Plato's exemplary craftsman

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CHAPTER 2

Plato's Exemplary Craftsman

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1 Introduction

In this chapter, we demonstrate that even an elite author like Plato betrays the contemporary cultural presence of a generally positive attitude to work and workers; this is *presupposed* in the communicative situation of the dialogues and thus offers a counterweight to the well-known explicitly negative passages. Our argument takes its place in the revision in the last decades of the traditional view on the low status of work, labour and crafts in premodern societies. That revision is part of a larger movement, in which debates on premodern economy, technology and money-making have been redirected by attempts to shed the evaluative biases of studying the ancient world from a modern perspective, with modern concepts, norms and values in mind. Similar academic developments concern issues such as globalization or connectivity.[1]

In thinking about work, the 2012 book by Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the 'polyphony' of ancient sources. In their study of attitudes towards work and workers in pre-industrial Europe they may even have erred a bit on the positive side, in their—in itself fully justified—attempt to tease out all the available evidence for the appreciation of crafts, labour and workers.[2] They are right, for example, in pointing out a generally positive evaluation of the Herculean model of *ponos*, 'toil, labour,' but they omit the fact that terms like *ponos* and *mochthos*, 'toil, trouble,' also

1 See the Introduction by the editors to this volume. For the debate on the economy and technological innovation, see e.g. Greene 2000. Specifically on technology and the debate on an alleged ancient 'blocage', see Bur 2016, chapter 1, and the forthcoming volume edited by Flohr, Mols and Tieleman. On money-making, see now Leese 2021. For globalization and connectivity, see e.g. Pitts and Versluys 2015; Hodos et al. 2017.

2 For a judicious evaluation of Lis and Soly 2012, see Verboven 2014. Neesen 1989 had already anticipated this positive reassessment; on Athens, see in particular Neesen 1989, 58 ff., pointing out, e.g., that in 580/79 BCE demiurges had been elected archons (Arist. *Ath. Pol.* 13.2) (1989, 63 with n. 77), and that there is widespread evidence of the professional pride of workers (1989, 97–100). Similarly, Van den Hoven 1996 investigates more positive assessments, which, for *ponos*, she finds in particular with some groups of philosophers (Stoa, Cynics) (1996, 21–30). See below, n. 5 on *ponos*.

automatically carry within themselves a more ominous association, in which 'toil' is connected with 'moral badness', 'poverty,' and 'low status.' Those are the overtones of the related adjectives *ponêros* and *mochthêros*, often simply translated as 'bad', and the nouns *ponêria* and *mochthêria* 'badness'. Moreover, the verb *poneô* is the intensive form of *penomai*, 'to work > to be poor'. *Ponos* 'toil' shares its root with *penia* 'poverty'. The whole nexus, then, of toil, moral badness, poverty and low social status is undeniably embedded in the language itself.[3] In addition, the example of Hercules himself is more likely to apply to the 'toil' or 'effort' of athletics, and by extension, intellectual labour,[4] than to manual labour, although even this does not make Lis and Soly any less correct in pointing out that there are many contexts in which work and workers are evaluated positively:[5] this back-and-forth only reinforces the notion of polyphony. Their work has since been corroborated by many other studies.[6]

Similarly, the magisterial *Story of Work* by Jan Lucassen takes a much wider view on work than simply the notion that it is what makes a living. The book demonstrates consistently that work is a value that is essential for the meaning-making efforts of human beings and their sense of identity. Also from a global comparative perspective, then, it seems to make sense to take a new look at ancient labour in terms of 'value', and there is no *prima facie* reason why the value approach could not also be relevant for an author like Plato. The question is, how and where?[7]

Many of the studies aiming at a reassessment of what was going on in antiquity (with work, progress, or technology) do so through one or both of two (relatively) new approaches. The first one is to counter the previous emphasis on elite written sources, notably by philosophers, by taking into account dif-

3 Sluiter 2008, 10, n. 26 'badness, poverty, and low status have the same package-deal relationship in the lexeme KAKOS as in the *ponêria* group'. On *ponos*, see Loraux 1982.

4 See, e.g., the use of Heracles made by Pindar, both in the context of the athletic achievements he celebrates, and as a model for the poet himself (Nieto Hernandez 1993). As Vernant puts it (1985, 275): 'Héraclès n'est pas un travailleur' (and cf. 1985, 367 n. 33, pointing out that there is no structure of cohesion in Heracles' labours, as there would have been had it been his 'work'). For Plato on *ponos*, see below.

5 They could also have chosen to refer to the large list of heroes with specialized tasks ('Helden als Sondergötter') as (to name but a few) doctors, doormen, cooks, chaser-away of flies, keybearer, mixer of water and wine etc.: Usener 1896, 247–273.

