RUCH FILOZOFICZNY
LXXX 2024 1

Zuzana Zelinová
Slovak Academy of Science, Bratislava
ORCID: 0000-0002-5316-8929
E-mail: zelinova13@gmail.com

Michal Bizoň
Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia
ORCID: 0000-0001-6576-4245
E-mail: bizon@fedu.uniba.sk

DOI: http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/RF.2024.004

Certain Aspects of the Limits of Socratic Dialogue in Moral Education*

Introduction

The Socratic dialogue is one of the best-known ways of reaching a certain type of philosophical position. The dialogical search for, or questioning of, ideas is associated primarily with Socrates and his disciples, such as Plato, Xenophon, and Aeschines, whose writings have captured something of the way in which Socrates conversed with his students. This form of philosophy has persisted throughout the history of Western thought. An emphasis on philosophical dialogue can be found, for example, in the works of Galileo, Leibniz, and Buber. The Socratic dialogue has become an integral part of pedagogy, alongside philosophy. In

* This study was supported by KEGA grant No. 046UK-4/2021 *The support of the implementation of moral education in primary school: applied research and methodical material for teachers.*

the 1930s, Leonard Nelson and Gustav Heckmann began applying the Socratic method of dialogue in teaching. They stressed the importance of the human ability to think independently without the influence of an external authority and were primarily concerned with the process of creative thinking in open discussion, through which participants reach a common answer to the given question.[1]

Contemporary scholars[2] have identified three main approaches in character education: 1) the first emphasizes the practical acquisition of habits and virtues; 2) the second the development of critical reasoning and the ability to think about morally relevant situations; and 3) the third is concerned with social skills and the pragmatic importance of prosocial habits. The Socratic dialogue can be classified under the second approach, although it does depend on the type of Socratism – in Plato's account of Socrates the emphasis is on rational knowledge and in Xenophon's it is on the practical exercise of virtue.[3] The Socratic dialogue method is widely accepted in both general education and moral education because of its well-known positive effects.[4]

The aim of our study is to highlight the potential limits of the Socratic dialogue in moral education. In attempting to identify these limits, we will draw on the original ancient writings containing several versions of Socratic dialogue and on modern texts about the application of Socratic dialogue in moral education. We will ask whether the limits are to be found in the texts of Plato or Xenophon, or rather the problems and para-

---

[1] Cf. Lucia Kuthanova, *Sokratovský rozhovor: skrytá cesta rozvíjajúca základné kompetencie* (Bratislava: Dr. Josef Raabe, 2008), 6–10.

[2] Cf. Martin Brestovanský, *Hodnoty, vzťahy a škola* (Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis, 2019), 232–233.

[3] Xenophon's *Memorabilia* is interesting on this, especially the discussion of what we might describe as the opposite of Plato's ethical rationalism. While our investigation of Plato's Socrates is based on ethical rationalism – in order to act virtuously I require knowledge – in Xenophon's this is reversed. "Only those who can control themselves (τοῖς ἐγκρατέσι μόνοις) are able to know what is most important of things (τὰ κράτιστα τῶν πραγμάτων), whether from words or deeds, and at the same time are able to sort them out according to their kind, so as to deliberately choose the good and avoid the evil" (Xenophon, *Mem*. IV. 5. 11). Moreover, the first book, discusses the fact that a person without *enkrateia* (i.e., the faculty of self-control) can neither learn anything nor perfect themselves in good (Xenophon, *Mem*. I. 5. 5). On the basis of these passages we may conclude that Xenophon turns Plato's Socrates on his head. In Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, Socrates assumes that some practical virtue is necessary for an individual to acquire the knowledge needed to discern right from wrong.

[4] On this, see Zelinová Zuzana, "Je sokratovská výchova aktuálna aj v súčasnosti?", *Pedagogika.sk* 3 (2019): 223–231.

doxes of this type of education. We assume that the historical thinking on the original Socratic philosophy will help us identify the limits and problems associated with this type of teaching.

