of poets and famous people and people hearing these spread them as truth.

### **Maker of the words**

Aside from the Sophists, also poets are among the ones who make wrong words. Although they might make word of truths since "their works stems from natural ability and charm. "They believe to know everything but they know nothing" (ibid. 22).

Plato puts them in three categories and sets some rules so that by regarding them they will no longer make wrong words. For their word is fundamental to education of the soul and from childhood which is the significant point in the education those words will be told and narrated into

their ears. Their words have two main problems: First it does not accord with the word of truth and second it is harmful for the polis. That is to say if the people grow up hearing their untrue stories there is the risk for them to become coward, disloyal and traitor. And it is quiet impossible to purge their soul from the thing gained in childhood.

Politicians are another group who are able to make word of untruth. They do so by using words of Sophists, poets and philosopher. And for the purpose of running the polis they can make wrong and word of truths.

Philosophers too are among the groups capable of making words; Socrates is the paragon of the true philosopher. He only speaks rightly and never otherwise not even when threatened by biggest dangers like death which by many is considered to be a great misfortune and try to escape it using deceitful or pitiful words (ibid 34-35). Socrates is the only one speaking right/truth since he is the only listener of the word of truth. He hears the words of Logos. He is like Solon and Parmenides and lawmakers of the ancient world; he is the one hearing the essence of things and he is the one being able to shed light into them using only the first unit of speech, words.

First lawmakers according to Plato are the one who hear the words of Logos in everything visible or invisible and they are the one who understand the essence of things and name them.

### **Apology, a starting point for Plato**

Apology is not only a work belonging to the earliest period of Plato's work but also it is considered to be the beginning of the way in which he has tread and leading to nearly thirty works. In Apology Plato illustrate the trial of Socrates; he was sentenced for uttering wrong words and deceiving youth of the Athens; Athenians or the public sentence him; Apology is the confrontation of Plato with Athenians. The picture of a conflict between the truth and the untruth word. The Speakers of the word of untruth are putting Socrates (speaker of the word of truth) to trial based on untrue accusations.

Socrates for Plato is the speaker of the right being sentenced by the speaker of the wrong word. Trial of Socrates means trial and death of the word of truth.

Confronting the planned the word of untruth in the court and in such a short time, Socrates manages to point out some the word of untruth so that everyone knows the things they believed in are not true. So that they wake up although it seems to be a hard thing to happen and the time is short; " I know not whether they are able to do this or not' Socrates says. The point is Plato take this hard task of Socrates and spends nearly fifty years on it to prove to

everybody what is the right and wrong words. Plato in Apology draws a picture of his starting point; confrontation of the speakers of the right and the wrong words:

1- Socrates answering wrong words of Athenians says that if you kill me or sent me into exile or deprive me from social rights and think of it as a misfortune for me you are totally untruth since they are misfortune to you. For me a misfortunate is the one who tries to eliminate some one unfairly and sentencing me is hurting you yourselves for " know that they cannot do bad to the good ones" since Logos will not allow that.

Socrates, the speaker of the word of truth believes this to be true " know that they cannot harm to the good ones" but the word common for people to be true is completely the opposite. They say and believe that "they can harm the good one". Socrates is defending the word of truth however the Athenians does not understand him. The point is "they do not understand the word of truth even if they hear it" (khorasani, 237)

They believe in the word of untruth which is exactly the opposite of the right one, words that sophists have made and are believed by the people in the society. And it is believed by the people that badness is better than goodness and life of cruel men is better than that of a good and just man. This thought is believed by them as a law and soon it will be a law in the society and consequently in such a society worst (cruellest) will be ruling. Since they believe so, their life would be the same which means, the word of untruth is the basis of the individual, the polis, government and the ruler through the time.

2- As believed by the people whatever Socrates does is not humanlike for his deeds are not communal, he never takes money for what he does for people and this is considered to be inhuman and even senseless. He runs after each citizen trying to have a dialogue, hoping that they would understand the value of themselves and try to accomplish humanlike characteristics and also to understand that what they know to be knowledge is fallible. However according to the majority of people these things are worthless and distance one from family and life. Therefore what Socrates did was the opposite of people.

3- People are used to do anything in time of danger even wrong acts. If they are summoned to the court they do things that are not in accord with human made laws which is based on Devine laws. For instance they do illegal things to change the verdict: by arousing pity and crying or bringing children or family to the court to impact the judge. According to Socrates these things are illegal since judge's role is to choose the right. A judge is the

person who should discern the right and wrong based on his natural skills and education, he has given a pledge and should follow it so he is supposed to judge people not by his feeling but only by law and based on facts and truths. The citizens of the polis are supposed not to make him break that pledge. The judge also must try to avoid disloyalty (apology 34-35)

Plato believes that the apparent winning of the speakers of the word of untruth does not show they are right and Socrates is wrong. If Socrates is sentenced it is not a sign of his inability of talking since he is a great speaker, instead he is not able to utter words that every one want to hear (the word of untruth), words that people are used to hear which Socrates hates (ibid 38).

