

Socrates the Citizen-Philosopher in Plato and in Xenophon

A THESIS
SUBMITTED ON THE 23rd DAY OF JULY OF 2014
TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS
OF TULANE UNIVERSITY
FOR THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

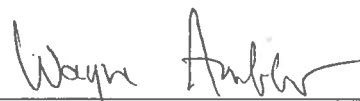
BY

Shane Gassaway

APPROVED:


Ronna Burger, Ph.D., Director


Richard Velkley, Ph.D.


Wayne Ambler, Ph.D.

Socrates, in many ways the paradigmatic philosopher, was distinguished in his own time for not travelling broadly but preferring to remain in Athens, devoted somehow to his fellow citizens even when his life was at stake. In Plato's *Apology* Socrates says it was his business to cross-examine others and make speeches every day about virtue, which he identifies as the greatest good and a benefit to the citizens and the city. But he is not very clear as to the nature of this benefaction. Socrates clearly had some concern with political education, but what exactly was the relation between his political education and his philosophizing? In Plato's *Lovers* Socrates seems to suggest that philosophizing would be most useful and ennobled by making men virtuous and superlatively efficacious in political matters (but in fact he holds out a much more modest promise of the goodness of philosophy). In Plato's *Cleitophon*, by contrast, Socrates is accused precisely of being unable to make someone (Cleitophon) virtuous and politically efficacious—though this apparent failing turns out to have at least as much to do with Cleitophon's own shortcomings and preconceptions as with the actual limits of Socratic political philosophy. Xenophon, finally, offers a more frank account of how Socrates benefited those who yearned for political honors. Xenophon represents Socrates' benefaction as a matter of moderating political ambitions, but not without also showing why it was best for Socrates to restrict his involvement to the private sphere. Both philosophers present a Socrates who benefited his fellow citizens by instructing them about political prudence, but who also aimed to avoid doing harm, which apparently precluded both his own public involvement and his ability to benefit all comers in accordance with their expectations.

Socrates the Citizen-Philosopher in Plato and in Xenophon

A THESIS

SUBMITTED ON THE 23rd DAY OF JULY OF 2014

TO THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

OF THE SCHOOL OF LIBERAL ARTS

OF TULANE UNIVERSITY

FOR THE DEGREE

OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

BY

Shane Gassaway

**©Copyright by Shane Gassaway, 2014
All Rights Reserved**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am very grateful and indebted to Ronna Burger for her invaluable instruction, advice, good humor, encouragement, and assistance; to Wayne Ambler, for his helpful comments and questions; to Richard Velkley, for his advice, instruction, and encouragement; to Seth Appelbaum, Alex Limanowski, Travis Mulroy, Alex Priou, and others whose conversation was instrumental to the development of this thesis; and to Stephen and Patricia Gassaway for their generous support.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	ii
TABLE OF CONTENTS.....	iii
INTRODUCTION	1

PART I. PLATO

CHAPTER 1. THE <i>LOVERS</i>	11
A. The Setting	12
B. Philosophy is Much Learning	21
C. Philosophy is Learning Many Arts and Practicing None	30
D. Knowledge of the Human Good	48
E. An Alternative Definition of Philosophy	68
F. Rivals?	72
CHAPTER 2. THE <i>CLEITOPHON</i>	75
A. Cleitophon's Socrates	78
B. Analysis of Cleitophon's Socrates	93
a. Cleitophon's Error	94
b. Socrates' Words and Deeds	98

PART II. XENOPHON

CHAPTER 3. THE <i>MEMORABILIA</i>	102
A. The Aspiring General	107
B. The General	114
C. The <i>Hipparch</i>	118
D. Nicomachides	136
E. Pericles	144
F. Glaucon	152
G. Charmides	157
H. Xenophon's Socrates	170
CONCLUSION	174
BIBLIOGRAPHY	176

Introduction

While throughout our tradition Socrates has been held up as the model of the philosopher as such, in his own time he was distinguished for being more particularly a citizen-philosopher: as represented by Plato and Xenophon, he did not travel broadly but preferred to remain in Athens, devoted somehow to his native city even when his life became forfeit. Yet the connection between Socrates' philosophical life and his citizenship remains something of a mystery. His devotion to Athens notwithstanding, he made a point of refraining from political activity in any ordinary sense. Rather than endeavoring to influence the city's affairs through institutional channels, he confined his involvement to private associations, mediating his influence through others who were more inclined to take part in politics.¹ When Socrates defended himself before the Athenian jury against charges of impiety and corrupting the youth, he explained that avoiding a public life allowed him to uphold justice, which he would not otherwise have been able to do without great risk; he also claimed that by speaking every day about virtue and exhorting each of the Athenians in private he benefited the city.² Yet the outcome of the trial is proof enough that many were puzzled about the value of Socrates' activity—at least,

¹ Cf. *Apology* 30a5-7, 36c2-4. A notable exception to Socrates' aloofness from public life is when, chosen by lot, he presided over the trial of the generals following the battle of the Arginousae (cf. *Apology* 32b ff.; Xenophon, *Memorabilia* I.1.18, *Hellenika* I.6-7).

² Cf. *Apology* 30a5-7, 36c2-4.

a majority of them were persuaded that he was guilty of the charges brought against him. Socrates averred that he roused the city from a condition in which virtue could not manifest; but in the trial he told the jury that he did not possess knowledge of the virtue of the human being and the citizen.³ Would this fact not have prevented him from maintaining that his exhortations and discussions about virtue constituted a complete or sufficient education in virtue? Did he then benefit the Athenians in some other way?

Those questions lie at the heart of this dissertation. Bringing together Plato's *Lovers* and *Cleitophon* with sections of Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, it explores from several different but mutually illuminating perspectives the question how Socrates understood his activity to benefit others. Each of these works highlights in a different way two seemingly incongruent features of Socratic political philosophy that bear on the question, or maybe the appearance, of Socrates' civic contribution. On the one hand, there is the radical boldness, in contrast with his predecessors, of Socrates' philosophical turn to political matters; and this in turn leads to an appearance of boldness in the political sphere, where prevailing opinions would be put into question. This appearance might seem to hold the promise of benefit through the discovery of desirable reform. On the other hand, however, Socrates displays cautious restraint toward the prospect that his inquiries might lead to any universal political teaching or program. His manner of benefiting Athens, therefore, must be more modest than some might hope. The *Lovers* culminates in an example of Socrates' boldness, and the *Cleitophon* portrays an interested outsider's

³ Cf. *Apology* 20a4-c3.

frustration with his restraint. Though Xenophon masterfully screens both features in his depiction of Socrates behind a veneer of seemingly banal solicitude,⁴ he develops a penetrating representation of them through diverse examples of Socrates' private associations with men of political ambition. In combining a reading of the *Lovers* and the *Cleitophon*, the first part of this study delineates the apparent disparity of Socrates' theoretical boldness and practical restraint, but aims to show, finally, a reconciliation of these features, which in the *Lovers* must be accomplished from one starting point and in the *Cleitophon* from the contrary. The comparison of Plato with Xenophon in the second part of the study highlights the essential features of this representation of Socrates, which are shared by alternative treatments with distinct points of emphasis.⁵

As the parallel studies bear out, Socrates' bold philosophical engagement with political matters does not principally issue from a sense of duty to the city or from general philanthropy. Rather, Socrates' turn began with the recognition that philosophy is a human activity that takes place within the context of the city; as Socrates realized, the philosopher must examine the origins of his activity in the political realm (where opinion is supreme) to gain assurance that unexamined opinions unconsciously held at the start of his quest for truth would not invalidate its fruits. Put somewhat differently, the philosophical quest for truth does not take place in a vacuum; it arises in the midst of competing opinions – above all about the

⁴ In the words of Richard Velkley, "Xenophon hints at but conceals Socrates' radicality. He minimizes the difference between Socrates and the gentleman for whom 'nothing is more characteristic than respect of the law'" (*Premises of Philosophy*, p. 60).

⁵ It also serves the peripheral purpose of showcasing the richness of thought of a long neglected purveyor of Socratic philosophy.

just, the beautiful, and the good – that cannot be reconciled as simply as some matters can by recourse to measurement or calculation.⁶ Some of these opinions are integrated into the fabric of political life and hallowed by time, their correctness taken for granted by laws, rulers, and political institutions. They constitute the source and therefore the content of much of a human being's education and culture, especially with a view to what he chooses to value in life. If a philosopher seeks truth about the world, then seeking the truth of received opinions about these controversial matters is part of his project. And insofar as his occupation takes its place among others in the city, this part of the philosopher's project is crucial to his self-understanding, and thereby to his understanding as a whole.⁷

Socrates' understanding of the very nature of philosophizing, on the one hand, prompted his philosophical turn to political matters. But his inquiries led him, on the other hand, to a skeptical outlook about the desirability, or possibility, of generating a universal political teaching, for he came to recognize that the sort of knowledge such a teaching would require – or that many would demand – is virtually unavailable to human beings. This explains his restraint. One of the central problems he encountered is the issue of the so-called “common good.” If this were simply the sum of the particular goods of each, there would be no difficulty. But what is called the common good almost inevitably requires some individuals to refrain from goods that might otherwise be theirs, and some to endure evils that they might otherwise avoid.

⁶ Cf. *Euthyphro* 7b-d.

⁷ Cf. Socrates' account of his turn to speeches in *Phaedo*, 96a-99e.

To be sure, such sacrifices enable human beings to work in concert, vouchsafing greater security to all than any one individual would find in isolation; to the extent, therefore, that security is a necessary condition for other goods, the requirements of the common good only demand an individual occasionally to forego some particular goods in order to guard the opportunity to enjoy others, and to be willing to risk his own life or substance to save it. But one must not mistake the condition for human flourishing for the thing itself. The good of each human being varies according to what his native aptitudes (to say nothing of his education and the circumstances of his life) make possible for him to achieve. In accordance with a Platonic analogy, just as a single exercise regimen might be of some benefit to a broad group of human beings, despite their individual differences, so might general prescriptions about the conduct of life be of some benefit to a group of citizens; but to reach his best possible condition each individual would nevertheless require personal prescriptions tailored to his own peculiar characteristics and abilities.⁸ Translating knowledge of what is good for a human being, therefore, into such universal precepts as would be required for a general program of human improvement even within one city, therefore, would not be possible, no matter how desirable it might seem.