6 I'm singling out here the study by Massar 2020, who concludes that '[*t*]*echnitai* were appreciated, employed, and encouraged because of the *technê* in which they had trained' (2020, 87), while also acknowledging that not all professions 'enjoyed the same cultural and social recognition' (2020, 89). In actual life, there were hierarchies of professions.

7 Vernant 1985, 270 explicitly denies this connection between work and value in Plato: 'On peut dire que pour Platon le travail reste étranger à toute valeur humaine.'

ferent bodies of evidence: literary texts (for ancient Greece: Homer, Hesiod, the lyric poets, comedy), but also inscriptions, and in particular other forms of material culture and information on how work was organized in antiquity. The second approach complements this extension of the range of evidence by reverting to those traditional and authoritative texts of the philosophers with a new and less trusting focus: this time, the rhetorical, political and ideological purposes of these sources take centre stage, e.g. their antidemocratic tendencies. While such political *parti-pris* has been acknowledged before, now it is being connected to the philosophers' representation and evaluation of work and workers, and thus becomes part of socio-economic history. Philosophers, like everyone else, tend to frame their texts in certain ways, and their biases can be analysed.[8]

The first approach, adding different voices and sources, not only helps to put on display the polyphony represented by different types of sources or genres of literature, but also calls attention to variations in assessments of different kinds of work. Farming, for instance, is always seen positively, no matter how elitist the source.[9] The second approach tempers the influence of the elite sources by pointing out their ideological preoccupations and prejudices.

In this chapter we will use the case of Plato to add a new angle to the second approach. Undoubtedly, some of the negativity about labourers that we can find in his work can be defused by an analysis of his ideological biases. However, we can go further than that: in a cognitively inflected reading of the (psychologically plausible) communicative behaviour of Socrates and his interlocutors, we can reveal shared cultural beliefs about work that are positive. This positive attitude is un-reflected and not connected with explicit views on work elsewhere in the dialogues.

The argument proceeds in several steps. First, we discuss the overt and explicitly negative statements on work and workers in Plato. Next, we explain the concept of 'common ground.' We then present the two elements in the Socratic dialogues that together make up the argument for a positive under-

8 Such a double approach, the inclusion of less studied evidence and the rhetorical evaluation of authoritative texts, has also been used, for example, in the reevaluation of the so-called 'bad emperors', such as Nero, who clearly enjoyed a much different reputation among the ordinary people in Rome than among the senators who wrote his history in a clearly biased way. See Hekster 2009 (senatorial history); 2011 (using other types of evidence).

9 See Murnaghan 2006 on farming as one of the arenas in which aristocrats could compete for honour, standing and authority. Knowledge of farming could also take the form of mastery of the *discourse* of farming, which could allow rich people to connect to the authentic credibility of the poor, honest farmer, while it could also qualify people for 'a central role in communal life' (Murnaghan 2006, 93), as a speaker.

lying view of work in that common ground: first, the fact that *technai* represent the most readily available and recognizable examples of a body of knowledge; and second, the fact that *technê*-knowledge is seen as something morally good. This last point turns out to have antecedents in the earlier poetic tradition.

The thesis we will defend, then, is this: in spite of the generally negative assessment of work in Plato, Socratic discursive strategies betray an underlying positive cultural evaluation of τέχνη-work in the common ground between Socrates and his interlocutors (even the higher-class ones).

2 Plato on Work and Craftsmen: The Negative Part of Polyphony

The familiar negative sentiments in Plato we will report only briefly, as a foil to what will follow.[10] In the sixth book of the *Republic*, Socrates points out the social influences that will keep the most gifted people from pursuing philosophy, thus leaving the field wide open to what he contemptuously calls *anthrôpiskoi*, 'manikins' (495c), who come from the *technai* ('arts, crafts, techniques, disciplines') and are attracted by the prestige of philosophy. These eager takers, who are giving philosophy a bad name, are 'immature people, who have been physically deformed by their jobs and work, and are mentally just as warped and stunted by their handicrafts' (ἀτελεῖς μὲν τὰς φύσεις, ὑπὸ δὲ τῶν τεχνῶν τε καὶ δημιουργιῶν ὥσπερ τὰ σώματα λελώβηνται οὕτω καὶ τὰς ψυχὰς συγκεκλασμένοι τε καὶ ἀποτεθρυμμένοι διὰ τὰς βαναυσίας τυγχάνουσιν, 495d).[11]

This passage emphasizes the negative effect of handwork on body and soul and it is followed (495e) by the (to us) highly offensive image of 'a small, bald metalworker (*chalkeus*), who has come into some money. Fresh out of debtors' prison, 'he's had a bath and is wearing brand-new clothes and a bridegroom's outfit, and he's about to marry his master's daughter because she's hard up and has no one to look after her'.[12] This is what is happening to philosophy, the daughter, who is being wooed by unworthy working-class people, rather than by someone of the level of the metalworker's master. The result of such a union will be inferior offspring (i.e. bad ideas, 496a). There is no doubt about the elitist

10 For denigration of artisans by ancient writers, see e.g. Hackworth Petersen 2010.

11 Trans. Waterfield 1993, slightly adapted; the Greek construction is anacoluthic and mirrors the brokenness of the people described.

