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Theaetetic Thought and Socratic Speech — **Towards a Theory of Therapeutic Language 2**

Patrick Jemmer

How can we summarize the role of internal dialogue in personal individuation? Well, “One potential function of inner speech is its role in self-awareness and the acquisition of self-information ... When one talks to oneself one can verbally identify, process and store data about one’s current physical and mental states as well as past or present behaviours” [1]. Another view “ ... suggests that a person becomes aware of a mental state when the individual generates a higher-order thought about that state. This position is congruent with the present proposal: we become self-aware when we engage in self-talk (higher-order thought) about our current mental states and personal characteristics ... this relationship most likely is bidirectional ... Inner speech itself also depends upon self-awareness, or at least consciousness: one has to be awake and conscious in order to talk to oneself. Moreover, without a conscious subjective experience the self would not have much to talk about” [1]. So, let us turn now to Schoeder’s analysis and interpretation of one of the earliest discussions of “intrapersonal communication” from Antiquity, Plato’s *Theaetetus*, quoted at the beginning of this article, wherein “Socrates claims that thought is a process in which ‘discussion’ takes place within the soul. Thought dialogic as well as linguistic; this can be contrasted to a theory of thought either more akin to a ‘monologue,’ or imagistic. Whereas Plato’s dialogues are external between two or more individuals, the implication of the passage above is that a corresponding ‘internal dialogue’ of the same form exists” [2]. We can compare this with Kant’s comprehension that “Self-consciousness – the awareness that ‘*I think*’ – arises in understanding’s recognition or *apperception* that it is entirely separate from imagination, yet already implicated within, and generative of, its processes. [Kant writes:] ‘I call it *pure apperception* ... because it is that self-consciousness which, while generating the representation ‘*I think*’ ... cannot itself be accompanied by any further representation.’ Understanding obtains the right to apply its concepts to all objects of possible experience through reason’s ‘Ideas’ which go beyond the possibility of experience” [3]. The specific language used by Plato to describe this was that “External dialogue is composed of statements (*logos*), which differ from judgments (*doxa*) ... [Elsewhere] Socrates uses *dianoia* to refer to thought, not *doxa*. Although both *doxa* and *dianoia* can be translated as ‘thought’, the distinction between the two seems to be in the degree to which a thought has been affirmed as a judgment (*doxa*), rather than just as thoughts (*dianoia*) ... If

thought is isomorphic with external dialogue, then it will also require individuals to have multiple view points. Judgment is the result of internal dialogue, since discussion is generally directed at reaching a judgment. There is also a distinction between 'statement' and 'judgment', since statements do not occur internally, 'silently addressed to oneself', whereas judgments do" [2]. The important inference of this distinction is that "... thought is linguistic as well as dialogic, rather than imagistic, as Aristotle and others will later argue. The translation of perception into specifically *linguistic* terms grounds judgment; thus, it seems that rationality and judgment are necessarily tied to language use, if not defined by language use. The notion of thought as *dialogic* might at first seem paradoxical, since dialogue requires two interlocutors and an individual generally contains only a single position ... [However, it is possible to] argue otherwise, considering the possibility that thought need not be limited to the contemplation of a single position" [2]. Thus the upshot is that even when "thinking to oneself" – "Conversation becomes a paradigm. Even when one is engaged in silent reflection, the model Plato looks to is that in which two people secure agreement before moving ahead" [4], in other words, "Dialogue is not merely an activity between individuals, but also the foundation of thought" [2]. If we resite this understanding in terms of Socrates' dialogue, then we realize that "Theaetetus stands before his own speaking as if it were a foreign tongue. If to opine and to think are the soul's silent versions of to speak and to converse, then one can genuinely opine if and only if one has gone through the thinking that has resulted in a conclusion" [5]. Kant can also be interpreted in the similar terms since "In the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Understanding possessed a 'consciousness' of its inability to form a consciousness of the 'thing in itself' (noumenon). The 'thing in itself' resided in a site beyond Understanding's consciousness. The very absence of the 'thing in itself' allowed Understanding to form a consciousness or representation of something outside itself: the faculty of Reason. Hence, Reason became the means for mediating between Understanding and the 'thing in itself'. In other words, Understanding's consciousness of the absence of the 'thing in itself' was, in fact, a consciousness of the *absence of Reason*" [3].