This issue alone suggests that, whatever progress Socrates might have made in acquiring knowledge of the human good, it could not have resulted in his endorsing in practice the imposition of a general political teaching on the community. The difficulty did not prevent him, however, from occasionally

⁸ Cf. *Statesman* 294c ff.

examining political matters – or the opinions that fundamentally drive them – together with those who could benefit from a word of caution or instruction, or with anyone else whose example, in one way or another, provided an occasion for philosophical investigation. Putting aside the question whether Socrates followed this practice primarily for his own philosophical development, one may observe that it afforded a twofold practical benefit to the citizens of Athens. Individually, at least some of those with whom Socrates conversed benefited from his instruction. More generally, Socrates was able to contribute to the continued existence of philosophy by protecting its reputation and the stability of the political atmosphere in which it can flourish.

In fact, these practical benefits of Socrates' activity of discussing human virtue and political life were not strictly separate: for the most part he instructed others about what should rightly hold them back from courses of action that could prove disastrous to themselves and the city,⁹ or detrimental to their own reputation no less than that of philosophy. Nevertheless, it seems Socrates could, and did occasionally, positively instruct some individuals about political matters—though it remains something of a puzzle whether he did so simply to teach and encourage them to engage in politics correctly, or if he also drew their attention to the nature of politics in a way that might finally lead them to philosophy.¹⁰

The *Lovers* showcases Socrates' philosophical turn toward the political things, and illustrates the reasons behind it through one of his interlocutors on the

⁹ Socrates does appear straightforwardly to encourage Charmides in *Memorabilia* III.7; his manner of encouragement, however, on second inspection carries a warning as well. See chapter 3 below.

¹⁰ Cf. my comments on *Memorabilia* III.3 below, pp. 118-36.

occasion recounted therein. Socrates discusses the definition of philosophy with a young philosopher in order to answer whether it is in any way beautiful and good. The young man turns out to have given virtually no thought to what sort of knowledge a philosopher ought to pursue for his own development, and has not sufficiently considered how pursuing knowledge could be in any way good—as useful to others, for example. After exposing the naivety of the young man’s exuberant endorsement of philosophy, Socrates questions him about an art or science, the possession of which would seem superlatively beautiful and good: an art of improving human beings, one and all, through ruling and punishing well. Despite what might look like Socrates’ promotion of a grand ambition, his questions in the *Lovers* contain a subtle criticism of virtually all existing political institutions: though the exigencies of the moment force them to judge and guide human affairs with self-assurance, they do not in practice rise to the standard of the art Socrates describes, which in fact the dialogue supplies good reason to suppose does not itself exist. The young philosopher with whom Socrates speaks, by unselfconsciously pursuing philosophy on the basis of opinions about the good and the beautiful borrowed from the city’s store, has thereby colored all his learning – indeed his own self-understanding – with a debilitating form of ignorance. This drama, moreover, unfolds against the backdrop of a house of learning in which two young boys have been discussing the nature of the cosmos. Socrates’ arrival on the scene precipitates a withdrawal of their attention from such lofty things to focus instead on the question whether investigating them is at all beautiful and good—a matter of self-examination, perhaps, that must be asked from the beginning if one is to avoid the

young philosopher's error. Beyond furnishing this instructive example to two potential pupils, Socrates' exposure of the young philosopher for a charlatan also serves to protect the dignity of philosophy from whatever folly he gets up to.

The drama of the *Cleitophon*, by contrast, is activated by Socrates' unwillingness to attempt a distillation of his political philosophy into a general teaching or program for political reform, which angers and confuses the character in the dialogue. The practical benefits of Socrates' activity notwithstanding, the effort to rise from opinions to knowledge about the just, the beautiful, and the good inevitably drew the attention of those who would attempt the sort of general application of the result of that inquiry with which (for reasons that will be discussed in detail) it turns out to be incommensurate. Someone incapable of comprehending the problematic character of the philosopher's understanding of political things might conceive of him as potentially a superlative benefactor of human beings, and thereby as someone apt to court the gratitude, love, and favor of the public. Whether fearing the rivalry of this phantasm or wishing to transform himself into it, someone under this misapprehension would be disposed to resent Socrates—either for his boldness in venturing to critically evaluate and thereby compete with received opinions, or for his apparent restraint in withholding a general teaching of the sort to transform anyone into a perfect ruler. Cleitophon proves to be of the latter sort. While conceding the superlative effectiveness of Socrates' exhortations to care about virtue, he nevertheless accuses Socrates of being useless to him when it comes to finally becoming virtuous—which he appears to desire in connection with ruling others. Socrates' refusal (or inability) to benefit

Cleitophon in the way he desires, however, nevertheless achieves the practical benefit of moderating the ambition of a less-than-worthy political actor, or at least of distancing Socratic philosophy from whatever name that actor makes for himself.

Xenophon's *Memorabilia* presents a set of portraits that develop the related themes of Socrates' bold examination of political matters, and his modest detachment from practical engagements in the political sphere. While Plato obliquely raises the question, through Cleitophon's accusations, whether Socrates was competent to make anyone virtuous, Xenophon seems to present Socrates more directly, as he goes about his business, caring not only for his own welfare but also benefiting family, friends, and fellow citizens. Whether Xenophon in the end answers the question of the nature of Socrates' benefit more simply and directly than Plato does remains a matter of debate. The two representations of Socrates are in some respects a reversal of one another. Plato places Socrates' philosophical activity at center stage, with the result that uncovering the practical benefit of his habit of inquiry demands additional reflection. Xenophon, by contrast, focuses explicitly on the benefit Socrates conferred on those around him, which often masks both the radical departure from conventional opinions that enabled Socrates to be of such valuable service to them, and the modesty of his personal assessment of the benefits he conferred (or would ever be willing and able to confer). These differences notwithstanding, Xenophon is in agreement with Plato on the purpose of Socrates' turn to political matters no less than on the limits his understanding of political matters imposed upon his civic contribution.

Part I of this dissertation takes on the Platonic dialogues. Chapter 1 provides a critical interpretation of the *Lovers*, which brings into sharp relief the primary reason for Socrates' bold theoretical turn to political matters. Chapter 2 draws lessons from the *Cleitophon* about the limits of Socrates' ability or willingness to disseminate his discoveries, and hence his hesitation to encourage or contribute to certain practical aims. Part II turns to Xenophon's writing. The third chapter analyzes Xenophon's straightforward disclosure in the *Memorabilia* of the practical lessons Socrates gave to leading and ambitious men, demonstrating the alignment of his somewhat filtered political teaching with the theoretical grounds of his activity. The conclusion presents a brief discussion of points of similarity and difference in the two treatments of these themes by Plato and Xenophon, and a general summary of the character of Socratic citizenship.

Chapter 1: Plato's *Lovers*

The drama of Plato's *Lovers* (or *Rivals*—the manuscripts do not all agree) consists of Socrates questioning a young man who claims to be a philosopher about what philosophy is, testing his assertion that it is not only beautiful but also good. The young man turns out to have neglected heretofore to examine the nature of his own activity, and proves grossly lacking in self-understanding. This exposure is especially humiliating for him, for the discussion unfolds in the presence of both the boy whom he loves, who breaks off a philosophical dispute in order to listen, and his rival for the affection of this boy, another young man who is an athlete.

The specific character of the young philosopher's deficient self-understanding and the reasons underpinning it serve as a foil for Socrates' superior approach to the love of wisdom. The gradual but inexorable emergence of this contrast in the course of the dialogue brings to light reasons for Socrates' turn to the examination of political matters, the opinions that activate them, and their relation to the philosophical drive to know.

As Socrates does not give the proper names of his interlocutors, I refer to the one as 'the athlete' and the other as 'the philosopher' (and occasionally "Socrates')

interlocutor” or “the wise one,” as Socrates calls him);¹ when context suffices to eliminate ambiguity, I refer to either interlocutor indifferently as “lover,” “youth,” or “young man.”

A. The Setting

Socrates sets the stage for what turns out to be a rather complex drama, and reveals much about his chief interlocutor, in surprisingly short order **What is it Lamb says?** He begins by saying that he entered the place of Dionysius, where he saw those of the young reputed to be most decent (*επεικεστατους*) in respect of looks and from well-born fathers, and also their lovers (132a1-4). The setting of the discussion is a place of learning. Those present in the house appear to be there for a variety of reasons: the boys who are reputedly decent and well-born are there as pupils; each of the lovers is apparently there to spend time in the presence of his beloved; Dionysius is absent from the discussion, but even if not physically present belongs to the setting as an instructor and a resident. For his part, Socrates does not say why he went to this place. By seating himself among the lovers and addressing himself to them, Socrates might give the impression that he, too, has come to the house as a lover (cf. 133a1-6). He soon attempts to benefit, however, from questioning the youth who claims to know what philosophizing is and that it is beautiful and good. To begin with Socrates assumes the status of one who requires

¹ Because the beauty and goodness of “philosophy,” “philosophizing,” and “the philosopher” are being examined in this dialogue, it is occasionally prejudicial to clarity to refer to the young man devoted to music and philosophy as “the philosopher.” I nevertheless refer to him that way when it is not inconvenient so as to emphasize what the discussion reveals about his self-knowledge, and also how his dignity is at stake in its outcome.

instruction, that is, a pupil. But in the course of the discussion he shows far deeper penetration into matters than his interlocutor does; by cross-examining the youth he appears to instruct those present concerning the suitability or otherwise of certain alternative answers to the guiding questions. If Socrates counts among the lovers, he establishes preeminence among them by his fitness as an instructor—yet perhaps without ever relinquishing the status of a pupil.

At the moment Socrates entered the house, two of the boys happened to be disputing about something. Though Socrates did not plainly overhear them, he says he conjectured that they must be disputing about Anaxagoras or Oinopodes, as they happened to be describing circles and imitating heavenly motions with their hands.² The boys were taking their dispute very seriously (132a4-b2).