12 Based on Waterfield's 1993 translation. Technically, the 'master' is also a *technikos*, but this part of the simile is dropped without any comment or elaboration.

negative image projected here. As always, the physical imperfections (baldness, short stature) suggest moral and social inferiority.[13]

Like other elite authors, Plato evaluates *ponos* positively, but that should not be taken as a positive comment on work and workers. His Socrates recognizes (*Resp*. 535d) that *philoponia*, the willingness to undertake toil and exertion, is necessary for an education in the ideal state. However, such *philoponia* cannot be lopsided, only aimed at the physical exertions of the gymnasium and the hunt, while there is *misoponia*, an 'aversion to exertion', where intellectual efforts are required. Plato, then, fully subscribes to an elite version of *ponos*, a valuable exertion of body and mind.[14] In that sense, it is fitting that in the *Apology* Socrates evokes his own Herculean efforts to investigate the truthfulness of the oracle that had claimed that 'no one is wiser than Socrates'. 'I must give you an account of my wanderings (πλάνην) as if I was performing labours (ὥσπερ πόνους τινὰς πονοῦντος) to prove the oracle to be irrefutable' (*Ap*. 22a). No Greek audience will have missed the implicit reference to Heracles.[15] But in this combination of physically walking around and intellectual research it is not 'work' in the Lis and Soly sense that Socrates is talking about.

Plato's overt statements about work, then, especially in terms of *banausia, cheirotechnia, cheirourgia*, 'handiwork', are negative in tone.[16] *Ponos* does not mean 'work'. Its application to elite pastimes requiring effort (the gymnasium, philosophy) cannot be used as the basis for an argument about the positive assessment of work *tout court*.

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13 Cf. Lis and Soly 2012, 27; for other examples of negative statements about work or labourers in Plato's dialogues, see *Resp*. 590c, βαναυσία δὲ καὶ χειροτεχνία διὰ τί ὄνειδος φέρει; 'why does low handiwork bring reproach?'; *Alc. 1* 131b, opposing what a 'good man' knows to *technai* that are *banausoi* (handiwork, but here clearly meant as 'vulgar'); *Symp*. 203a7 also creates a hierarchy in which only one type of *sophia* (the communication between gods and men) makes its possessor *daimonios* ('inspired'), while cleverness in a *technê* or handicraft (*cheirourgia*) makes one (only a) *banausos*, 'handworker', but again clearly with overtones of 'vulgarity', given the opposition; and *Leg*. 644 states that training aimed at moneymaking or other forms of cleverness without mind or justice is *banausos* ('vulgar') and unbefitting of a free citizen, and not worthy of being called *paideia* in the first place. For such denigration of artisans and the insulting use of *banausos*, cf. Hackworth Petersen 2010. For the package deal of moral, social and physical inferiority in classical Athens, see Sluiter 2008.

14 See above, n. 4. There is no Greek equivalent for our 'work' (Vernant 1985, 274; Loraux 1982, 172). *Ponos* always needs to be interpreted in context, especially for its evaluative overtones. In the *Republic*, *ponos* mostly refers to agriculture (e.g. *Resp*. 369e), always valued positively (see Murnaghan 2006) or the gymnasium (e.g. *Resp*. 410b). *Mochthos* and *mochtheô* are not attested in Plato.

15 De Strycker and Slings 1994, 279–280 ad loc.

16 See n. 13 for *banousos*.

3 Assessing 'Common Ground'

How, then, can we prove our claim that there is a more positive underlying view of work, or at least of the *technai*? The theoretical insight we will use in the remainder of this chapter derives from cognitive linguistics and the basic principles of human interaction and communication. When two (or more) people are in conversation, different things happen at the same time. They are monitoring their interactions in different ways, for instance, from a point of view of politeness and social appropriateness. But they are also developing their conversation and the exchange of information by 'moves' that will need to make sense to their partner. One condition for this to happen is that a move cannot lack all connection to the situation, the relationship between the partners, or previous exchanges. Moves should be 'anchored' in what is called 'common ground'. In a technical sense, common ground refers to 'the sum of [two people's] mutual, common, or joint knowledge, beliefs and suppositions'.[17] Items in the common ground do not need to be made explicit, because all the interlocutors know them, they are aware that the others know them, and they are aware that this awareness, too, is shared and mutual. 'Anchoring' in the common ground guarantees that whatever is added as new by a communicative move is connected to something familiar and cognitively available.

