

IX Symposium Platonicum

Title: The definition of *dunamis* in Republic V and its argumentative role

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Abstract:

The aim of this paper is to analyze the argumentative role of the technical sense attributed to the term *dunamis* in Republic 477c-d. Our conclusions shall be that it allows Socrates to:

- i) classify opinion and knowledge as connections between specific objects and performances in the soul;
- ii) introduce the soul as a common object to opinion and knowledge;
- iii) establish limits to knowledge, so that it does not depend only on the soul's will;
- iv) recognize a cause of being, which he will later attribute to the form of good.

Our subject begins with the definition of opinion and knowledge as *dunameis* that must differ from each other by their performances and their objects (477b). To explain this criterion, we must come back to 346a-d, where the crafts differ from each other by a specification of *dunamis* that results from the object over which its task is performed. If the two passages are analogous, the performance derives necessarily from the object over which the *dunamis* is set, rejecting the thesis that there are two criteria for individuation of *dunamis* and concluding (i).

Our interest then turns to the relation between task and object in the case of knowledge, once it is set over being and performs the task of knowing how being is (477b). Since no performance can happen over static objects, knowledge will only be noticed in the soul and will depend on it as another kind of object. This will lead us to understand the soul as a common ground to opinion and knowledge (ii), that will it make possible to pass from one to another.

When we try to see what sort of relation a *dunamis* establishes between its objects, we get to its definition as a kind of being, by virtue of which we can do what we can. From this sentence we derive two points: that we have various *dunameis* referring each of them to a different action we can perform; and that the *dunamis* in itself cannot be confused with the *dunamis* in us, although the latter is caused by the former. This causative notion links our actions and its possibilities not directly to objects, but to *dunameis*.

If this hypothesis is right, in the case of knowledge we have a causative link between *dunamis* and knowing as well as between *dunamis* and being. About these two cases, we intend to give only some hints about their argumentative consequences. The first of them gives us some light in understanding the limits of knowledge that become clear in expressions like *hopos dunamai* and *eis dunamin* (368e, 427e, 458e), leading us to (iii). The second one seems to be reflected in the more refined version of the concept of *dunamis* that includes a third element (508a), and to be the point that allows Socrates to affirm that the form of the good is what gives *dunamis* to truth, knower and known (508e) and is, by *dunamis* (509b), superior to being (iv).

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Preference: Shorter panel for the “Parallel” session.