Socrates says that, since he happened to sit next to the lover of one of the boys disputing (he does not say how he knew this one to be the lover of that one, but one can guess), he nudged him by the elbow and asked what the two boys were so serious about; he observed that presumably whatever they deemed serious must be something great and beautiful (132b2-6).³

² These natural philosophers were evidently well known to Socrates. The beautiful boys pantomiming the motions of the cosmos by moving their bodies might as easily lend ornamentation to contemplation of the whole cosmos as contemplation of the whole cosmos might lend ornament to the boys (cf. Michael Davis, "Philosophy and the Perfect Tense" (hereafter *PPT*), pp. 8-9). The beauty of the boys and its effect on Socrates and the lovers, together with the contemplation of the heavenly motions, form a backdrop to the discussion about what it is to philosophize, whether or not philosophizing is beautiful, and whether or not it is good.

³ I render *καλός* as "beautiful." While "noble" might seem a more suitable translation of the word in the context of predicating an activity, I believe there are overriding advantages to the alternative. As Ronna Burger has noted, "The noble, one might say, is the particular way the beautiful shows up in the sphere of morality" (*Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*, Chapter 1, note 2). The discussion about the beautiful in the *Lovers* clearly pertains to the moral sphere, but given the backdrop of the dialogue, it also inevitably transcends it. Rendering *καλός* as "noble," it seems to me, runs greater risk of obfuscating the aesthetic sense of the word than rendering it as "beautiful" runs of obfuscating the moral sense.

Socrates' question conceals something that is evident from his narrative comments, namely, that he had already conjectured the subject of the boys' dispute.⁴ He therefore must have asked the question for some reason other than to learn what the boys were so serious about. Whatever the reason, he could hardly have asked a question better suited to stir up trouble. His question goes to the heart of the difference between this lover and his rival (this one is serious about athletics, and the other, philosophy), a difference evident in their very appearances.⁵ Essentially Socrates asked the lover in the presence of both his beloved and his rival whether what his rival was serious about was anything worthwhile.

Human beings are serious, Socrates implied, about matters great and beautiful. The lover, however, scoffed at the suggestion that what the boys were treating so seriously was anything great and beautiful. Rather, as he saw it the boys were engaged in something paltry or even ridiculous. He asked Socrates "What say you, 'great and beautiful'? – But really, they simply blather over the things aloft and talk nonsense, philosophizing" (132b8-10).⁶ Far from great and beautiful things, the lover seems to have thought that philosophizing qua concern for the heavenly things is mere blather (*αδολεσχέω*), no better than talking nonsense (*φλυαρέω*). He did not contradict the implied proposition that great and beautiful things are worthy of seriousness, but rather suggested that what these boys were taking seriously was unworthy.⁷ Or perhaps he meant to say that the particular way that the boys were

⁴ Cf. Christopher Bruell, "On the Original Meaning of Political Philosophy" (hereafter *OMPP*), p. 93

⁵ For the appearance of the athlete, cf. 132c8-10; for that of the philosopher, cf. 134b2-4.

⁶ I have used Burnet's text throughout this chapter. Translations are my own.

⁷ Merely asking what someone is serious about might already suggest that he is unjustifiably serious (Davis, *PPT*, p. 12). Perhaps Socrates' question anticipated the lovers' answer.

disputing about these things was mere blather and nonsense:⁸ whereas Socrates' question concerned the object of the boys' activity, the lover's answer maligned the activity itself. In any case, which things are great and beautiful is a matter of some dispute, and therefore the seriousness with which the boys were treating the heavenly things was questionable evidence of the greatness and beauty of disputing about those things, or perhaps of a certain way of disputing about them.

Marveling at this harsh answer, Socrates asked the young man whether it seemed to him to be ugly (shameful) to philosophize.⁹ The young man having answered a question about the matter of the boys' discussion with a remark about their act (or manner) of discussing, Socrates also shifts focus and asks about the boys' activity. The young man did not answer Socrates. It was his rival who, interjecting, answered on his behalf that he obviously held philosophizing to be ugly. This other youth, who happened to be sitting nearby, said that Socrates was not acting himself even to ask such a question of the other fellow; or did not Socrates know that the one he addressed had passed all his life gripping necks, eating to excess, and sleeping?¹⁰ What did Socrates suppose him to answer but that philosophy is shameful (132c1-12)? One can only conjecture as to the swiftness and propriety of the rival's interruption, to say nothing of the accuracy of his statement.

Socrates says that the one lover had devoted his time to athletics, and the other to *μουσική* (music, poetry, literature, philosophy etc.) (132d1-3). He does not

⁸ Cf. Michael Davis, *PPT*, p. 13

⁹ Having chosen to render *καλός* as "beautiful," it seems appropriate to render *αισχρος* as "ugly," rather than "shameful," even though the moral sense of the word seems dominant. In order to keep that moral sense in mind, I ask the reader to consider such uses of the word "ugly" as "That was an ugly thing you did," or "that you said."

¹⁰ Athletes at the time ate (frequently beef) to excess after strenuous exercise in order to build muscle mass. Falling asleep would often result.

explain exactly how he came to know this difference, although perhaps it is clear from what the musical one, the philosopher, had just said together with their physical appearances. Each of the two lovers pursues some sort of excellence, and each wishes (or appears to wish) to denigrate the excellence pursued by the other. The difference between what these two lovers take seriously constitutes a particular instance of a general dispute about the highest things.

This philosopher rebuked Socrates for asking a question of someone who apparently did not take questioning and answering seriously. But this is an exaggeration: clearly the athlete was also occupied with the beloved, who had drawn him, after all, to the house of a grammar teacher.¹¹ Furthermore, like Socrates, the athlete was also able to conjecture from a distance at which it was difficult to overhear that the boys were disputing about astronomy; and later he becomes dispirited over his ignorance of whom to question about what sort of learning improves the soul (cf. 135a6). The philosopher presumed that his rival would answer that philosophy is ugly. Even off the cuff, however, the athlete's statement was sufficiently ambiguous to allow that he did not believe philosophizing ugly in itself.

It seemed to Socrates that he ought to let off the one whom he had been questioning, who claimed no experience in speeches, but rather in deeds; and instead to question thoroughly the other who claimed to be wiser, so that Socrates also, if he could, might receive some benefit from him (132d3-7). Having encountered someone who presumed to be wiser, Socrates was eager to benefit

¹¹ Cf. Davis, *PPT*, p. 17

from learning something if he could. He makes a point of contrasting speeches with deeds, saying there would be greater benefit in questioning thoroughly someone who claims experience in speeches. This is not to say that he values speeches over deeds (as the philosopher clearly does). The implication of his statement is rather that he can benefit from questioning someone who claims to be experienced in speeches (whether or not that claim is justified). Knowledge of his own ignorance exempted the athlete from being a target of Socrates' scrutiny. Later, however, Socrates appeals to the athlete's experience (134a3-8), and in the end the athlete has the final word when the philosopher proves to have nothing to say (139a7-9).

In addition to the overt rivalry between the philosopher and the athlete over the favor of the boy, there may be a rivalry between this philosopher and Socrates as "friends of wisdom." Or perhaps it is better to say that this philosopher's desire to be distinguished on the grounds of being wiser rests on an erroneous conception of wisdom as something that one person possesses at the expense of another. His jealousy of the wisdom he supposes himself to possess might turn to envy if he turns out to be ignorant, or rather if someone exposes his ignorance. To begin with, however, he did not wish to treat Socrates as a rival (cf. 133d9-11, 134c5).

The philosopher implicitly invited Socrates to question him instead of the athlete. Socrates did so, but without altogether letting off the athlete; he told the philosopher that the question had been directed at both of them. His continuing to include the athlete in the discussion might amount to mere politeness; however, it is possible that Socrates genuinely and from the beginning wished to engage both lovers. Their rivalry proves useful for manipulating the discussion. In any event,

after engaging the attention of both, Socrates said to the philosopher that, if he supposed he could answer more beautifully, he should address the same question, whether it seemed to him beautiful or not to philosophize (132d8-11). Previously Socrates had asked the athlete whether it seemed to him ugly to philosophize. Now, in asking ‘the same question’ of the philosopher, Socrates exchanges “beautiful” for “ugly” and falsely conflates the opposite with the negative; while something ugly is certainly not beautiful, something that is not beautiful is not necessarily ugly (cf. *Symposium* 201e-202b). In encouraging the philosopher to make the opposite claim, Socrates invited him to carry his antagonism with the athlete over into the context of the conversation. Moreover, Socrates urged the philosopher to give his answer in case he supposed he could answer “more beautifully” than the athlete—as opposed to “more truly” or “more earnestly.” Answering a question is for this philosopher a point of pride or honor, a means of ennobling himself.

“As we were saying these things,” Socrates continues, “the two boys, overhearing and ceasing their dispute, became auditors of ours” (133a1-3). However seriously the boys had been taking the matter of their dispute, their attention was diverted from the heavenly things when Socrates and the lovers (their elders and the admirers of one of them) took up the question whether serious concern for the heavenly things is beautiful or ugly. Perhaps it had not occurred to them that being concerned about great and beautiful things might not itself be great or beautiful; for the moment this turned out to be more important to them than the

great and beautiful things themselves.¹² Does the greatness or beauty of a thing necessarily lend greatness or beauty to preoccupation with it?