The limits of Socratic[5] teaching in the ancient texts

The most important goal in education is to ensure "that those who are educated no longer need education".[6] At some stage, teachers encounter a point where pupils assume that since they already know how to act and what is moral, good and right, or virtuous, they have nothing new to learn. In Plato's and Xenophon's accounts, Socrates not only rejects the teacher label, but also claims never to have taught anything. Plato's Socrates admits when apologizing in court that he can neither teach human or civic virtue.[7] Xenophon agrees and states that what Socrates offered was friendship, not tuition.[8] The fact that Socrates is not referred to as a teacher is primarily related to the apologetic nature of the writings. Socrates' disciples sought to exonerate their teacher, who was condemned for corrupting youth (τοὺς νέους διαφθείροι).[9] In ancient Greek philosophy and literature, a person did not need to be called a teacher in order to be one. For example, the blind poet Homer was considered the greatest Greek teacher, despite never having used the term *paideia* (παιδεία) in his epics *The Iliad* and *Odyssey*.[10]

Socrates's own teaching seems to contradict that aim, since it requires him to be in permanent contact with the person he is teaching. In ancient writings there are multiple references to pupils ceasing to be virtuous once no longer in direct contact with Socrates. The most famous example involves Socrates and Alcibiades. "So it was with Critias and Alcibiades.

---

[5] By "Socratic" we mean the portraits by the various authors of the *Socratikoi logoi* (especially Plato and Xenophon), since Socrates did not write anything himself.

[6] Nadežda Pelcová, Ilona Semrádová, *Fenomén výchovy a etika učiteľského povolání* (Praha: Karolinum, 2014), 106.

[7] Plato, *Apol*. 20a-b and also *Apol*. 19e.

[8] Cf. Xenophon, *Mem*. I. 2. 3.

[9] Cf. Xenophon, *Apol*. 10; Plato, *Apol*. 24c.

[10] "The term παιδεία is not used in the Homeric epics […] Homer, who will be regarded as the great teacher of the Greeks, and whose epics will become a standard part of the education of Greek youth, does not speak of education". Matúš Porubjak, *Vôľa (k) celku: Človek a spoločenstvo rečou Homéra a Theognida* (Pusté Úľany: Schola Philosophica, 2010), 86.

As long as they were with Socrates, they were able, with his help, to control the vicious appetites. After parting with Socrates, Critias fled to Thessaly, and there he consorted with men who preferred injustice to justice. Alcibiades, in his turn, for his beauty became the favourite of the ladies of noble society".[11] Alcibiades and Critias behaved virtuously only when with Socrates, who presented them with a *paideutic* model of self-control or moral action – they had to see the decisions he made in relation to moral dilemmas. Plato affirms that looking into each other's eyes plays a significant role in Socratic *paideia*.[12] Both Socrates' disciples mentioned above followed their teacher, whom they considered a paragon of virtue, and because of the emotional relationship between them and the philosopher. In Plato's dialogue *Theagenes*, Socrates admits that he is good at one art only, the art of love (τὰ ἐρωτικά).[13] But we know from other dialogues that he was also an expert in the art of midwifery. The "midwife" has to be in contact with the "pregnant woman"; in other words, there has to be contact between the teacher and the "pregnant" pupil. Socrates' *maieutiké techné* (μαιευτικὴ τέχνη) consists of: 1) assisting with the childbirth and 2) "treating the newborn", i.e., ascertaining whether the pupil has given birth to a healthy child.[14] This art is directly related to the art of love (ἐρωτικὴ τέχνη), as Socrates' teaching requires constant contact with Socrates – the effect of the art of midwifery is lost if young men are not in direct contact with him for the required length of time. In some cases, personal contact cannot be re-established if inter-

---

[11] Cf. Xenophon, *Mem*. I. 2. 24.

[12] In the *Alcibiades I* dialogue, the pedagogical relationship between teacher and pupil is expressed metaphorically as Socrates learning something by looking into the pupil's eyes.