And there are also overtones of therapy and the physician or midwife in the Theaetetic dialogue as noted by Polansky [6] who could be summarized as stating that "The reference to midwifery suggests that Socrates aims not only to help Theaetetus express his ideas, but also to produce an inner dialogue within Theaetetus in which those ideas arise. For an external dialogue to result in knowledge, it would begin as external, and later become internalized by the speakers, who would reach a judgment, followed by a reinterpretation into external dialogue, in which the knowledge claims could be discussed" [2]. Moreover, "Polansky furthers these questions of the relationship between internal and external dialogue. He holds that internal dialogue is deeper and richer, since it takes into account the dialogic process with which it arrived at its solution, whereas externalized 'statement' reduces the process to a single, propositional statement ..." [2]. We contrast this with the analysis of McCabe [7] who "... claims that internal dialogue cannot contain the depth of external dialogue, since internal dialogue lacks two distinct interlocutors, each of whom holds his or her position to be true. McCabe questions the specific use of the dialectic form, claiming the choice of dialectic represents an ideal form of thought ... She goes on to claim that this is only a model, and that this is a prescriptive claim regarding what the best type of process would be, but may not in fact represent how beliefs are

actually formed ... While such a model might provide *better* judgments, it remains prescriptive; the focus remains on what discourse *should* be, rather than how it actually functions" [2]. In Kantian terms we are "... forced to circumscribe Understanding's so-called 'consciousness'. Basically, this 'consciousness must not be seen to form itself into an absolute representation, for if it were to do this it would fall back into a metaphysical contradiction. If we want to save freedom, no other way remains but to attribute causality to the appearance and freedom to the thing in itself. Freedom functions in terms of an Idea of Reason as *noumenon* (thing in itself), whilst Understanding's continuous yet futile search for an objective principle governing freedom is situated in the realm of appearances and illusion" [3].

Now the thrust of these arguments leads to the proposal of a formal structural relationship or isomorphism between thought and language, and "The notion that thought is of a similar form as external dialogue grounds further discussion. The isomorphism is implicit in Socrates' claims that: 'the soul when it thinks is simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies'" [2]. Now, "The way that thought is described suggests that internal dialogue there is one activity (dialogue) which can take place, either between two individuals, or within an individual. Either way, the same activity is taking place, and thus internal and external dialogue can be thought of as isomorphic" [2]. Let us now pause to compare and contrast internal and external "dialogue," and we find that " ... the difference will lie in the fact that for externalized dialogue there will be two interlocutors, whereas for silent dialogue this will take place within a single individual. In a certain sense, in order to truly be a 'dialogue,' there will still be two opposed positions, despite the lack of two distinct individuals. Thus, one of the central features must be that a silent discussion consists of an individual engaging at least two positions in discussion. This demands the capacity of an individual to, if not actually hold two beliefs, recognize the possibility that either of two positions might be a solution to a problem" [2]. We thus recognize that "The goal of most dialogic exchanges is to come to an agreement, which one may not have been able to reach alone; however, as demonstrated in the majority of Plato's dialogues, agreement does not always result. Although judgment is achieved when the soul, 'affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel' ... dialogue is not sufficient for judgment. Instead, most of the dialogues do not end in the affirmation of 'one thing' alone – dialectical inquiry need not lead to agreement. What is central to dialogic exchange, therefore, is not judgment, but the exchange of two opposing positions with the goal of reaching a consensus or attaining knowledge" [2]. Furthermore, we can question the causal relationship between internal and external dialogue – " ... whether internal dialogue is a reflection of externalized dialogue, or if external dialogue is a reflection of internal dialogue or some other relationship. Later, Socrates describes 'account' as: 'making one's thought apparent vocally by means of words and verbal expressions – when a man impresses the image of his judgment upon the stream of speech, like a reflection upon water or in a mirror' ... While this understanding of 'account' is not ultimately successful, the conception of the relationship between thought and language remains relevant to our discussion. Here speech is a reflection of thought, suggesting thought precedes speech. Polansky notes that a circularity arises since ... [one section] describes thought in terms of speech ... [whilst another] describes speech in terms of thought. It is not, however, problematic" [2]. In

summary we find that “Thought and speech are linked and each seems necessary to understand the other. Thought is necessary for speech on this account, but speech clarifies thought in a way that thought alone cannot. While thought precedes speech, we can only understand thought through speech. For Polansky [6], thought and speech are distinguished by the degree of expression each contains. Thought might be described as occurring as a sort of proto-language, which operates much like a language, but lacks the clarity or solidity of a spoken language” [2]. For Plato, the nature of the thought-language relationship is that “Thought and language are not simply isolated incidents of discourse, but rather each is necessary to complete the other. If thought is translated into speech, its translation into an expressible statement clarifies and solidifies it. Yet, the danger in this translation is that the statement may lose the depth and profundity that it contained as a thought ... [6]. This objection does not seem problematic – rather, the profundity lost is replaced by the opportunity to pose the claim against another claim in externalized dialogue. Although the process that produced the internal judgment is not evident in the resulting statement, externalized dialogue may provide objections that the internal dialogue did not” [2].