The philosopher's agonistic desire to prevail over his rival was piqued when the two boys turned their attention upon them. Socrates says he does not know what the others felt, but he at least went wild – for he is always stricken wild by the young and beautiful. But something made it seem to him that the philosopher was no less affected, even though despite his apparent turmoil he nevertheless answered Socrates' question very ambitiously (133a3-8). The lover's ambition or love of honor could be observed, Socrates indicates, by his manner of answering. In what then was his psychological turmoil to be observed? Did his manner of answering also betray his inner agitation? In any event, the philosopher's response was rather odd:

“For whenever indeed,” he said, “O Socrates, I should deem philosophizing to be shameful, I would hold myself to be not even human, nor anyone disposed in this way;” [he said this] pointing toward his rival, and speaking in a loud voice so that his favorite could overhear. (133a8-b3)

The philosopher seems to have meant that he does not hold as human anyone who considers philosophizing shameful. In word, he indicated himself along with any indefinite other within a counterfactual proposition. In deed, he pointed to his rival and spoke in a loud voice so as to designate him as the target of the speech. Presumably he wished to imply that his rival was sub-human.¹³ In any event, the athlete had not actually answered or made explicit whether he thought philosophizing ugly, so the implication itself remains at least somewhat dubious.

¹² Cf. Davis, *PPT*, p. 10

¹³ Technically he failed to rule out the possibility that his rival was super-human; cf. Davis, *PPT*, p. 23.

The philosopher's pretension to cleverness (cf. 133d9-11, 134c5), confirmed by Socrates' observation that he answered in a manner displaying much love of honor, seems to suggest that the unusual structure of the philosopher's sentence was owing to his wish to answer in a sophisticated manner. However, the odd construction taken together with his awkwardly raising his voice and pointing might also indicate that his attempt to speak with sophistication was thwarted by great agitation resulting from the attention of his beloved. Wishing to answer with sophistication, perhaps the philosopher, being flustered, only made a muddle of speech.

Evidently not having been satisfied with this answer, Socrates says that he asked the philosopher again whether philosophizing seemed beautiful to him. This is the first of several indications that Socrates would brook no nonsense from the clever speaker. It is typical of the Platonic Socrates to insist that his interlocutors give short and simple answers; sometimes he even extracts promises from them to this effect (for example, cf. *Gorgias* 449b). In the *Lovers* he subtly compels the philosopher to adhere to this restriction without ever explicitly demanding it. This maneuver is made possible by a happy coincidence: while the presence of the rival provokes the philosopher to confidently display his abilities, the presence of the beloved frustrates them. His confidence outstripping his abilities allows Socrates to manipulate him into exposing himself, which at first curbs his arrogance and eventually causes him to withdraw into humiliated silence.

The philosopher answered that philosophizing certainly does seem beautiful to him. Next, Socrates asked whether it seemed to him to be possible to know

whether anything is beautiful or ugly, not knowing to begin with what it is (a typical Socratic question). The philosopher answered obligingly that it did not seem possible, but that he did know what it is to philosophize, which Socrates asked him to explain (133b4-c3).

B. Philosophizing is Much Learning

To define what it is to philosophize, the philosopher appealed to what Solon said somewhere: “I grow old, ever learning many things.”¹⁴ Someone who is going to philosophize, as it seemed to Socrates’ interlocutor, young and old, should always be learning some one thing, so as to learn the most possible in his life (133c7-9).

At first the philosopher seemed to Socrates “to be saying something.” Idiomatically, “to be saying something” just means to be saying something true, beautiful, or worthwhile to consider—something serious. After reflecting, however, Socrates wondered if the philosopher, perhaps, was not “saying something.” When Socrates asked him whether he held philosophy to be much learning, he answered, “Certainly.” Next Socrates asked him if he considered philosophy to be merely beautiful, or also good (133c9-d12). That he should have asked this question only after confirming that the philosopher did not mean that philosophizing is anything but “much learning” seems to imply that lifelong learning, understood differently, might be straightforwardly beautiful and good. In any event, the ensuing discussion

¹⁴ Solon, Fragment 18. As this saying of Solon has come down to us elsewhere, the word *διδασκομενος* stands in for the philosopher’s *μανθανειν*. Whereas *μανθανειν* primarily carries the sense of learning for oneself, *διδασκομενος* is closer to the sense of receiving instruction (cf Leake, p. 82 n. 5).

shows that philosophy could not be good in the way Socrates' interlocutor thought if it were beautiful in the way he insisted.

In the first stage of his line of questioning (133c9-134e6) Socrates orchestrates a revision to the philosopher's definition—a revision designed to raise the question, what sort of learning is good for the one who learns? By the end of the second stage (135a7-137b1), it is obvious that for all his enthusiasm the philosopher has not given this question sufficient thought.

The philosopher said that he considered philosophy to be good as well as beautiful. Socrates asked him whether he saw the coincidence of the beautiful and the good as peculiar to philosophy, or if these two seemed to him to come together also in other things—athletics for instance (133a5-8). Bringing the discussion around to the topic of athletics serves to steer the question of what is good toward a ground on which its answer is more readily apparent; for while the good of the soul may prove difficult to judge (cf. 134e4-8), the good of the body at least seems obvious to all. Additionally, this step provokes the philosopher vis-à-vis his rival. The question effectively forces the philosopher either to argue against the orthodox view that athletics is beautiful and good (consider the Olympic and other games) or to concede in the presence of his beloved the beauty and goodness of what his rival reveres and excels at. Socrates need not have pressured him in this manner to extol something he would prefer to denigrate: a similar question about farming would have served just as well (cf. 134e1-2).

Before the philosopher answered Socrates' question (or perhaps while he considered how to answer in a way that might mitigate the odium of what he had to

say), Socrates posed it again negatively: “Or don’t you [consider athletics also to be both beautiful and good]?” (135d8). In rhetorical terms, Socrates pressed the lover to speak before he had a chance to formulate an answer in the awkwardly sophisticated style of his earlier statement. Socrates says that the philosopher replied to this question “very ironically,” saying that to Socrates he granted that athletics is both noble and good, but that to his rival he said it was neither. So overtly ironic as to be basically not ironic, this answer seems to be the premature expression of what was intended to be a sophisticated response.

To speak ironically means to communicate different messages at the same time, possibly to different listeners, using the same words. Since the philosopher not only communicated different messages to different listeners, but also pointed to his doing so, he could not fail to communicate both messages to both sets of listeners. Irony may be either open or closed: an ironic speaker may indiscriminately call attention to his communicating two messages, or he may discreetly conceal one of the messages from part of his audience. Usually one is accused of being ironic either when overtly displaying one’s irony to all and sundry or when failing to conceal it. When detected, irony offends those who believe that the speaker intended to exclude them, even nominally, from some message that his words contained. While the philosopher surely wished to offend his rival in this way, no listener could seriously have taken himself for a candidate for exclusion because both messages were expressed in the plainest terms.

The philosopher was willing to make a concession to athletics, but not without attempting, at the same time, to exalt his own pastime and thereby himself

by referring to his willingness to conceal his true opinion so as to rebuke his rival despite it. It is somewhat odd to try to exalt oneself by admitting willingness to deceive others; if one is going to deceive anyone about anything, oughtn't one conceal one's willingness to do so? In any case, the philosopher's statement calls into question whether he cares more for honor than for truth, for deed than for speech. His honesty, such as it is, appears to stem from some sort of consideration for Socrates. Does he respect Socrates as a fellow lover of wisdom, or does he fear him as a skilled speaker?

Expanding the comparison, Socrates asked the philosopher whether, in the case of athletics, he held that much exercising was love of athletics. The philosopher responded by saying that he certainly did, just as he held, in the case of philosophizing, that much learning is philosophy. Next the philosopher effectively agreed that lovers of athletics exercise not simply for the sake of exercising, but rather for the sake of the effect, namely bringing the body into good condition. The paradigm implies that lovers of wisdom or philosophers do not undertake learning for its own sake but rather for the effect, namely bringing the soul into good condition.¹⁵ To say that philosophizing as simply "much learning" is beneficial implies that learning of any kind – about the brains of leeches no less than about the human good – benefits the soul. Socrates' cross-examination of the philosopher gradually undermines this proposition.

Socrates asked the philosopher if much exercise causes the body to be in good condition. The philosopher affirmed that it does, and playfully asked how

¹⁵ Cf. 134d; Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 96.

anyone could become healthy from little exercise (133e11-134a2)? The philosopher's question reduces the alternative regimens to much or little exercise, overlooking the whole spectrum in between. "And then," Socrates says,

it seemed to me that now the lover of athletics should be incited so that he might aid me through his athletic experience. Whereupon I asked him, "But indeed why are you silent, my good friend, while this one is saying these things? Or does it also seem to you that human beings have good bodily condition out of much exercise, or is it rather out of measured exercise?" (134a3-8)

Socrates shows more generosity in his questioning of the athlete than he did in his questioning of the philosopher: he did not ask the athlete for judgment on the value of "much" exercise without also feeding him the more sensible alternative of "measured" exercise. Nothing prevented Socrates from gently suggesting this alternative to the philosopher without involving the athlete at all. He chose instead to casually offer the athlete the ammunition he needed to denigrate the philosopher, paying him back for the previous attack.

Using a proverbial expression,¹⁶ the athlete said he supposes "even a pig would know" that the body has good condition out of measured exercise; "So why not a man who is insomniac and fasting, who has an un-rubbed neck and is thin from anxiety?" (134b2-4).

It is a good jibe: the athlete implied that his rival's ignorance of what produces good bodily condition (as attested by his appearance) shows he is inferior even to a beast in intelligence. The athlete also managed something the philosopher had not, which was to designate the target of his jibe by speech alone—he did not have to raise his voice or point. Socrates says the boys were delighted by what the athlete said, and the philosopher blushed (134b4-6).

¹⁶ The same expression appears in *Laches* (196d).

Socrates then turned back to the philosopher to ask if he conceded that neither much nor little exercise causes human beings to have good bodily condition, but rather measured exercise. Or would the philosopher battle with the two of them (Socrates and the athlete) concerning this argument (134b7-10)? This latter question serves as a warning. Lest the philosopher actually consider maintaining his feeble claim, Socrates reminds him he is outnumbered, facing an alliance of a skilled speaker with someone experienced in the matter in question. Socrates' skill, more than the athlete's experience, gave the philosopher pause:

"This guy," he said, "against him I should be happy to contend, and I know well that I should come to be capable of maintaining the thesis I assumed, even if I assumed one yet weaker than this—for he is nothing. But against you I have no need to love victory in violation of opinion, and I agree that not much but rather measured exercise produces good condition in human beings." (134c1-7)

By his own account, the philosopher was a skilled speaker, capable of maintaining a weaker thesis against a stronger one so long as he argued with an amateur. After earlier proclaiming his willingness to deceive, he now betrays a desire, under different circumstances, to forego an honest discussion for the sake of establishing his superiority at speaking. Does he love wisdom more than victory? Against Socrates, at least, he would not seek victory in violation of his opinion; but would he nonetheless seek victory?