Plato believes that Sophists make the word of untruth and to do so they pay attention to the manners and words that are favored by people. However Socrates believes this to be wrong since it is false for human being to use anything to escape danger for escaping danger is not difficult but escaping badness is and since badness is deeper than death Socrates falls in and Athenians fall deeper. They sentence Socrates to death and truth sentences them for cruelty and badness; both sides are happy but which one has chosen the right pass? No one knows but god (ibid: 42)

The public spread the word of untruth and the words become an axiom for them. They talk about death as if they know the misery of death however Socrates believes that neither him nor anybody else what death is. People fear death as if they know it is the greatest misfortune so while doing anything they make sure it does not lead to death however this is wrong and the thing they should consider is the rightness of that action. The difference between and common people is that since Socrates does not know about the other world, tries not to fool himself and this only makes him the wisest man. He only fears the things he knows for sure like breaking the laws, disobeying the verdict of the superior person be it god or another human being (ibid: 28)

Plato believes that people tend not to wake from the sleep and they don't want to hear the word of truths. They put in jail the one who wants to wake them up so that they go on with the sleep. They are not aware that by killing Socrates they are wasting god's gift since god has sent him o them. But now may be god send them someone else to wake them from the deep sleep. (ibid: 31)

In Apology Despite all the things he says the word of untruth common among the Athenians, but they sentence him to death. His accusation means accusation of word of truth and its speaker; killing Socrates is killing of word of truth. People not only

misunderstand his words but take his death sentence as sign of his guilt and a proof for their wrong words.

Therefore more the word of untruth is spread in Athens which hurt Socrates friends and pupils. And it seems from the day of trial to the day of execution which is marked by arrival of a ship, more wrong words were said: If Socrates was right why then was he sentenced?

Why did not his friend, Plato, Kriton and others save him from death? At least they can pay for his fine and save him or helping him escape.

These statements are further proof to the old saying that the innocent man will never die, which mean that if Socrates dies so he was guilty. These are some examples of the word of untruth hurting Socrates friends and pupils. Plato in his following works tries to prove the fallibility of common beliefs: he wants everyone to understand what the right or the wrong word is, who the speaker of the word of truth is and what characteristics the speaker of the word of untruth has. Why and how Plato does tries to prove that people are wrong and present the word of truth? Why are these so important to him? And how can word change individuals, polis, and governor of the specific period of time?

Majority of Plato's writings during fifty years are concerned with this subject therefore it seems that right and the wrong word is the link between Plato's works. Werner Jaeger (1888-1961) believes education is that link (Naghizadeh 40)

This is true however we should keep in mind that education is a part of Plato's plan to prove the fallibility of the word of untruth, that is, education is a part of Plato's plan on word, not embracing it.

### Conclusion

In majority of Plato's works truth/right and the word of untruth is the main problem. What is the word of truth? What is the word of untruth? How it is

possible to change common beliefs about a the word of untruth? Why is Socrates the speaker of the word of truth? What is it in Socrates words that Plato considers to be true and put it against the wrong words? In this essay we tried to present the early stages of Plato's work which took fifty years of his life and resulted in thirty works. We analyzed Apology in which Plato depicted the first confrontation of the speakers of the right and wrong words.

### Corresponding author

Pari Sousahabi

Islamic Azad University Science and Research branch, Philosophy Department, Tehran, Iran.

[Pari\\_sousahabi@yahoo.com](mailto:Pari_sousahabi@yahoo.com)

### Reference

- 1 - Davari Ardakani, Reza , *I am Only Speaking to one! A picture of Socrates' Face*, Keyhan Farhangi 9 (3), Khordad 1371.
- 2 - Khorasani, Sharafoddin, *Early Greek Philosophers*, Ketabhayeh Jibi Publications, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition, 1357.
- 3 - Jowett , Benjamin , *The dialogues of Plato* , New York : Random House , 1937.
- 4 - Naghib Zadeh, Mir Abdol Hossein, *An Overview of Philosophy Of Educaion*, Tahoori Publications, 25<sup>th</sup> edition, 1389.
- 5 - Plato, *Collected works*, translated by Mohammad Hasan Lotfi, Kharazmi Publication, 1336.
- 6 - Plato, *Collected works*, translated by Mohammad Hasan Lotfi, Kharazmi Publication, 1381.
- 7 - Plato , *The Collected dialogues of Plato* , translators : Lane Cooper and others , Princeton University Press : 1987.

5/5/2012