> "Socrates: let us consider, then, what objects must we look at in order to see not only the object but also ourselves (ἡμᾶς αὐτούς)?
>
> Alcibiades: Apparently, Socrates, that into mirrors and into similar things.
>
> Socrates: You say rightly. Is not our eye by which we see (τῷ ὀφθαλμῷ ᾧ ὁρῶμεν) a kind of mirror?
>
> Alcibiades: Surely.
>
> Socrates: Have you noticed, then, that the face of one who looks into the eye of another appears in the opposite eye as in a mirror, in what we call a pupil, because it is a kind of image of the one who looks there (εἴδωλον ὅν τι τοῦ ἐμβλέποντος)?
>
> Alcibiades: You are right.
>
> Socrates: 'When, then, the eye looks at another eye, and looks into the best part of it, the part through which the eye sees, it would thus see itself (οὕτως ἂν αὑτὸν ἴδοι)'". Plato, *Alc. I*. 132d-133b.

[13] Cf. Plato, *Theag*. 128b and also Plato, *Symp*. 177d.

[14] Cf. Plato. *Theaet*. 150c.

rupted.[15] Thus, Socrates' disciples acted virtuously or morally because they were in touch with their beloved teacher, who was a paragon of virtue and guided them, through his love, along the path to the good life.[16]

But how did Socrates make decisions when faced with such dilemmas? This frequently discussed question is related to another issue – how can someone become a teacher despite repeatedly declaring he has no knowledge and that the only thing he knows is that he knows nothing about being a teacher? At key points in his life, the Socrates described by Plato[17] and Xenophon[18] makes decisions in line with an inner voice or conscience that arrives unexpectedly, like Euripides' *deus ex machina* – it is a divine voice, a *daimonion* (δαιμόνιον). The most famous example of the *daimonion* being used to solve a moral dilemma is when Socrates makes his decision about the court's judgement about his life.[19] Socrates' *daimonion* is usually prohibitive, and since he does not hear it during the trial he takes that to mean there is nothing to fear from being sentenced to death. But Socrates cannot control the *daimonion* – either it speaks up or it does not. It sends signals about important issues as if it were external or random.

Thinking about the role of this divine voice in teaching, we can conclude that just as the disciples did not know how to act properly in the absence of their teacher, neither did Socrates know if his actions were right in the absence of the *daimonion* postulated by the authors of the *Sokratikoi logoi*.

In general, Socratic teaching, which is embodied in the art of dialogue, is said to emphasize the process rather than the result, or specific and certain knowledge. The question of how to obtain true knowledge through the dialogical method is discussed in the original ancient sources, for example, in the well-known paradox in Plato's *Meno*. This paradox points to the complexity of realizing we know something or have some kind of knowledge. In this dialogue Plato states through Socrates, " [...] For that a man can seek neither what he knows nor what he does not know? That which he knows, he will not want to seek – for he

---

[15] Cf. Vladislav Suvák, "Sókratovská therapeia: Úloha Sókrata", *Filozofia* 3 (2014): 828.

[16] In the *Clitophon*, Socrates is praised for being able to persuade people to exercise but is criticized for not giving positive or even practical guidance on how to keep fit (Plato, *Clitoph*. 410e) – thus, this dialogue suggests that without Socrates his disciples would be unable to handle moral dilemmas.

[17] Cf. Plato, *Phaedr*. 242b-c, *Theat*. 151a, *Theag*. 129e a 129b-c, *Symp*. 175b.

[18] Cf. Xenophon, *Apol*. 4-5, *Symp*. VIII. 5, *Mem*. I. 3. 4.

[19] Cf. Plato, *Apol*. 40a-c.

knows it, and there is no need to seek such a thing. But neither will he seek what he does not know, for here he does not even know what to seek".[20] If a person thinks they have that knowledge, they will not seek it, and even if they do not but acquire it, how will they know that it is the knowledge they were seeking? Here there is a problem justifying the acquired belief. Socrates' *daimonion* helps justify it. This question was resolved by Plato through the theory of *anamnesis*, that is, the recollection of a previous life in which the soul possessed knowledge. The pupil's soul is able to recall experiences from a previous life through the teacher asking appropriate questions.[21] However, if we do not accept Plato's doctrine of *anamnesis* (ἀνάμνησις), which implies the reincarnation of the soul, we will not find a suitable answer to Meno's paradox.

We can conclude this historical section by noting that there are four main problems with Socrates' teaching as described in Plato and Xenophon: 1) When not in the direct presence of the teacher, pupils cannot act virtuously.[22] 2) The teacher does not know (without the external irrational interventions of the *daimonium/deus ex machina*) what character the pupils are being guided towards. 3) Even if the pupils acquire some knowledge, they cannot be sure it is correct rather than just a questionable opinion. 4) The emphasis is on the teaching process and not the outcome.