And herein lies hidden a crucial point – the necessary openness of the dialogical dialectic, for “Since there can be any number of objections as a result of external dialogue, there will never be any clear end of them dialectical process. Thus, we reach another central element of dialogic exchange: open endedness. What distinguishes dialectical inquiry from a dogmatic approach is the notion that any claim is open to objection, and further investigation. Thus, no knowledge claim can be grounded in absolute certainty, but rather will always be a potential object of an objection, internal or external. As we move from thought to the implications on knowledge, this issue will play a key role in determining how a dialogic theory of thought will impact the resultant theory of knowledge” [2]. In terms of such epistemology we can define the relationship between knowledge and judgment as follows – “Despite the lack of any positive definition of knowledge, given its internal status, and its relationship to judgment and thought, it follows that we can consider knowledge as both a type of thought as well as a type of judgment. If knowledge is a form of thought, then judgment is a type of thought aimed at knowledge. Although judgment is not sufficient for knowledge, it is a necessary condition. Socrates distinguishes between ‘thought’ as: ‘simply carrying on a discussion in which it asks itself questions and answers them itself, affirms and denies,’ ... whereas judgment occurs: ‘when it arrives at something definite, either by a gradual process or a sudden leap, when it affirms one thing consistently and without divided counsel’ ... Thoughts occur in the mind, but judgments only do so through this dialectical process, suggesting that judgment is directed at truth. Since knowledge is a type of judgment, it will be the result of a process such as the one described above” [2]. However there is a crucial consequence of “knowledge as a type of judgment,” as identified by Nails who realised that “When a dialogue ends without claiming certainty, one does not then go back, looking for hidden clues to Plato’s real opinion on the matter. One may well go back to try to increase one’s understanding of the issue under discussion, but that is a different enterprise altogether” [8] and moreover “Plato sets his characters to argue forcefully for a number of doctrines, yet discussion is never closed, and the production of dogma is not the goal” [8]. The importance of this “different enterprise altogether” is that “Nails’ interpretation also suggests that Plato’s work is not interested in

solving philosophical problems, but rather *presenting* problems. It is unlikely that Plato would still be relevant at all, had he written in a treatise form ... Thus, the form of the dialogues itself denies a dogmatic interpretation, in support of an open-ended (or 'double-openended') reading of Plato" [2]. If we set *Tractatus* alongside *Theaetetus*, "unravelling the threads" of Wittgenstein's "clear-as-mud" aphorisms and comparing these with Plato's "undogmatic, double-open-ended" dialogues, the philosophico-mystical similarity should become apparent.

We come now to the question of the privileged "process" nature of internal dialogue, whereby "The process of transferring an internal judgment to an externalized statement transforms a judgment into a proposition, however, judgment involves more. Polansky argues that the transition from judgment to statement denies the judgment of the original depth that it contained ... For Polansky [6], internal dialogue is privileged, since it contains a greater depth, rather than remaining at the level of simply expressing the resulting *opinion* of the internal dialectical process. Thus, Polansky values internal dialogue over external dialogue insofar as only internal dialogue can display the full depth implicit in the *process* of coming to a judgment, whereas the externalization of the judgment simply becomes statement" [2]. The exact nature of this internal procedure is that "Opinion (or judgment) is the result of an internal dialogue, which differs from speaking the words out loud. I can fairly easily speak words that I do not hold to be true or meaningful, even have a discussion in which I do not hold any of the words I am saying to be true (think of someone reading from a script in a language that he or she can only speak, but not understand.) In none of these instances does *speaking* words imply that the speaker believes them to be true. I cannot make a judgment that those words are true, unless I have internalized their meaning" [2]. If we now consider the *form* of this knowledge then we reach the important conclusion that "Perhaps there is a ... sense in which knowledge is non-propositional for Plato. The objects of propositional knowledge may not, in fact, be what Plato intends by knowledge at all. That is, although Socrates' questions tend to be of the form 'What is X?' and in general the responses will be propositional ('X is Y'), as in the *Theaetetus*, the reason that they fail is that what is intended cannot be contained within propositional frame" [2]. This is because "Predication requires the predication of something, whereas Socrates seems to be looking for something definitional. Even a definition would seem inadequate due to the regress since the other terms must also be defined. While I do not want to import Forms into this discussion ... whatever Socrates is looking for would be of the same form as knowledge of Forms would. Knowledge would, it seems, not be propositional at all, but be able to recognize the essence of a concept. There would be an internal understanding, which need not translate into the ability to produce an externalized proposition" [2]. And as a negative example of this then we can follow Gonzalez who believes that "If Socrates thinks that what virtue is cannot be defined, that a definition could never state more than how virtue is qualified, and if he wishes to hint at this view without explicitly affirming it, then we should expect him to do exactly what he does" [9]. And in this sense we regain the Kantian viewpoint that " ... the territory of pure understanding is the 'land of truth'. However, it is also 'the native home of illusion, where many a fog bank and many a swiftly melting iceberg give the deceptive appearance of farther shores, deluding the adventurous seafarer ever anew with empty hopes'. Illusions continually obstruct understanding's reflexive capacity, leading it to confuse the power to *realize* consciousness with the power to *control*