In any event, either from cordiality or from fear of Socrates' skill, the philosopher abandoned his claim that much exercise produces good bodily condition. Next Socrates asked the same question about food: does food according to measure produce good bodily condition, or rather much food? Socrates says that the philosopher agreed that it was the same in the case of food. Finally, after he

compelled the philosopher also to agree that in all things pertaining to the body it is the measured amount, rather than much or little, that is most beneficial, Socrates asked about the soul. Of the things administered to the soul, the philosopher agreed that the measured are beneficial rather than the unmeasured. He also agreed that things learned are one of the things administered to the soul, and assented that of these things, also, it is the measured amount that is beneficial rather than “much” (134c8-d13).

Returning to the paradigm of the body, Socrates asked whom they would justly ask what sort of labors and foods are measured when it comes to the body. Evidently the athlete has been accepted as a contributor to the general discussion, especially in matters in which he is experienced, because Socrates says that the three of them agreed it was the doctor or trainer (134d14-7). The introduction of the question “what sort” rather than “how much” is subtle (*hopoios* replaces *hoposos*), but crucial. It introduces the question of quality or kind into the search for what brings the body or soul into good condition.

The combination of exercises and foods in the question what produces good bodily condition might be significant. Both medicine (regulating food) and athletics (regulating exercise) improve the body, but whereas exercise according to measure requires diligence or the willingness to undergo pain, consuming food according to measure requires moderation or willingness to forego pleasure. The same virtues might apply to the things administered to the soul. Indeed, Socrates mentions two virtues in connection with improving the soul in the last section of the *Lovers*: justice and moderation, justice being characterized as correct punishment for the

sake of improving the one punished. In this sense, diligence might be said to be self-administered justice. The cardinal feature of Socrates' interlocutor is lack of diligence (he does not want to learn anything to the point of expertise, or to practice any of the arts). Is Socrates' treatment of him just?

Next Socrates asked of whom it would be appropriate to inquire how much is the measured amount of seed scattering. They agreed it was the farmer (134e1-3). This new paradigm is more complex than the former because it affords reflection on the cultivation and growth of what is administered to ("planted in") the soul in addition to benefiting the soul itself.¹⁷ The good condition of crops depends not only upon the fuss over their cultivation and the quality of the soil in which they are planted, but also upon the suitability of the crops planted to the soil and climate in which they are planted. Even though Socrates returned to asking "how much" is measured, the farming paradigm elaborates and clarifies the importance of quality and kind in what produces the good condition of the body or soul.

Now Socrates says that he asked whom they would justly ask about the planting and sowing of things learned in the soul—both how much and what sort is measured? He says that they were all completely perplexed at this question (134e4-7). They would never even have arrived at it had they not first established that measured learning, rather than much, is beneficial for the soul. For if simply learning much is beneficial, it hardly matters what one happens to learn at any given time, just so long as one learns some one thing both young and old.

¹⁷ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 106.

Socrates playfully asked them if they were willing, since they three were perplexed, to ask the boys in their presence [about how much and what sort of learning should be administered to the soul]; or were they three perhaps ashamed, as Homer says the suitors were, who did not deem someone else worthy to string the bow (135a1-5)?¹⁸

Socrates' playful questions suggest that in some things perhaps none of us is any better than a beginner, and for that reason we might have something to learn from those who take themselves for beginners or who are conscious of their ignorance. To the philosopher the questions also delivered a double rebuke: the first question hinted that he had come to light as no better than amateur boys in understanding a matter he made a display of taking seriously; the second referred to the lowness of forbidding another who might appear unworthy from even competing in a contest in which one wishes to excel (as the philosopher did when he interrupted the athlete to break into the discussion).

Although the rebuke seems especially intended to sting the musical lover, Socrates says that afterward they (both rival lovers and also possibly the boys listening) seemed to him disheartened over the argument. That the athletic lover should be affected in this way goes to show that he too cared about the good condition of the soul (whatever the philosopher might say about him). In view of

¹⁸ In the passage of the *Odyssey* to which Socrates refers, the suitors object, apparently out of apprehension of the shame they must feel if he succeeds, to letting a man they take for an aged beggar attempt to string a bow that each of them has failed to bend. The beggar, Odysseus in disguise, not only manages to string the bow but accomplishes a masterful shot with the weapon before turning it against the suitors (cf. *Odyssey* XXI 285-6; XXII 1 ff.).

this change in morale, Socrates says he switched tacks and tried to pursue the investigation differently.

C. Philosophizing is Learning Many Arts and Practicing None

Socrates begins the second stage of his questioning by saying that he then asked “But what sort do we guess to be those especially of the things learned that the one philosophizing should learn, if not all or much?” (135a6-10). This question suggests that perhaps those who have admitted ignorance about what sort of learning benefits the soul need not be disheartened, for they are in a position to guess or divine some sort of answer. Indeed it might occur to someone in this condition that discovering what sort of learning improves the soul, as the next step on the way to improving it, belongs to the set of things learned that improve the soul (just as learning of one’s ignorance of these matters was the first step). The philosopher, however, misses Socrates’ hint and does not guess anything of the sort. Indeed he does not deign to guess at all,¹⁹ but instead embarks on a series of assertions about what the one philosophizing ought to learn, which gradually reveal a conflict between his notion of the conditions for something being beautiful and what he is willing to concede makes something good.

Having been refuted, laughed at, and brought to perplexity on the basis of his original definition of philosophy, the philosopher whom Socrates here calls “the wiser one” no longer attempts to answer with undue sophistication. Instead, he offers a straightforward articulation of the sort of learning he believes a philosopher

¹⁹ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 96.

ought to pursue, which he hopes will shore up the deficiencies of his previous statements. Socrates says “the wiser one” began his response to the question about which things the one philosophizing ought to learn by pointing to the most beautiful of the things that can be learned and the fitting things from which someone might have the greatest (πλειστος) reputation in regard to philosophy.²⁰ He said the one philosophizing would have the greatest reputation for philosophy if he were reputed to be experienced in all the arts, or if not all then in the greatest and especially the most remarkable, learning them as much as is proper for the free to learn—as much as belongs to comprehension, not to handicraft (135b1-8). Again, which is more important to Socrates’ interlocutor, being experienced or having the reputation of experience? And what sort of experience is he talking about? Based on his final statements, clearly he is not referring to the experience of a practitioner. Once again the philosopher has betrayed a prejudice in favor of speeches (comprehension) over against deeds (handicraft), although in this case it is a common one: an artisan is held to be of inferior rank despite the knowledge he possesses.²¹

To the extent that he now discriminates between the knowledge of an artisan and that of a reputed philosopher, Socrates’ interlocutor seems to be responding to the question about the content of learning that makes it “measured”; however, he discriminates merely on the basis of conventional opinion, and also still seems to

²⁰ Given that not all philosophical activities are universally held to be beautiful (cf. the athlete’s response to Socrates’ first question, 132b8-10), “the wiser one” might not be correct in asserting that it is the most beautiful learning that confers the greatest reputation for philosophizing.

²¹ Artisans are held to be inferior and even ugly because, earning by their labors only enough to live, they end up living only to labor; and what’s more, this labor mutilates their bodies and souls (cf. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 4.1-3; W. R. M. Lamb, p. 310).

conceive of the difference in knowledge as quantitative. The qualitative difference he somehow locates in the knowers themselves, as opposed to the type of knowledge they possess. By “what is proper for the free to learn” the philosopher wished to distinguish the gentleman’s learning of the arts from what an artisan learns. But an artisan however vulgar is also good, for he practices an art, and each art serves human beings something useful. The free person is not useful in this way. The insistence of “the wise one” on the beauty of philosophizing points the way toward his ignorance of and ongoing perplexity about its goodness.

It is possible, even likely, that mere anxiety about a repetition of his previous error motivated the philosopher’s concessions that one cannot learn all the arts, and perhaps not many of them thoroughly. Whatever the case may be, saying that philosophizing is learning ‘as many of the arts as possible’ is not sufficient to dispense with problems with defining philosophy as ‘much learning.’

Socrates probed the philosopher on the difference between learning as much as belongs to comprehension and as much as belongs to handicraft. The philosopher had spoken as though comprehension somehow fell short of practice. In the case of carpentry, however, the lion’s share of learning belongs to the one who understands architecture and works but little with his hands; those who have learned only enough to do the manual labor of carpentry are commoner and their work much cheaper to purchase. Those who know the art of architecture are so rare that, as Socrates observed, “Few should come to be even among all the Greeks” (135b9-c3). After he made these observations about carpentry, Socrates asked the philosopher if

his distinction meant something like this—that the one philosophizing should learn as much as the architect, rather than as much as the lowly carpenter?

Socrates indicates the character of the philosopher's ostensible agreement with this point through a curious narrative comment: "And he hearing me conceded that he was saying even something such as this" (135c3-5). Did the philosopher answer upon hearing, but without taking the time to understand? Indeed, based on his previous statements the philosopher had seemed to have in mind not what Socrates suggested but quite the opposite: that learning as much as belongs to comprehension falls short of learning as much as belongs to handicraft; and even if this was not what he thought initially, he will venture to suggest it in the sequel (cf. 135c8-d8). Perhaps he had been considering that the sort of comprehension that comes from experience is hard won, depending on iterations of the same acts and therefore taking time. As Socrates observed, however, spending much time practicing an art does not demand and may not result in a broad or profound understanding of it. In any case if learning "as much as belongs to comprehension" in the arts means becoming an expert (the architect rather than the carpenter), then the higher honor afforded to comprehension of the arts corresponds with more learning, not less.