The limits of modern Socratic dialogue in moral education

In the following section, we highlight the potential weaknesses in modern Socratic dialogue in relation to moral education taught in schools.[23]

---

[20] Plato, *Meno* 80e.

[21] Plato states in the *Phaedo* that "learning is nothing but recollection" (*Phaedo* 72e). It is clear from his dialogues that the questioning and answering method prompts recollection and so the Socratic method can be referred to as "learning". For similar reasons, in some older interpretations, Plato's theory of anamnesis is mentioned in accounts that attempt to describe Socrates' education method, cf. Frederick A. G. Beck, *Greek Education, 450–350 B.C.* (London: METHUEN & CO LTD, 1964), 193–198. We can even find interpretations that hint at the theory of anamnesis in Xenophon, cf. Richard R. Wellman, "Socratic Method in Xenophon", *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2 (1976): 307–318.

[22] This can be applied to those students who have not acquired indepedence in acting virtuos, i.e., those students who have not been with Socrates for a long enough time to become virtuous even without the presence of a teacher.

[23] The Socratic dialogue is a teaching method used in school subjects as well as in the field of moral education. Cf. Emil Komárik, Adriana Maďarová, Da-

Given that in the *Sokratikoi logoi* there is not just one but several variants of the Socratic dialogue, the term Socratic dialogue does not denote a strictly defined teaching method. In the literature, the Socratic dialogue refers to various methods that share certain similarities and differences. According to Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas Smith,[24] we can distinguish three basic models of Socratic dialogue that can be applied in pedagogy today.[25] The first is the ʿTesting modelʾ, in which the teacher uses the *elenchus* method to refute pupils' false beliefs. However, it does not offer positive knowledge. By contrast, in the second ʿ*Theaetetus* model', there is no confrontation between teacher and pupil, who instead collaborate in the birth of knowledge through fruitful discussion with the teacher, whose critical constructive questions bring pupils closer to the truth. The third is the ʿ*Meno* modelʾ, in which the teacher knows in advance what questions to ask and how to do so if pupils are to acquire positive knowledge. In addition to these three basic models of Socratic dialogue, there is a fourth variant, associated with Nelson and Heckmann, which we will refer to as the ʿneo-Socratic dialogueʾ.[26] The main difference between ʿneo-Socratic dialogueʾ and the other three models lies in the teacher's position and role. In this model, the teacher does not play such an important role in the thinking process and may even be completely disregarded. Since our critique deals with elements found in several of the models, we use the general term the Socratic dialogue. However, considering the above distinction, our critique will focus on the ʿTesting modelʾ and the neo-Socratic dialogue in education.

The Socratic method is considered to be the oldest method for developing critical thinking;[27] our critique will therefore serve as an examination of the role and place of critical thinking within moral education in

---

niela Malá, *Charakter: Príspevok k rozvoju morálnej gramotnosti* (Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína filozofa v Nitre, 2014), 21–23.

[24] Thomas C. Brickhouse, Nicholas D. Smith, "Socratic Teaching and Socratic Method", in: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Siegel Harvey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 177–194.

[25] On the possibility to connect the ʿ*Meno* modelʾ with the ʿ*Theaitetus* modelʾ, see Zelinová, "Je sokratovská výchova aktuálna aj v súčasnosti?": 223–231.

[26] On the importance and use of neo-Socratic conversation in character education, see Gisela Raupach-Strey, "Die Bedeutung der Sokratischen Methode für den Ethik-Unterricht", in: *Das Sokratische Gespräch im Unterricht*, ed. Dieter Krohn, Barbara Neisser, Nora Walter (Frankfurt am Main: Verlag, 2000), 341–358.

[27] Ivan Turek, *Didaktika* (Bratislava: Wolters Kluwer, 2014), 264.

general. We begin our exploration of the limits of the Socratic method by defining its aim.