Common ground can be manipulated in various ways, but that will not concern us here. For our purpose, what is important is that the Socratic dialogues can be analysed in a way that brings to light and makes explicit (for us) what is presupposed by all speakers and thus cognitively available and (presumed to be) acceptable to all of them. Some elements of the common ground will be shared culturally (e.g. that there is an oracle in Delphi and that the officiating priestess is called the Pythia);[18] other elements may be part of the specific interpersonal context (e.g. information about characteristics of one of the interlocutors).[19] Our focus will be on the former: the cultural common ground

17 For this definition, see Clark 1996, 93. 'Anchoring' is a concept describing how what is perceived as new is connected to what is considered familiar, see Sluiter 2017 and https://anchoringinnovation.nl. For the linguistics of anchoring, see Sluiter 2021; anchoring in common ground: Allan and Van Gils 2015; Kroon 2015, 2021.

18 Shared cultural common ground explains, e.g., why in *Ap*. 21a, having mentioned Delphi and oracle-consultation, Socrates can say 'well, **the** Pythia answered …' using the definite article (ἀνεῖλεν οὖν ἡ Πυθία). The Pythia needs no further introduction, belongs in the Delphic setting, and can be referred to as a known entity.

19 Situated cognition: Cave 2017; Corthals and Sluiter 2023.

of Socrates and his interlocutors and of Plato and his audience. And we will show that positive ideas about work, specifically about *technai*, are part of that common ground.

4 Technai

Our argument to discover the positive underlying assumptions about *technê* proceeds in two steps. First, we will show that whenever Socrates and his interlocutors are talking about *knowledge*, it is *technê*-knowledge that is in the common ground as the culturally most readily available example (i.e., the prototype) of knowledge. It is part of the shared cultural information that *technai* have specific bodies of knowledge associated with them. A second common-ground assumption we will point out is that *technai* are generally associated with a *positive morality*.

4.1 Technê-*Knowledge is Prototypical Knowledge*

Plato's representation of the progression of thought in the early Socratic dialogues is psychologically and cognitively credible. This goes for the behaviour of Socrates' interlocutors, but also for that of Socrates himself. In both cases, we can detect so-called 'prototype effects.' When people work with categories ('furniture', 'birds', but this can also be extended to abstract concepts, such as 'knowledge' or 'virtue') they do not simply count items 'in' or 'out', as either members of the category or not. They are also capable of ranking examples as better (more central) or worse (more peripheral) ones. A chair is a better example of furniture than an ashtray, and in the US, a robin is the best example of a bird. The best example of a category is called the prototype. People can produce and recognize such an example most quickly.[20] Prototypes are typically in the common ground, since they are a culturally shared phenomenon.

In the early Socratic dialogues, Socrates and his interlocutors usually try to pin down the essence of a virtue (the 'what is x'-question).[21] Typically, the interlocutors start from the most readily available example from their direct personal experience. 'What is courage?' 'Well', says Laches, who is a general, 'that is staying in line at one's assigned post'.[22] In this case, the military associ-

20 Prototype theory goes back to Eleanor Rosch 1973, 1975. For a good account in connection with classical Greek texts, see Rademaker 2005, 19–26.

21 Smith 1998 points out that it is possible that Socrates himself is not in principle searching for definitions. However, since his interlocutors frequently claim some form of expertise, they should be able to explain 'what x is'.

22 Pl. *La.* 190c4.

ations of *andreia*, 'manly courage', are widely shared in Greek society. This, then, is a prototype effect and courage in war is part of the cultural common ground. This first attempt at definition, here and in other dialogues, never stands up to scrutiny, but the important thing is that this representation of thinking through readily available examples is a recognizable part of human cognition.[23]

Socrates' behaviour is also psychologically plausible and it will lead to another prototype effect. The context in which the dialogues take place is often an educational and investigative one: either Socrates is coaching young men (or, as for instance in the case of *Laches* again, the actual question is about how to educate young men, in this case in 'manliness and courage', combined in the Greek term *andreia*); or he is talking to sophists, who claim expertise as educators in moral excellence or virtue, *aretê*. This educational context can be seen as a psychological prompt, a form of (semantic) priming,[24] for Socrates' most characteristic intuition: that *virtue is a kind of knowledge*. It should be, if it can be taught. This is actually quite a daring and new intuition, one to which the Socratic dialogues revert time and again. It is something that needs clarification for Socrates' interlocutors. It is always helpful to base explanations on examples, rather than on abstract principles, and it is of course important to select examples that would be readily recognizable to one's addressee. It is here that we see another prototype effect. The best and most readily available example of knowledge, its prototype, is *technê*-knowledge. The new and unusual idea of virtue as knowledge is being anchored in the common ground by the analogy of the *technai*, which all represent a recognized body of knowledge, of which the practitioners can give an account, and which is transmitted in teaching. Socrates can count on the recognition value of the *technai*.[25] They are a helpful cognitive model for Socrates' interlocutors to think about the virtues.[26]