Socrates pressed the philosopher to say if it is not impossible for the same person to learn even two arts such as architecture, not to speak of many and great ones (135c6-8). This question goes to the heart of Socrates' contention with his interlocutor's definition of philosophy: given the limits of the human lifespan, the time required to learn any one thing, and the multitude of things that can be learned,

it is possible for a human being to squander his entire life learning trivial matters, which can hardly be said to improve the soul. Human mortality renders the quantitative side of the question “what is measured learning” moot even if it is “measured” always to be learning something (Socrates was initially willing to accept that philosophy is lifelong learning). Far more important is the qualitative side that demands judgment as to what sort of learning benefits the soul, so that one may always be learning something worthwhile.

The philosopher tacitly conceded that it is indeed impossible for the same person to learn “many and great” arts and responded by modifying his claim, this time saying that the one philosophizing need not know each of the arts so precisely as one who possesses the art himself. Instead he need only know as much as belongs to a man who is both free and educated, enough to be distinguished from other non-practitioners in following along with the speeches of the artisan, contributing his opinion in such a way as to be reputed cleverest in the things said or done concerning the arts (135c8-d8). It sounds as though he is saying that the one philosophizing need not be a knower in the traditional sense; rather, he must know merely enough to convince others who are ignorant that his judgment is superior in the very matters about which they are all ignorant.²² Evidently the philosopher’s prejudice against artisans extends even to the experts: not only is it ugly to stoop to carpentry, it is also ugly to busy oneself to the point of expertise in architecture.

²² This ability comes pretty close to the power that Gorgias attributes to the art of rhetoric and the rhetorician (cf. *Gorgias* 456a-457c). Taking the suggestion together with the attempts at and allusions to sophisticated speech by “the philosopher,” one might conjecture that he had been trained by a sophist.

Still uncertain about the argument, Socrates asked whether he himself had in mind the sort of man “the wise one” meant by likening the philosopher to a pentathlete. Pentathletes train to compete in all of five different types of athletic contest. Whereas at running they are inferior to the best of those who train in running only, and at wrestling to the best of those who train at wrestling only, pentathletes are at least superior to amateur athletes in these contests. Perhaps, Socrates said, the philosopher meant that something similar is brought about in those who pursue philosophizing: they are inferior to the practitioners of each of the arts, but superior to other non-practitioners. “The wise one” answered that in likening the philosopher to the pentathlete Socrates appeared to him to have beautifully brought to light the things having to do with the philosopher. For the philosopher is simply not the sort to be enslaved to any matter or to labor at anything to such a point of precision as to be, from concern for one thing, deficient in all others (as artisans are); but he is the sort to have laid hold of all measuredly (135d9-136b2).

That Socrates’ interlocutor embraces training for a pentathlon as a paradigm for philosophy indicates that he has yet to grasp the implications of asking ‘what sort’ of learning constitutes the measured amount. Training a body for competition in five events is not quite the same as training the body so as to bring it into the best condition—or if it is, then there must be some reason why training for these five events and not others, and not more or fewer events, produces good bodily condition. The philosopher has apparently not thought of such questions. With the first comparison of philosophizing to athletics – or rather ‘love of wisdom’ to ‘love of

athletics' – the philosopher agreed explicitly that athletes train not simply for the sake of training but to produce good bodily condition, and implicitly that philosophers learn not simply for the sake of learning but to produce good psychic condition (cf. 133e7-10). By the time Socrates restores the comparison by asking about the pentathlete, the focus of the discussion has shifted from the beneficial quantity of exercises or things learned to the beneficial content of exercises or things learned. The philosopher still seems unable to identify such content, though to his credit he has at least attempted to articulate how “measured” learning is supposed to correspond with good psychic condition.

The philosopher's latest statements shed some light on the grounds for his prejudice against artisans, and also on the error into which it leads him. Even though settling down into a single occupation may cultivate the mind and body along certain lines, it also entails suppressing (or neglecting to develop) much besides that belongs naturally to the whole human being and without which perhaps a human being cannot be said to be in good condition.²³ Having been asked to explain how philosophizing produces good psychic condition, Socrates' interlocutor conjectured that the one philosophizing must learn many arts (so as to avoid a psychic fate similar to the psychic and somatic fate of an artisan). In the same way that competing in the pentathlon might seem to cultivate the body with less compromise to its all-around condition than results from competing in, say,

²³ In other words, the principle of the division of labor, that “one man does a finer job practicing one art,” and should therefore labor at only one thing, tends to suppress the wholeness of the human being (cf. *Republic* 370b). This fact points toward a tension between political justice and private justice as formulated in *Republic* IV.

running or boxing,²⁴ perhaps learning many arts (if it is possible to learn many arts in a single lifetime) cultivates the soul with less compromise to its all-around condition than results from practicing any art by itself. “The wise one,” however, fails to see that one would not necessarily produce psychic harmony or excellence by learning many arts indiscriminately—any more than one would produce bodily harmony or excellence through training for many contests indiscriminately.²⁵

Socrates says that after this answer, being eager to know plainly (*σαφως*) what the philosopher meant, he inquired of him whether he supposed the good to be useful or useless (136b3-6). The narrative comment suggests that something had been thrown into doubt. Perhaps Socrates wished to understand just how his interlocutor conceived of the superiority of the philosopher over the artisan—a point he had insisted upon since venturing to say what the philosopher especially ought to learn (cf. 135b1 ff.). At stake is whether he had again put forward a definition that might require him to abandon or modify his claim that philosophizing is good—for as Socrates soon shows, the brand of *polymathia* by which the philosopher had lately characterized philosophy does not support that claim.

Up to this point in the discussion Socrates raised questions about the good in connection with the condition of human beings, both with regard to the body and

²⁴ Running builds the legs to the neglect of the shoulders and chest, while boxing builds the shoulders and chest to the neglect of the legs, so that training in either sport alone throws the body out of its proper proportions (cf. Xenophon, *Symposium* 2.16 ff; Seth Benardete, *Encounters and Reflections*, 72-3).

²⁵ The difference between the physical appearances of the two rival lovers (each as described by the other) superficially suggests that one has cultivated the body to the neglect of the soul, while the other has cultivated the soul to the neglect of the body (cf. 132c8-12 and 134b2-4). One might question whether one can bring the body into its best condition without also cultivating the soul, or the soul into its best condition without also training the body.

with regard to the soul. No one thought to ask whether to be in good condition required that one's condition must be good for anything or anyone in particular. However, a human being is said to be good ambiguously: it might mean 'good in himself' (or 'good for himself') on the one hand; or, on the other hand, it might mean 'good for others.' Asking whether someone is useful points especially to the latter sense.

Calling Socrates by name (probably the closest anyone comes to swearing in this dialogue), the philosopher said that those who are good are surely useful. He cannot unproblematically believe in the equivalence of the useful and the good, however, for though he admits that artisans are useful, he evidently does not believe that they are good in the same sense that the philosopher is good.²⁶ How then does he conceive of the goodness or usefulness of philosophizing?

Following up on his question, Socrates asked, "Accordingly, if the good are useful, are the wicked useless?" This seemingly casual inversion obfuscates the difference between the opposition of 'good' and 'wicked' on the one hand, and that of 'useful' and 'useless' on the other: the former are opposites, the latter negatives. Whereas the useless merely lack usefulness, the wicked do not simply lack goodness. The useless are no help at all, but the wicked perhaps even inhibit. Considering this obfuscation in connection with the ambiguous relation between the good and the useful, to which the philosopher appears insensitive, one perceives the argument here effectively closing off a certain position regarding the goodness of philosophizing: according to the assumptions they are adopting, one can no longer

²⁶ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 100.

argue that those who philosophize are good, albeit to no one but themselves, or that while they are not especially useful to others, neither are they wicked.

To the question whether the good are useful and the wicked useless, Socrates says that the philosopher agreed (136b10). Strictly speaking, the concession that the wicked are useless does not entail that the useless are wicked, though the interlocutors apparently take it to do so.²⁷

Socrates proceeded to ask, “What then? Do you believe the philosophers useful or not?” (136b11-12). Having agreed that the good are useful while the wicked are useless – and holding, as the sequel bears out, that the useless are wicked – the philosopher now faces the stark alternatives of maintaining that philosophers are good and therefore useful to others, or abandoning that claim wholesale and saying that they are even wicked. The latter alternative effectively entails abandoning his primary claim that philosophizing is beautiful, and endorsing the claim he attributed to his rival (an outcome he is ultimately unable to avoid so long as he maintains his current definition of philosophizing). Socrates reports that the philosopher agreed not only that philosophers are useful, but most useful (136c1-2).²⁸

²⁷ The philosopher does not object when Socrates, in his recapitulation of the argument, takes it as a matter of course that they had agreed uselessness entails wickedness (cf. 137a10-b1); this also seems to be the purport of Socrates’ adding “and the evil are useless” to his shorter summary of agreed-upon claims at 136e.

²⁸ There are several possible reasons for the vehemence of the philosopher’s affirmation of the usefulness of philosophy. Perhaps he wished to reassert his superiority over his rival, the athlete (his agreement that the good are useful taken together with his tendency elsewhere to conflate categorical subsumption with equivalence might suggest that by “most useful” he believes himself to be saying “best”). Or perhaps, sensing the hatefulness of one of the alternative positions with which Socrates’ question presented him (a position which basically entailed admitting to be wicked), the philosopher wished there to be no mistake about his rejecting that alternative.

Socrates then called upon the philosopher, and perhaps also the athlete and even the boys observing the discussion, to join him in judging in what way someone who is taken for second-best turns out to be useful if what his interlocutor says is true. For, as Socrates pointed out, clearly the philosopher is inferior to each of those who practice the arts (136c4-6). “The wise one” can hardly avoid conceding to what Socrates’ statement implies after having asserted previously that the philosopher is inferior in understanding to the practitioners of the arts.