consciousness. [Kant explains that:] 'False ideas arise as a consequence of an improper consideration of reason's Ideas'" [3].

And as soon as we steer our minds in this direction, trying to avoid the "fog banks and swiftly melting icebergs of illusion" we find ourselves in a "*meta-position*" with respect to communication and need language to talk about language. We can illustrate the language-metalanguage distinction by considering as an example the sentence: "In saying: 'geraravit' he was slurring four words into one" [10]. To analyse what is going on here we recognise that "Such an assertion is an assertion about words. Since all assertions are *in* words, such an assertion makes use of words to say something about words. Most assertions, on the other hand, make use of words to say something about almost anything except words. In the present terminology: most assertions of everyday speech are not metalinguistic" [10]. Despite the fact that "The distinction here is one quite commonly used in ordinary speech" [10], we must exercise caution from the outset as we can certainly postulate that "Everyday language users, using words such as 'language', 'meaning', and 'rule', do not, ... sit down over coffee to use their unexamined language to discuss the question: 'Can a meaning possibly be assigned to a symbol in a private potential language?'. That is not the kind of question for which everyday language has been devised. The area, if it exists, would be unusual" [11]. Of course, Wittgenstein, in the *Tractatus*, phrased this thus: "In everyday language it very frequently happens that the same word has different modes of signification – and so belongs to different symbols – or that two words that have different modes of signification are employed in propositions in what is superficially the same way" [12]. So, to take Wittgenstein's example: "Thus the word 'is' figures as the copula, as a sign for identity, and as an expression for existence; 'exist' figures as an intransitive verb like 'go', and 'identical' as an adjective; we speak of *something*, but also of *something's* happening" [12]. And as an aside – "In the proposition 'Green is green' – where the first word is the proper name of a person and the last an adjective – these words do not merely have different meanings: they are *different symbols*." [12]. Of course "This is a problem, not for ordinary language-users, but for philosophers, who tend not to notice that their questions are the result of not seeing clearly enough the logic of our language. So, for example, if you are aware that the word 'is' can be used to express predication ('Green is green'), then no confusion need be caused. If you are not aware of this, then you will make the 'grave mistakes' made by philosophers ... " [13]. In summary, Wittgenstein thought that "... In this way the most fundamental confusions are easily produced (the whole of philosophy is full of them) ... In order to avoid such errors we must make use of a sign-language that excludes them by not using the same sign for different symbols and by not using in a superficially similar way signs that have different modes of signification: that is to say, a sign-language that is governed by *logical* grammars – by logical syntax" [12]. In this sense, "An unusual area, with substantial issues, may exist. We may not presuppose that it does not. Philosophers *may* have been imagining, thinking about, and discussing, a genuine, unusual, area ... " [11]. Given this warning, however, we can still proceed with our "philosophical investigations," bearing in mind that "I then need to be careful to explain meanings for any everyday words which I am extrapolating into this area – and to say which other everyday words I judge not to be appropriate" [11]. We can imagine that "I proceed like a Physicist, who is careful to explain that 'weight' and 'amount' are going to be used with adjusted, extrapolated,