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23 The best general description of the dialectical progression in the Socratic dialogues is still Goldschmidt 1947. For the cognitive plausibility of the thought-process of Socrates' interlocutors and discussion of the *Laches* example, see Sluiter and Rosen 2003, 5–8, where it is argued that the military context for 'courage' is not just a personal thing for Laches but is culturally shared: mental categories are built from the ground up, starting from 'best examples.'

24 See Chivers 2019 for a critical assessment of priming theories in social psychology. Semantic priming has not been called into question. In this context it would refer to the fact that the concept of 'knowledge' should come up faster in a context of education or investigation than in a neutral context.

25 Smith 1998, 133; Parry 2020 [2003] section 2 offers a long list of all the *technai* to which Socrates has recourse.

26 Parry 2020 [2003], section 2 discusses Plato's use of *technai* to illustrate important philosophical points, in particular to explain virtue, ruling and the creation of the cosmos. He

As an example of how easily the *technai* may be adduced in the search for an understanding of a virtue, here is an exchange from Plato's *Republic*, where Polemarchus has just taken recourse to the authority of the poet Simonides to provide a definition of justice: 'giving what is owed to each person is just'.[27] When Socrates suggests that Simonides' phrase 'what is owed' may actually mean 'what is appropriate', Polemarchus regards this as a platitude: 'well, of course' (332c). And then Socrates (the 'I') brings in the *technai* quite abruptly as a way to focus the discussion (with Polemarchus still as the mouthpiece of Simonides)(332c):

> 'But listen', I said, 'suppose [Simonides] were asked: "So, Simonides, take the art (*technê*) that we know as medicine. What is it? What does it give that is owed and appropriate, and to what does it give it?" What do you suppose his reply would be?'
> 'Obviously', he answered, 'he'd reply that it is the art of giving drugs, food, and drink to bodies.'
> 'What about cookery? What art do we say it is? What does it give that is owed and appropriate, and to what does it give it?'
> 'It gives taste to cooked food.'
> 'All right. So which art (*technê*)—the art of giving what to what—might we call justice?'[28]

Notice the casual way in which the notion of *technai* is introduced, as an example that needs no further introduction itself. Socrates never motivates it, and Polemarchus goes along with it.

In this instance, there is not so much emphasis on the knowledge aspect of the *technai*, but elsewhere there is.[29] In the *Charmides*, Critias at some point comes up with a definition of *sôphronein* as 'knowing oneself' (τὸ γιγνώσκειν ἑαυτόν, 164d), and he is asking Socrates to agree with him. Socrates, of course, wants to investigate first: 'if *sôphrosunê* is knowing (*gignôskein*) something, then clearly it would be a form of knowledge (*epistêmê*) and knowledge of

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singles out two aspects, the role of reflexive knowledge (i.e. the capacity to give a reasoned account of what one is doing), and the fact that *technai* are oriented towards the welfare of their object (see section 4.2 below). Balansard 2001 argues that the Socratic use of *technai*-arguments derives from the sophists and is meant ironically, as a rebuttal. This does not affect my own argument on the role of *technai* in the common ground.

27 Pl. *Resp*. 331e: τὸ τὰ ὀφειλόμενα ἑκάστῳ ἀποδιδόναι δίκαιόν ἐστι.

28 Trans. Waterfield 1993, slightly adapted; see Hemmenway 1999 on this *Republic* passage and its use of *technê*-analogies.

29 See Annas 1981, 24–26 on this passage.

something'. Yes, says Critias, it is knowledge of oneself. And Socrates instantly brings in medicine, as another (clearly well-known) form of knowledge, of health, and this analogy is followed by that of housebuilding and other *technai*: all of them considered under the rubric of *epistêmê* (Pl. *Chrm*. 165c–166b).

Most of Socrates' interlocutors, particularly the younger ones, willingly go along with the analogy and never question or protest against the use of the *technai* as a tool for thinking, but the hostile sophist Callicles does (Pl. *Grg*. 491a):

> By the gods, … you simply never stop your perpetual talk about shoemakers, fullers, cooks, and doctors, as if that's what we are talking about.
>
> Νὴ τοὺς θεούς, ἀτεχνῶς γε ἀεὶ σκυτέας τε καὶ κναφέας καὶ μαγείρους λέγων καὶ ἰατροὺς οὐδὲν παύῃ, ὡς περὶ τούτων ἡμῖν ὄντα τὸν λόγον.