According to Kanakis,[28] the aim of Socratic dialogue is not on the end result or on reaching the right answer, because ethical questions are open-ended questions that do not have a right or a wrong answer, but on asking open-ended questions with the aim of leading one's dialogic partner to think about the implications of what they say and accept uncertainty, which is key to acquiring a critical reflective attitude. On that basis, we can identify a number of problems with the use of Socratic dialogue in moral education.

First of all, it follows that in the Socratic dialogue the emphasis is primarily on the process (the how) and not the end result (the what). This also applies to the ˈneo-Socratic dialogueˌ. According to Nelson, the founder of this tradition, the Socratic method "is the art of teaching not philosophy but philosophizing, the art of teaching not about philosophers but of turning the students into philosophers".[29] The aim of the Socratic method, then, is the dialogue itself, not what the dialogue leads to. There are of course domains (e.g., recreational sports) in which it is quite right to focus on the process rather than the end result. But when dealing with difficult ethical issues in moral education, the end result is no less important than the process. It would be wrong to claim that it does not matter whether pupils studying moral education learn which values are important or which actions are morally right or wrong in a given situation.

There are some limits regarding the preference for process over end result, i.e., the emphasis on developing critical thinking and moral judgement. Critical thinking about morality needs some pre-knowledge on which to be realized. A further limit is the fact that the Socratic dialogue relies on pupils' prior knowledge, without which new knowledge cannot be acquired.[30] By analogy, obtaining the desired results will prove difficult if certain moral values and norms of action have not been internalized. If pupils continue to insist on a morally unaccepta-

---

[28] Iannis N. Kanakis, *Theoretische und empirische untersuchengen zur wirksamkeit der sokratischen Lehrstrategie* (Heidelberg: Universität Heidelberg, 1984), 43–44.

[29] Leonard Nelson, "Die sokratische Methode", in: *Das sokratische Gespräch*, ed. Dieter Birnbacher, Dieter Krohn (Reclam: Verlag, 2000), 21–72; Leonard Nelson, "The Socratic Method", in: *The Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy: Selected Essays by Leonard Nelson*, transl. Thomas K. Brown III (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1949), 1.

[30] Lubomír Mojžíšek, *Vyučovací metody* (Praha: SPN, 1988), 159.

ble position despite the teacher's Socratic efforts, the dialogue may fail. Hence, pupils need to learn[31] the moral values and norms first, before developing the capacity to critically assess and reassess them. Critically reassessing or questioning these is the second step in moral education. To avoid engaging in relativism when first thinking critically about morality, pupils will need to be firmly "rooted" in a particular morality and "hold" firm values. Consequently, it is only appropriate and desirable for older children to be taught the art of critical thinking on morality once they have acquired certain moral values and the capacity to act in line with certain moral norms.[32] Critical thinking about moral norms and values prevents dogmatism, the idea that moral norms always apply regardless of the circumstance. But without prior moral 'anchoring', i.e., the internalization of values and norms, there is a risk of demagogy, the idea that there are no norms, just situations in which we make decisions without a reference point.[33]

The classic objection to overestimating the role of critical thinking in education relates to the fact that even those with excellent judgment, who are able to identify morally relevant situations and consider all possible courses of action, along with their consequences, and choose the right action, i.e., "what should be done", do not necessarily act[34] on that basis. Another similar objection is that while the Socratic dialogue is a verbal method for teaching pupils the art of dialogue, such as the ability to argue, merely having that ability is no guarantee the person will become a good person, because individuals who lack experience can only possess theoretical knowledge.[35] Critical thinking, although necessary, is not sufficient for making good decisions about moral issues and selecting the right action. Therefore, in moral education we cannot solely rely on teaching pupils the ability to make moral judgments.

If pupils are disproportionately exposed to irresolvable questions (moral dilemmas), they may start to question existing or socially accepted norms and come to believe that there are no universally accepted values or norms of action. That can lead to moral relativism and the belief that how the individual acts is unimportant because there is no

---

[31] It should be added that this takes place primarily in family settings, so that pupils have already acquired certain morals before starting school; although sometimes these may need to be challenged and reassessed.

[32] Note that Socrates entered into conversation with young men, not children.

[33] Erazim Kohák, *Člověk, dobro a zlo* (Praha: Ježek, 1993), 24.