meanings ... “ [11]. The importance of “taking care to explain meanings” and “saying which others are inappropriate” is illustrated in detail in the arguments below. On the other hand, “Substantial issues, in an unusual area, may *not* exist. They may indicate illusory depth, generated by Philosophers removing everyday words from their usual contexts, and placing them in unusual combinations; the cogs fail to mesh; language goes on holiday” [11] – now, in this latter case, “ ... when I use more carefully explained words to try to express problems in the putative area, I should find that the problems dissolve; I should find that there is *no* unusual area – just grammatically-induced confusion” [11]. Thus we arrive at the situation wherein “ ... by carelessly taking usual words beyond the limits of the area they were intended for, by taking them on holiday ... that the cogs that should usually mesh to make language mean something are running free” [11] – and in this situation, the philosopher’s “ ... proposal can be eliminated by careful attention to the usual uses of the words involved; examples from everyday use – presentation of facts about everyday linguistic use – will expose its nonsensical quality” [11]. Contrary to this we must beware of philoposhical “Ordinary Languagism” [11] whereby if the philosopher’s argument “ ... involves many usual words, but – because of the unusual area intended – using some with *adjusted meanings*, and perhaps some special new words (technical terms). If so, for his critic to try and eliminate his proposal by insisting on using his words in the usual way, against his intentions, and hence triumphantly demonstrating that the philosopher’s claims are inconsistent with normal usage, is unsound arguing” [11]. This latter extension of unsound reasoning is widespread, and “Its influence is pernicious” [11]. The problem with this observation, however, is that “The exposure of Ordinary Languagism is disappointing for a critic impatient with metaphysics – impatient to expose much historical and contemporary philosophy as [the] nonsense he is intuitively sure it is” [11]. For example “Any tough-minded engineer would balk at ‘The Good is more identical than the Beautiful’, feel that it is clearly nonsense, and feel that all we need is to find the simple method for demonstrating this” [11]. However, despite this desire, it remains the case that “Verificationism failed to provide an algorithm for demonstrating nonsense, and so does Ordinary Languagism” [11]. In negotiating these discussions we must be careful “ ... not be misled by this into thinking (a) that there is such a thing as a ‘correct’ sign-language or (b) that there is anything wrong with the language we have. The problem with our everyday language is not that it is inadequate to express our thoughts, nor that it stands in need of improvement in order to express thoughts more precisely ... the problem is that it does not, so to speak, wear its own logical form on its sleeve” [13].

In this context, where “the cogs fail to mesh; language goes on holiday” it is of great interest to modern therapeutic practice to note “ ... Wittgenstein’s insistence that philosophical work be re-conceived as a form of treatment, a therapeutic discipline” [14], and that his approach to this work falls into two parts – “The first acknowledges that philosophy can induce conditions which *call* for treatment; the second prescribes philosophy as a treatment. What neither suggest is that philosophy might be *both* the condition and the prescription ... “ [14]. Moreover “There are some arguments in Wittgenstein’s later work, but not enough for the taste of most professional philosophers. In most cases, Wittgenstein does not offer an *argument*, but rather a kind of *therapy*” [13]. In this sense Wittgenstein’s perception may be seen as mirroring that of Hegel who claimed “My philosophy included a schizophrenic principle of self-division, negation, contradiction, but its ultimate aim ... is

one of reconciliation and harmony” [15], and who “ ... suggested that therapy had to be dialectical: it had to involve sympathizing with the patient’s complaints, winning the trust of the disturbed. It would involve respecting the patient’s rational personality while at the same time overcoming the one-sidedness and abstraction of the patient’s ‘fixed idea’” [15]. Furthermore “The way that Wittgenstein now proposes to clear up philosophical confusion bears some similarities to Freudian psychoanalysis. (‘The philosopher’s treatment of a problem is like a doctor’s treatment of an illness’)” [13] and “In his conversations and lectures, Wittgenstein drew attention to the analogy between his philosophical method and Freud’s psychological methods, even to the extent of describing himself as a ‘disciple of Freud’. However, he had no sympathy with Freud’s own conception of his achievement, according to which he had created a new *science* of psychology” [13]. The reason for this is that “For Wittgenstein, it was absolutely vital to realize that Freud had *not* given us a set of scientific explanations for, e.g., dreams and neuroses. His achievement was much greater than *that*, for what Freud had given us, according to Wittgenstein, was a new *mythology*, a new way of looking at ourselves and the people around us, a way that allowed us to see connections between things that we had not seen before” [13]. So it is safe to say that “The therapy simile is evidently an important thread in the knot ... ” [14], and that “Work on philosophy – like work *in* architecture in many respects – is really more work on oneself. On one’s own conception. On how one sees things (And what one expects of them)” [16]. Thus “ ... the significance of philosophical investigation lies in the kind of self-understanding it produces. The best, or perhaps the only, way of becoming acquainted with the background framework of our own thoughts is to be made thoroughly aware of the different frameworks which have created and sustained the thoughts of others” [14]. And perhaps this need “to be made thoroughly aware of the different frameworks which have created and sustained the thoughts of others” is the reason why Wittgenstein’s later investigations “ ... progress by means of multiform dialogue, questions and replies and assertions that issue from what is, and not just on a first reading, a bewildering array of different voices giving vent to different convictions, prejudices and philosophical temptations, voices that are sometimes stirred, sometimes stilled, by an underlying flow of argument that is not always plainly perceptible” [14].

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