Next Socrates called upon his interlocutor to answer whether he would send for a doctor or rather the second-best man, the philosopher, in case a friend for whom he had great serious regard fell sick. In a feeble attempt to answer in such a way as to avoid devaluing the philosopher, “the wise one” said that under such circumstances he would send for both the doctor and the philosopher. Socrates insisted that he say which person he would prefer to attend to the sick friend first. More sensibly the philosopher answered that no one would dispute that having the doctor attend to a sick friend first would be preferable, as on a storm tossed ship it would be better to entrust both one’s property and such a friend to a pilot rather than to a philosopher. He then agreed that the same holds for everything else: while there are artisans available the philosopher turns out to be useless. “So is the philosopher now someone useless to us?” Socrates asked. “For there are always artisans [available] to us. And we have agreed the good to be useful, and the bad useless” (136c8-e4).

Each of the arts being somehow useful to human beings, someone who thoroughly understands and practices any of the arts thereby makes himself useful;

and as long as such a practitioner is on hand – and one is always on hand in the city – he will be more useful than anyone else with respect to the art that he happens to practice. Therefore if a philosopher is useful it cannot be by virtue of whatever understanding of the arts he happens to possess. According to Socrates' interlocutor, however, philosophizing is simply coming to some mean understanding of each of the arts; therefore the philosopher comes to light as useless.

For the second time, Socrates reports that the musical lover was *compelled* to agree (cf. 134d1). Does the narrative comment indicate that he unsuccessfully resisted agreeing that the philosopher is useless? The argument has admittedly reached a somewhat hyperbolic conclusion. For surely not only the best at something is useful, but the second-best may also be of use either as a partner or as an alternate, and so on. The answer "I would send for both" is not altogether insensible; those who are less useful than the most useful are usually not for that reason accounted useless.²⁹ Moreover, Someone might contest on behalf of the philosopher that even *polymathia* or "interdisciplinary" knowledge might become useful under certain circumstances in a way that knowledge of only one of the arts cannot. While the usefulness of the practitioner's knowledge is generally limited to the horizon of its application as he understands it, perhaps an outsider with admittedly less acquaintance with the things within that horizon is nevertheless in a

²⁹ Nevertheless it must be admitted the second-best at anything usually arrives at that status having set out to be nothing short of the best, or at any rate without having purposely stopped short of his potential or of acquiring thoroughgoing understanding of his pursuit—and certainly not having foregone practice of any kind.

better position to conceive of its expansion.³⁰ Each of the arts serves some good, but each may in turn be subordinated to another art serving a more comprehensive good, until all perhaps are comprehended under a single art, an “architectonic” art.³¹ Someone in the position “the wise one” has come to might venture to say that philosophy is, or is the search for, knowledge of the most comprehensive human good. But then, no one with the least inkling of such a possibility would have put forward pentathletic training as a paradigm for philosophy. Rather than conceiving of a heirarchy of knowledge, Socrates’ interlocutor merely takes common opinions about what is beautiful and fitting for a free person to learn as the guiding principles of philosophical activity. But doing so is as much as to accept without further examination common opinions about what is good for a human being. And yet in what matters could one more wish to exchange opinion for knowledge?

Socrates asked the philosopher whether it is rude to ask “what comes next” after he had agreed that the philosopher is useless according to his definition (136e6-7). This question allows that the act of refuting, or rather of articulating the terms of refutation, touches on propriety.³² But one refutes in speech, and speeches as speeches pertain to the true and false rather than to the proper and improper; only when taken as deeds, as acts of bringing into the open what is beautifully or justly (or otherwise) brought into the open, do speeches touch on propriety. Perhaps in the spirit of this distinction, and of his prejudice in favor of speeches over

³⁰ The engineers who knew how to divert the waters of the Euphrates for Queen Nicrotis to build a bridge in Babylon, for example, might not have divined of their own accord how doing so could also be useful to an army laying siege to that city. And yet this is what allowed Cyrus to take it (cf. Herodotus, *Histories* I.185-6, 191; compare Xenophon, *Education of Cyrus* VII.5.10-19).

³¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I.1-2; Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 97.

³² What a rude business Socrates has chosen for himself (cf. *Apology* 21b ff.)!

against deeds, the philosopher told Socrates to ask whatever he wants. His indifference toward the propriety of speeches, however, is belied by his behavior: previously he blushed, embarrassed at having spoken in error (cf. 134b1-6); and at the conclusion of the dialogue Socrates relates that the philosopher, ashamed at being shown that philosophizing cannot be what he says it is and also beautiful and good, fell silent. One might also mention his eagerness to answer more beautifully than his rival (132d8), Socrates' observation that he answered in a way that showed his great love of honor (133a7-8), and his avowed general willingness to deceive in order to win victory in argument (134c1-4). Propriety, or rather love of victory and honor, seems to motivate the philosopher's behavior more than desire for truth.

What comes next is a short recapitulation of the points of the discussion that, being approved by the philosopher, culminated in a refutation. The refutation in turn leads to a new line of questioning.

Although he accurately summarizes some of the principal points of agreement in his recapitulation, Socrates alters one and adds another. He accurately began by saying, "We agreed philosopher to be noble," but then he added something on which in fact they had not explicitly agreed, namely "and to be philosophers ourselves." Next Socrates asserted they had agreed "philosophers to be good" (136e9-137e3). Originally they agreed, not that philosophers are good, but that philosophy is good. They agreed to this after considering what philosophizing is, and before inquiring whether philosophizing would, according to the definition put forward, benefit the soul. Socrates finishes the recapitulation with an accurate articulation of some of their most recent points of agreement: the good are useful,

the wicked useless; philosophers, so long as artisans are available, are useless; and there are always artisans. He asked the philosopher whether these things had been agreed, to which the philosopher responded, “Certainly” (137a4-8).

By saying to the philosopher that “we” had agreed “to be philosophers ourselves,” Socrates adopted a posture of solidarity, perhaps with a view to cushioning the blow of pointing out the contradiction in his interlocutor’s claims. However, this statement also prompts the listener to consider Socrates as a philosopher in comparison with his interlocutor—a comparison one could not have avoided making in light of the guiding questions of the dialogue, to say nothing of its alternate title (*On Philosophy*). Appealing to his interlocutor for solidarity might serve to point the listener toward disparity. In any event, the statement brings into the open what is at stake for philosophers generally vis-a-vis the city, which they cannot do without but which might prefer to do without them if they should prove useless, not to say wicked. Matters are even more critical for Socrates’ interlocutor because of his ambition: believing himself a philosopher, and wanting to be honored for his cleverness, he has every interest in being able to demonstrate that philosophizing is beautiful and good, rather than wicked and useless.

The claim that the philosopher is good seems to have been introduced as a tacit assumption when “the wise one” suggested that a philosopher ought to pursue understanding of the arts (cf. 135b1-d8). Since he holds that philosophy is also beautiful, however, “the wise one” insisted the philosopher refrain from ugly practices—such as practicing any of the arts. If on the one hand “the wise one” holds that what is beautiful is also good, on the other hand he seems to hold the

philosopher beautiful precisely to the extent that he is not good—at least not in the way artisans are good. His understanding of the good of the soul extends so far as to reject recognizably deficient types and denounce the practices that produce them; about the character of psychic excellence and its cultivation, however, he proves to have given little thought and to possess less imagination.

Socrates drives the point home by saying, “It looks as though we were agreeing that, by your account at least, if to philosophize is to be knowledgeable of the arts in the way you are saying, they [philosophers] are wicked and useless for as long as there are arts among human beings” (137a10-b1). Previously the philosopher agreed that the wicked are useless (cf. 136b8-9); he did not at that time explicitly concede what this does not entail, that the useless are also wicked. Now, however, he tacitly concedes this point. As previously mentioned, without this concession one might have claimed that those who philosophize are good, albeit to no one but themselves, or that while they may not be especially useful to others, neither are they wicked.

Socrates used an odd formulation: as long as there are arts among human beings, those who know the arts in the way “the wise one” says the philosophers know them are wicked and useless. But if there were no arts among human beings, presumably no one would know them in any way at all. Why not simply say that the philosophers are useless as long as there are artisans among human beings? By formulating the conclusion in the way he does, Socrates calls attention to the root of the absurdity of his interlocutor’s statements. “The wise one” is not really worried about the scope of the philosopher’s knowledge of the arts, or even whether it is

surpassed by the artisans,³³ but rather that the philosopher should never degrade himself by practicing any art. Not the extent of the philosopher's learning of the arts, but rather the application of his knowledge is at issue. "The wise one" insists that the philosopher know the arts in speech but never apply his knowledge in deed. Thus does he sacrifice the good to the beautiful. The formula implies that as long as arts are practiced among human beings, that is, as long as there are arts, someone who learns the arts with no intention of thereby making himself useful is not only useless but also wicked. It would follow that if philosophizing were seeking to know without making oneself useful – if, for example, it consisted in unbridled prying into the heavenly things – then the athlete's apparent contempt for philosophizing would be justified. The presumed separation of speeches from deeds in the definition of philosophizing put forward by Socrates' interlocutor is parasitic on the beauty and goodness of philosophizing.

Calling the philosopher his friend, Socrates finished him off with a rebuke: he said he suspects philosophers are not like that [wicked and useless], and philosophizing is not seriousness about the arts, being a busybody and poking about learning much, but something else; for he supposed this was subject to reproach and those serious about the arts were called vulgar (137b1-6).

Socrates does not disavow the philosopher's contempt for artisans. Artisans are good insofar as each of the arts they practice serves human beings something

³³ "The wise one" only agreed that the philosopher ought not to learn as much as the artisans after Socrates pointed out just how difficult it is to learn even as much as one artisan knows; and he began by holding out that philosophizing is "much learning," plain and simple. He is only worried about how far the philosopher ought to learn the arts to the extent that he wishes to avoid a repetition of the contradiction in his initial statements.

useful; but they are not beautiful insofar as they are limited beings. If there are men who are both beautiful and good, then presumably they are not good in just the same way artisans are good; or, if they practice an art, perhaps it does not compromise the health of the body and soul as many arts do. In any event, the ugliness of artisans should point especially back to the question, which of the arts or which things learned produce good psychic condition?