And some of Socrates' none-too-clever political opponents have a vague inkling that this *technê*-discourse is all by itself a dangerous aspect of Socratic rhetoric: in the attempt by the Thirty to contain Socrates' activities, Critias demands that he abstain from future reference to 'shoemakers, builders, and bronze workers.'[30] These passages mostly show the extent to which the *technê*-analogies were recognized as a fixed part of Socratic discourse, however much his opponents may have been unwilling or incapable to grasp their actual role.

That role is the stability provided by the *technai*: their possessors really know something,[31] and everyone knows this. The information is in the common ground. So when Socrates in the *Apology* recounts his attempts to disprove the claim of the oracle that nobody is wiser than him, he is initially looking for someone with expert moral knowledge.[32] He goes to a politician with a reputation for wisdom (*sophia*), but discovers that there is no real wisdom there (*Ap*. 21b–c). Then he embarks on the Herculean wanderings mentioned above (section 3), which bring him to anyone with a reputation for wisdom, the poets for instance, but all in vain. As a last resort, he turns to the *cheirotechnai* (Pl. *Ap*. 22c–d):

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30 Xen. *Mem*. 1.2.37: ὁ δὲ Κριτίας, Ἀλλα τῶνδέ τοί σε ἀπέχεσθαι, ἔφη, δεήσει, ὦ Σώκρατες, τῶν σκυτέων καὶ τῶν τεκτόνων καὶ τῶν χαλκέων· καὶ γὰρ οἶμαι αὐτοὺς ἤδη κατατετρῖφθαι διαθρυλουμένους ὑπὸ σοῦ ('but Critias said: "Well, you will have to stay away, Socrates, from these, the shoemakers and the builders and the bronze workers. In fact, I think they have been worn away completely by being constantly talked about by you"').

31 Goldschmidt 1947, 102.

32 Smith 1998, 131 n. 5 points out that *technê* and *epistêmê* can be used interchangeably in the early dialogues for such moral knowledge.

> Finally, then, I went to the handworkers. For I was aware that I did not know a thing, so to speak, but I knew about them at least (γ') that I would find they knew many beautiful things. And I was not disappointed in this: indeed, they knew things I did not know, and in that respect they were wiser than me.
>
> τελευτῶν οὖν ἐπὶ τοὺς χειροτέχνας ᾖα· ἐμαυτῷ γὰρ συνῄδη οὐδὲν ἐπισταμένῳ ὡς ἔπος εἰπεῖν, τούτους δέ γ' ἤδη ὅτι εὑρήσοιμι πολλὰ καὶ καλὰ ἐπισταμένους. καὶ τούτου μὲν οὐκ ἐψεύσθην, ἀλλ' ἠπίσταντο ἃ ἐγὼ οὐκ ἠπιστάμην καί μου ταύτῃ σοφώτεροι ἦσαν.

The handworkers have *epistêmê* ('knowledge'), a bottom-line aspect of wisdom. Unfortunately, they, too, do not have enough self-knowledge to understand the limits of their knowledge, so there is no real wisdom here either. But Socrates' intuition that here at least he would be certain to find knowledge was correct. What is more, his use of the Greek particle γε ('at least', 22d1) shows that he reasonably assumed that *at least* this expectation would be fulfilled.[33] He could probably count on this being an expectation shared by his listeners. Once again then, a positive statement about handworkers is presented as something obvious, and thus as part of the common ground.

What the Platonic representation of Socratic discourse shows, then, is that there is a widely recognized positive association between the *technai* and a body of knowledge, which can be transmitted between teachers and students. The know-how of the *technikos* is the prototype of the category of knowledge. Since *technai* spring to mind as the most readily available, *positive* examples of a form of knowledge, the *technê*-analogy cements and anchors the knowledge component of virtue, which is the Socratic intuition that may have prompted the analogy in the first place. Most importantly for our purposes, in spite of overtly negative statements about workers elsewhere in Plato, this analysis shows that Socrates and his partners, and Plato and his audience, share in a readily available positive cultural association of the *technai*.