[34] This objection was raised by Aristotle in relation to Plato's ethical rationalism (see, e.g., *Eth. Nic*. 1144b28).

[35] Mojžíšek, *Vyučovací metody*, 160.

such thing as a right action. There are only different – sometimes contradictory – equivalent solutions to morally relevant situations.

Kanakis's definition of Socratic dialogue is positive in the sense that the moment of uncertainty leads pupils to adopt a critical reflective attitude. This moment is reached via the *elenchus* of the 'Testing model', which forms part of the teacher's conscious strategy to bring pupils to *aporia*, i.e., to a dead-end situation. Introducing an *aporia*[36] into the dialogue is a teaching device for making pupils uncertain about their knowledge and for inducing an atmosphere of 'productive restlessness' in the group. The *aporia* is a means of showing them that their previous knowledge on the matter was based on ignorance. The moment of uncertainty is intended to motivate pupils to further explore the question and find the answer.[37] However, uncertainty can be both motivating and demotivating for pupils.[38] Challenging previous moral beliefs can present a starting point for further exploration or it may just turn out to be the end point. Instead of stimulating pupils, uncertainty can lead to unwanted resignation, especially when experienced repeatedly. Teachers may find that the moment of uncertainty elicits genuine interest among pupils in solving the problem and that they then ask: So what is the answer? Direct questions such as this can place the Socratic teacher in an awkward situation because the essence of Socratic dialogue is that teachers should not "present their own ideas and knowledge of the world to pupils".[39] A good Socratic teacher will resist the temptation to answer pupils directly and continue asking questions. The only honest, direct Socratic answer to such a question is: I don't know.

This points to another limitation with the application of Socratic dialogue in moral education and the teacher's role. Does adopting an evasive attitude arouse greater interest and desire for knowledge and encourage pupils to seek the truth or does it negate that desire because it cannot satisfy it. Teachers who relinquish their position of moral authority may miss the opportunity to teach and guide pupils, and point them in the right direction. Furthermore, refraining from shar-

---

[36] Problem of *aporia* is well reflected in the article Matúš Porubjak, "Sókratovská pedagogika v Platónovom dialógu Menón", *Pro-fil 23* (2022), 1–15.

[37] Josef Petrželka, "Pedagogické aspekty sókratovského dialogu", *Pro-Fil* 3 (2000), 27.9.2000, access 10.1.2022, https://journals.phil.muni.cz/profil/article/view/20220.

[38] In a neo-Socratic interview, learners may experience frustration and disillusionment if the interview ends without the initial question being resolved due to time constraints. Kuthanova, *Sokratovský rozhovor*, 27.

[39] Komárik, Maďarová, Malá, *Charakter*, 22.

ing one's opinion could undermine pupil trust in the teacher and their knowledge. After all, if the teacher does not know, then who does? In the Nelson-Hekmann tradition of Socratic dialogue, as a principle teachers will not comment on the substance of the discussion no matter what the circumstance[40] and nor do they provide participants with a ready-made "package of knowledge".[41] Socratic lecturers intentionally move away from a position of authority and instead take on the role of a facilitator who manages the discussion but is not a participant.[42] A teacher who offers a pupil an answer to a question posed in a Socratic dialogue would be denying their own efforts.[43] But is a teacher's refusal to provide pupils with an answer not an implicit denial of their educational role? Are teachers who reject the role of moral authority not abdicating responsibility for moral education or, more precisely, for the content?[44]

The principle of not intervening in the content of a discussion means the teacher has fewer options for redirecting discussions that go off in an "undesirable" direction or towards unwanted conclusions, which, despite all Socratic efforts, may be contrary to virtuous way of life. By refusing to take authority, the teacher has no recourse to one of the most effective ways of morally influencing pupils – by setting an example. This is probably more of a problem with younger children, where the use of the Socratic dialogue in the classroom may challenge the teacher's authority and subsequently lead to difficulty with classroom management and maintaining discipline.[45]

Another potential limitation is pupil age, as pupils will need to have developed abstract thinking to be able to participate in the Socratic dialogue. Therefore, with lower grades the emphasis should be on demon-

---

[40] Kuthanova, *Sokratovský rozhovor*, 6.