4.2 Technê *is Inherently Moral*

Technê-knowledge is the best example of knowledge. So, if moral excellence (virtue) is also a knowledge-based practice, however unfamiliar that claim may be, then virtue does indeed share characteristics with a *technê*. This more familiar example may, then, serve as a cognitive and rhetorical frame, a form of

33 For the scope particle γε, see the *Cambridge Grammar of Classical Greek* 2019, 692.

scaffolding for thinking and speaking about virtue. But there is also a corollary to this argument: the frame works both ways. It also means that *technê* becomes tinged with the characteristics of a virtue: *technai* are taken to be inherently moral. If *technê* is a frame for thinking about virtue, virtue is also a way to think about *technê*: they become *mutual* frames.[34]

This idea is not just a construction of the Platonic dialogues, it is actually a widely held view, not only in antiquity, but also today. In his famous book about the Craftsman, Richard Sennett claims that craftsmanship is about 'the right way' (to make something), it is 'the skill of making things well' and entails 'the desire to do a job well for its own sake'.[35] He also takes the step from qualitatively good work to morally good work, by emphasizing the dignity of the craftsman, and the authority that is based on quality of skill plus ethics.[36]

In Plato, too, the two steps can be discerned: the (market-driven) need to do good work is familiar to Socrates and his interlocutors as well as to Plato and his audience, as is made clear from a passage in the *Meno* (91c–e). Socrates is speaking with Anytus (one of his future prosecutors), who is railing against sophistic education and the dangerous damage done by it. Socrates replies that he finds it hard to believe that someone like Protagoras should have been making a lot of money as an educator for over 40 years and never been found out to have made his students worse by their association with him. Whereas any shoemaker mending old shoes or any tailor stitching up torn clothes would be found out within a month if they made things worse rather than better. There is an assumption here that people will deliver good-quality work. In this case, we can still distinguish technically skilled work (shoemaker, tailor) and the moral effects of a bad educator. However, the step to the moral qualities of the *technikos* is also made explicitly.

One might think that *technê*-knowledge in itself is ethically neutral: you can use it for good or bad purposes.[37] In fact, in the Socratic dialogues (here the first book of the *Republic*), this thought is explored. The knowledge of a doctor would also make him a good poisoner. The knowledge of a guard would also enable him to become a good thief.[38] And yet, this is theoretical only, and

34 For 'framing', see Coulson 2001, Tolmach Lakoff 2000, Coulson 2001.

35 Sennett 2008, 8–9; 11.

36 Sennett 2008, 54, (dignity); 61–62, (authority); see further 2008, 294–295 for the ethics of craftsmanship. Lis and Soly 2012, 46–47; 53 also emphasize this.

37 See e.g. Sennett 2008, 22–23 ('craftsmanship is certainly, from an ethical point of view, ambiguous'), but Sennett here still believes that classical Greece despised craftsmen. Nevertheless, he sees a tendency to do the right thing.

38 Pl. *Resp*. 334a. See Hemmenway 1999.

denied vigorously: a craftsman, a practitioner of a certain art, is always said to be someone who makes a moral and responsible use of his knowledge. If the doctor turns into a poisoner, he is no longer acting as a doctor when he is doing so. The questions whether this goodness of the *technikos* is due to an additional master-*technê* of morality, or whether a doctor needs to stay away from the dangerous additional *technê* of money-making (both points of contention among philosophers) need not concern us here:[39] the intuition that *technê* is inherently aimed at the good is there, as part of the common ground. The idea of 'the benefit of *technê*' and the association of work and virtue were conventional.[40]

5 *Aretê* and Work in the Earlier Poetic Tradition

Talking about the 'conventional nature' of the association between work and knowledge, and in particular work and virtue, is simply a different way of stating that it belongs to the cultural common ground of the communicative situation in the Platonic dialogues. In order to illustrate this conventional nature, we could just refer to Lis and Soly again, but instead we will briefly point to some concrete examples from the poetic tradition.

In the Odyssey, Odysseus builds his marriage bed and the bedroom it occupies with his own hands. A tree stump forms one of the bed's legs and anchors it to the ground. Odysseus describes the expert and knowledgeable workmanship he put into it in great technical detail, as an indignant response to the remark by Penelope suggesting that the bed had been moved—this reaction proves his identity to Penelope (*Od.* 23.181–204).[41] It is clear that the unmovable nature of

39 Cf. Barney 2007.

40 So Wolfsdorf 2008, 106; cf. Roochnik 1986; Balme 1984, 150: 'The conclusion is that the vast majority of Athenians supported themselves by the labour of their own hands, that work was considered both virtuous and necessary, and that the attitude of contempt for banausic crafts and manual labour was limited in Athens to a few intellectuals who are prominent in our tradition'. On the passage from *Republic* 1, see in particular Hemmenway 1999. For the connection between hard work and virtue, see Lis and Soly 2012, 16–26. Incidentally, the nervousness of the abuse of technical knowledge is very persistent in classical antiquity: it also leads to the prophylactic addition to the definition of the orator: *vir* ***bonus*** *dicendi peritus* (Cato the Censor *apud* Quint. *Inst. Or.* 12.1.1, and widespread in the later tradition).