[41] Barbara Neisser, René Saran, "How can Socratic Dialogue be used in Ethics Lessons in School?" in: *Socratic Dialogue and Ethics*, ed. Jens Peter Brune, Dieter Krohn (Münster: LIT, 2005), 191.

[42] Kuthanova, *Sokratovský rozhovor*, 6, 21.

[43] Ibidem, 23.

[44] The opposite problem may in turn be associated with the '*Meno* model', as Petr Bláha points out. Petr Bláha, *Nevýchovné eseje o výchově* (Praha: Přestupní stanice, 2019), 5. Since the achievement of positive cognition as a result of the conversation depends on the teacher as the one who masters the art of asking appropriate questions, we can say that in a sense this is an authoritative model of education.

[45] Neisser, Saran, "How can Socratic Dialogue be used in Ethics Lessons in School?", 191.

strative thinking and the dialogue itself should be based on the pupils' own experiences.[46]

The main limitations with the use of modern Socratic dialogue in moral education in schools relate primarily to 1) the conception of the teacher's authority, or role in the dialogue, and 2) the pupil's existing moral knowledge. Another issue is 3) the very nature of the *aporia* that the Socratic dialogue entails – can a dead-end situation induce 'productive' disquiet in pupils, or does it discourage them from further exploration and reflection? The use of *aporia* and the failure to adopt a moral position may lead pupils to adopt moral relativism and weaken their value orientation.

Conclusion

Both the historical and modern conceptions of Socratic dialogue exhibit continuity, especially the three basic models ('Testing', '*Theaetetus*', '*Meno*'). But the opposite is true of the Nelson-Hecmann type of neo-Socratic dialogue. Having compared the two traditions – historical and contemporary – and their application in moral education, we can conclude that the critical moments and limits inherent in modern Socratic dialogue are related to the problems we identified in the first, historical, part of our paper. These relate to both 1) teacher and 2) pupil.

1) When not in the direct presence of the teacher, pupils cannot act virtuously, and the teacher has no knowledge of the kind of character the pupils are being guided towards (without the external irrational interventions of *daimonium/deus ex machina*). 2) Even where the pupils have acquired some knowledge, the teacher cannot unequivocally demonstrate that the knowledge is true, rather than just a misguided opinion. Nonetheless, there are some differences between the traditions of Socratic dialogue. In the historical Socratic dialogue the teacher has to be present in order to navigate the pupil through the moral dilemma, whereas in the contemporary Socratic dialogue teacher should follow the given concept of the role model or authority in facilitating the acquisition of value orientation. However, pupil acquisition of knowledge is similar in both the original ancient sources on Socratic teaching and the contemporary Socratic dialogue. In modern moral education, pu-

[46] See Mojžíšek, *Vyučovací metody*, 160. This is one of the advantages of the neo-Socratic conversation, which is based on experience, Gisela Raupach-Strey, "Die Bedeutung der Sokratischen Methode für den Ethik-Unterricht", 94–95.

pils need to have some existing knowledge, just as Plato postulated in the theory of anamnesis, that is, recollection of knowledge acquired in previous life. Without some level of previous knowledge, neither the historical nor the modern versions of Socratic dialogue are effective and nor can they lead pupils or fellow Socrates to acquire knowledge that can be described as accurate and certain.

In conclusion, we wish to comment on our criticism of the Socratic dialogue. In the first place, it should be stressed that our aim was to highlight the potential limitations of using this method in moral education and to point out the relevant critical moments. Our aim was not to reject this method of education as such. The Socratic method clearly has a number of benefits and as such should form part of teaching methods. Some of the negative aspects and limitations identified in our study can be surmounted in educational practice – so long as the teacher is aware of them.

Bibliography

Aristotle. 1934. "Nicomachean Ethics". In: *Aristotle in 23 Volumes*, vol. 19, ed. Harris Rackam. Harvard: Harvard University Press.

Beck Frederick A. G. 1964. *Greek Education, 450-350 B.C.* London: METHUEN & CO LTD.

Bláha Petr. 2019. *Nevýchovné eseje o výchově*. Praha: Přestupní stanice.

Brestovanský Martin. 2019. *Hodnoty, vzťahy a škola*. Trnava: Typi Universitatis Tyrnaviensis.