41 Note the emphasis on hard work (κάμον, 23.189), quality of work (εὖ, 23.193, 197) and knowledge (ἐπισταμένως, 23.197). Also, the mention of technical tools (e.g., carpenter's rule, drill, 23.197, 198). Lis and Soly 2012, 18 give more examples of Odysseus' technical abilities, but the marriage bed is the one with the clearest moral overtones, although this is not made explicit.

the bed is also symbolic for the permanence of the marriage and the loyalty of husband and wife, although this moral aspect remains implicit.

Explicit connections between work, its material effects (riches), and moral excellence are also part of the epic tradition. In Hesiod's *Works and Days* this is expressed, for example in the lines, εἰ δέ κεν ἐργάζῃ, τάχα σε ζηλώσει ἀεργὸς πλουτεῦντα· πλούτῳ δ' ἀρετὴ καὶ κῦδος ὀπηδεῖ ('and if you work, the idle man will soon envy you as you grow rich. Excellence and fame follow riches', 312–313).[42] The Homeric Hymns to Heracles and Hephaestus each end with the conventional prayer δίδου δ' ἀρετήν τε καὶ ὄλβον ('give us excellence and wealth').[43] The phrase is applicable to any deity, but is especially apt in the context of these two short hymns, each devoted to a deity with a special connection to work and the arts.[44] The hymn to Hephaestus enjoins us to sing of Hephaestus, who taught men work (*aglaa erga*). Earlier they lived in the mountains like wild animals, but now they have learned to work (*erga daentes*) because of Hephaestus, famous for his technical skill (*kluto-technês*), and they live comfortably. The prayer for 'excellence and wealth' caps the hymn. *Aretê* '(moral) excellence', is connected with work.[45]

6 Conclusion

In this chapter we have used some psychological and cognitive tools and concepts to demonstrate that the overtly negative statements about work in Plato should be relativized, not only through the now well-known exposure of ideological (elite) bias, but also by the presence of more positive associations in the cultural common ground of the communication. We used (semantic) priming as a possible explanation for Socrates' tendency to think about virtue as a kind of knowledge—given that the context of the dialogue is educational. We used information about mental categorization and prototype theory to argue for an underlying positive association for *technê*-work, in that, culturally,

42 See West 1978 ad loc., with more examples of the conjunction of riches and moral excellence or prestige.

43 *HH Heracles* (15.9): χαῖρε ἄναξ Διὸς υἱέ· δίδου δ' ἀρετήν τε καὶ ὄλβον; *HH Heph.* (20.5–8): νῦν δὲ δι' Ἥφαιστον κλυτοτέχνην ἔργα δαέντες | ῥηιδίως αἰῶνα … | εὔκηλοι διάγουσιν ἐνὶ σφετέροισι δόμοισιν. | ἀλλ' ἵληθ', Ἥφαιστε· δίδου δ' ἀρετήν τε καὶ ὄλβον.

44 Allen et al. 1936 ad loc.

45 The translations of the Homeric Hymns by Hugh Evelyn White and (in the Loeb series) Martin West translate *aretê* as 'success' and 'status,' respectively. Both correctly identify associations of the term, but the fact remains that its primary meaning is excellence, including moral excellence.

technê-knowledge is the best example (prototype) of the category of knowledge *tout court*. We used the notion of common ground as the common and shared basis for communication, into which new information can be 'anchored'. The idea that virtue is a kind of knowledge is new; but this idea can be explained and explored by having recourse to the best-known example of knowledge. And finally, we adduced framing theory for the mutual framing of virtue as (*technê*-)knowledge and *technai* as something inherently virtuous, the second culturally shared positive element underlying Socratic conversations.

In a way, then, we were analysing what Plato's texts betray almost in spite of himself. Where discussion of work and handwork are 'in focus', the statements he ascribes to his mouthpieces are negative. When the conversation is not primarily about work, but about the ethical and philosophical notions central to his interests, his language reveals commonly held, and thus culturally shared presuppositions. In that common ground, there is also room for the polyphony pointed out so well by Lis and Soly, for instance, in the tradition of mockery of doctors and other professionals.[46] A trace of this can be found, for instance, in the gentle mockery of the doctor Eryximachus in the *Symposium*.[47] However, if we want to discover the positive parts of this polyphony, there is no need to leave Plato behind entirely. Hidden in the dialogues are at least two widely shared cultural views of the *technai*: they represent the best example of a body of knowledge, and they come with the *a priori* assumption that such knowledge will be used for something good; and that there is a moral aspect to honest workmanship.

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46 Brecht 1930.

47 See Hunter 2004, 54.

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