Brickhouse C. Thomas, Nicholas D. Smith. 2009. "Socratic Teaching and Socratic Method". In: *The Oxford Handbook of Philosophy of Education*, ed. Harvey Siegel, 177–194. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Kanakis N. Iannis. 1984. *Theoretische und empirische untersuchengen zur wirksamkeit der sokratischen Lehrstrategie*. Heidelberg: Universität Heidelberg.

Kohák Erazim. 1993. *Člověk, dobro a zlo*. Praha: Ježek.

Komárik Emil, Adriana Maďarová, Daniela Malá. 2014. *Charakter: Príspevok k rozvoju morálnej gramotnosti*. Nitra: Univerzita Konštantína filozofa v Nitre.

Kuthanova Lucia. 2008. *Sokratovský rozhovor: skrytá cesta rozvíjajúca základné kompetencie*. Bratislava: Dr. Josef Raabe.

Mojžíšek Lubomír. 1988. *Vyučovací metody*. Praha: SPN (Státní pedagogické nakladatelství).

Neisser Barbara, René Saran. 2005. "How can Socratic Dialogue be used in Ethics Lessons in School?", In: *Socratic Dialogue and Ethics*, ed. Jens Peter Brune, Dieter Krohn, 189–192. Münster: LIT.

Nelson Leonard. 1949. "The Socratic Method". In: *The Socratic Method and Critical Philosophy: Selected Essays by Leonard Nelson*, transl. Thomas K. Brown III, 1–43, New Haven: Yale University Press.

Pelcová Nadežda, Ilona Semrádová. 2014. *Fenomén výchovy a etika učiteľského povolání*. Praha: Karolinum.

Petrželka Josef. 2000. "Pedagogické aspekty sókratovského dialogu". *Pro-Fil* 3, 27.9.2000, access 10.1.2022. https://journals.phil.muni.cz/profil/article/view/20220.

Plato. 1967–68. *Platonis Opera I.-IV.*, transl. John Burnet. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Porubjak Matúš. 2010. *Vôľa (k) celku. Človek a spoločenstvo rečou Homéra a Theognida*. Pusté Úľany: Schola Philosophica.

Porubjak Matúš. 2022. "Sókratovská pedagogika v Platónovom dialógu Menón". *Pro-fil* 23: 1–15.

Raupach-Strey Gisela. 2000. "Die Bedeutung der Sokratischen Methode für den Ethik-Unterricht". In: *Das Sokratische Gespräch im Unterricht*, ed. Dieter Krohn, Barbara Neisser, Nora Walter, 90–104 . Frankfurt am Main: Verlag.

Raupach-Strey Gisela. 2012. *Sokratische Didaktik. Die didaktische Bedeutung der Sokratischen Methode in der Tradition von Leonard Nelson und Gustav Heckmann*. Münster: LIT.

Suvák Vladislav. 2014. "Sókratovská therapeia: Úloha Sókrata". *Filozofia* 3: 824–834.

Turek Ivan. 2014. *Didaktika*. Bratislava: Wolters Kluwer.

Wellman R. Richard. 1976. "Socratic Method in Xenophon". *Journal of the History of Ideas* 2: 307–318.

Xenophon. 1971. *Memorabilia*, *Symposium*, *Apologia Socratis*, transl. Edgar Cardew Marchant. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Zelinová Zuzana. 2019. "Je sokratovská výchova aktuálna aj v súčasnosti?". *Pedagogika.sk* 3: 223–231.

Summary

The main aim of our paper is to identify the potential limits of Socratic dialogue in moral education. These limits will be identified using a) the original ancient writings preserving several versions of Socrates' dialogue, and b) modern writing on the Socrates' dialogue in moral education. We will determine whether these limits are to be found in the writing of Plato or Xenophon, or rather in the problems and paradoxes of this type of education. We assume that a historical exploration of the original Socratic philosophy will help us to more easily identify the limits and problems in moral education. However, our intention is not to reject the Socratic dialogue as such, but merely to point out some of the potentially controversial aspects of its use in moral education.

Keywords: Socratic dialogue, models of Socratic education, moral education in schools, Plato, philosophical teaching