Socrates' rebuke, which forestalls any further suggestions on the part of the philosopher,³⁴ fuses together contempt for practicing the arts with the portrayal of philosophizing as learning many arts. It does this by conflating *βαναυσους* with *τους περι τας τεχνας εσπουδακοτας*—in effect, by expanding the object of derision from the familiar “one who practices one of the arts” to the more general “one who becomes serious about the arts.” By extending the conclusion about learning many arts from “it would be useless” to the claim that “it would also be wicked,” furthermore, he implies that this manner of philosophizing would be ugly as well.

With this step the refutation of the philosopher is complete: in holding out against philosophizing being anything ugly, he apparently sacrificed that according to which his definition might render it good; and now, after conceding that philosophizing would be wicked according to his definition, he is told that it would also be “vulgar” and “a matter of reproach” after all. In the beginning he contested that philosophizing is not only beautiful but also good; he is shown in the end that philosophizing as he understands it is not only bad but also ugly. Far from contradicting the position he attributed to his rival, his definition is shown to

³⁴ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP* pp. 99-100.

support it. In light of this result, perhaps the true lover of wisdom should sooner welcome the enmity of someone like the athlete than accept the friendship of someone like “the wise one.”

D. Knowledge of the Human Good

So far the content of the discussion has been supplied almost entirely from the side of the philosopher; Socrates only introduced the contention that exercise or learning according to measure is more beneficial than “much” (which he contributed through the medium of the athlete in order to provoke the philosopher), and suggested that the pentathlete might furnish a paradigm for the sort of learning “the wise one” wanted to say the philosopher should pursue. The content of the next stage of the discussion is dominated by a barrage of suggestions from Socrates about what sort of knowledge would be most useful and most desirable for human beings to have—the unspoken implication being that this learning, if anything, would make philosophizing both beautiful and good. There is a ready explanation for this shift: exposing the justification of contempt for philosophizing of one sort may be a necessary step for vindicating another sort, but unless such an alternative is articulated for the sake of comparison, exposing a charlatan philosopher runs the risk of inspiring general contempt for philosophy. Socrates, we may suppose, would wish to avoid this outcome.³⁵

³⁵ Lamb notes the “clumsy abruptness” of the transition to this final stage in his general introduction, taking it for evidence that the dialogue is spuriousness (Lamb, p. 311). To be sure, the purport of Socrates’ next line of questioning (and its relevance to the preceding discussion) is not immediately clear. However, several strong connections, some more straightforward than others, demonstrate the unity and alignment of this final stage with the preceding.

They would know more plainly whether Socrates spoke the truth (that philosophizing is not meddling in many arts), Socrates said, if his interlocutor answered whether it is those who make horses best, or others, who know how to punish horses correctly. The philosopher affirmed those who make horses better are the ones who know how to punish them correctly. Socrates asked if it was the same in the case of dogs, and the philosopher once again agreed (137b7-c6).

Socrates' questions involve three terms: improvement, knowledge of correct punishment, and something to be improved by correct punishment, e.g. horses or dogs. The only term unambiguously connected with the previous stages of the discussion is "improvement," which runs through 'producing good condition of soul or body' on the one hand, and 'making horses or dogs best' on the other hand. The question, then, is why the method of improvement under examination should suddenly shift from exercising or learning to punishment. And why should the discussion turn to horses and dogs? If these questions surprise at all, the philosopher does not show it. Perhaps the most recent impasse has left him even more disheartened than the previous one (cf. 135a6).

Horses and dogs are both used for decorous, gentlemanly pursuits in addition to more pedestrian interests. Neither animal is strictly necessary for any of the arts that serve human needs, the arts that are straightforwardly good and useful in the sense that Socrates exploited in refuting the philosopher. In *Republic*, neither animal appears explicitly in the "healthy city."³⁶ Horses are both faster and also more beautiful than other beasts of burden. Those who can afford to keep horses

³⁶ Cf. *Republic* 369b-372d. "Other kinds of herdsman" at 370d need not be taken to refer to horse-trainers; "hunters" are introduced in the description of the city of leisure (373b).

might use them for pleasure riding, hunting, racing, or warfare, in addition to simply carrying other burdens. Someone with property to protect might keep dogs to watch over it; someone with sufficient means to maintain a kennel and equipment, and with leisure for hunting might also use dogs for that purpose. Suffice it to say that horses and dogs belong among the trappings of a certain type of life, a life of higher dignity and beauty (nobility) than the utilitarian life devoted merely to the satisfaction of bodily needs.

Both dogs and horses are especially spirited animals, requiring training or “breaking” – accomplished partly through punishment – before they become useful for human concerns, that is, before they can be of service either to pedestrian interests or to the higher, more decorous pursuits of the gentleman.³⁷

Referring to the knowledge of correct punishment and improvement about which he had just inquired as an art, Socrates next asked whether this art is the same as the that which judges (*γινώσκειν*) the good ones from the evil ones, or if it is some other? The philosopher said that it is the same.

If one punishes solely for the sake of improving that which is punished – as seems straightforwardly the case with “disciplining” dogs and horses – then all punishment that fails to improve is incorrect and comes to mere injury.³⁸ But in order to know what sort of punishment improves and when, or even whether or not it improves, one must be able to judge the better from the worse, the good from the

³⁷ In *Apology* Socrates compares the improvement of the young to the improvement of horses (cf. 20a-b, 24c-25c). In the case of horses, it is the horse trainer alone who makes them better while all others corrupt them. Socrates compares himself, not to a trainer of horses, but to a gadfly that awakens a horse from the slumber in which virtue cannot manifest (cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1095b31-1096a4.)

³⁸ Cf. *Euthyphro* 13a ff., *Republic* 335b ff.

bad. Knowledge of correct punishment therefore entails knowledge of the good and bad of that which is punished.

Turning to the case of human beings, Socrates asked if the philosopher would be willing to agree that the art that improves them is the same as that which both punishes correctly and distinguishes (*διαγιγνώσκειν*) the good ones from the bad ones. The philosopher said, “Certainly” (137c14-d4).

Referring to dogs and horses, Socrates asked whether the art that both improves and punishes correctly is the same as the art that judges the good and bad (whether improvement/correct punishment = knowing good and bad). Referring to human beings, Socrates asked whether the art that improves is the same as the art that both punishes correctly and distinguishes good and bad (whether improvement = correct punishment/knowing good and bad). In the first question “improvement” and “correct punishment” make a pair over against “knowing good and bad”; in the second question “improvement” stands alone over against the pair “correct punishment” and “knowing good and bad.” This subtle transposition masks a point of instability in the triad of improvement, punishment, and knowing good and bad. Certainly, animals at least are unambiguously punished for the sake of their improvement (even if this improvement has more to do with the creature’s suitability to serving human ends than with its quality as a being unto itself). However, in the case of human beings the urge to punish is not always motivated or even accompanied by the desire to improve the one punished—and yet the

righteous ire behind that impulse nevertheless pretends to judge the good and the wicked.³⁹

The agreement that knowing good and bad is essential to improvement sheds light on the previous stage of the discussion because it constitutes the primary deficiency of the philosopher's understanding of his own activity. He has just come to light as having spoken in ignorance about which of the arts the philosopher ought to learn in order to become better; but it was ostensibly from concern that the philosopher should be good (or at any rate better than the artisan) that he said what he said. He believed that since focusing on any art to the exclusion of others causes the soul to become narrow and truncated, one must learn as many arts as possible in order to improve the soul. But it turned out that though this program might prevent the soul's becoming worse, there is no reason to expect it to result in the soul becoming good (or at least useful in the way that an artisan is useful). Not having reflected sufficiently on the good and bad of a human being, the philosopher failed to identify which things one ought especially to learn in order to improve the soul. The art of correct punishment, or of improving human beings, or that distinguishes the good from the bad would seem to supply the very knowledge or power of discernment that the philosopher requires. Did Socrates wish to suggest that the art now spoken of is the very thing learning which produces good psychic condition? Could such an art serve as an architectonic art, dictating for whom, how much, when, and for what each of the other arts and sciences should be learned and

³⁹ In the *Republic*, Socrates tells a story about Leontius, son of Aglaion, being overcome by the desire to view the bodies of executed criminals; such a desire is incompatible with regard for the improvement of the punished (*Republic* 439e-440a).

practiced for the sake of the most comprehensive human good? But if such an art exists, who are its teachers and practitioners?

Having secured agreement that the art that improves human beings is the same as the art that punishes correctly and distinguishes good and bad, Socrates asked if, when an art is applicable to one, it is also applicable to many; and if, when an art is applicable to many, it is also applicable to one? The philosopher affirmed that this is true, both of horses and of all the others (137d5-10).

This question about the applicability of an art to both one and many is hardly simple, and the philosopher's easy answer overlooks several difficulties. For knowledge applicable to the improvement of one also to be applicable to the improvement of many, the same treatment would have to be beneficial for each and every individual to which it was applied. An "art" that applied the same treatment to many would therefore have to ignore possibly important individuating characteristics of particular members of a species.⁴⁰ But a program that improves all or most members of a species might not be the best program for improving certain particular members, even and especially the most brilliant. As Aristotle puts it, the measured amount of food consumed per day by the average amateur athlete would be too much for someone only beginning to train, and yet it would be too little for Milo.⁴¹ Socrates' pointedly asking whether the same holds for horses highlights the problem: it is doubtful that the best horses, those that are especially suited to be used for decorous pursuits, receive the same training and therewith the same

⁴⁰ Cf. *Statesman* 294c ff.

⁴¹ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* 1106b1-5. Milo was reputedly able not only to lift an entire ox, but to devour one.

punishments as ordinary horses. As there is an ambiguity in the epithet 'good,' there is an ambiguity in how we conceive of the good of a kind: while sometimes it is by the standard of qualities that emerge in all members comprehensively, sometimes it is by the standard of qualities that only emerge in the case of the most exemplary member. An art that applies the same program for improvement to all and sundry is restricted to the former conception of what is good, and therefore is not sufficient for cultivating the best possible condition in the best members.

Next Socrates asked, "What then is the science that correctly punishes the licentious and lawless in the cities? Is it not judicial expertise (*δικαστικός*)?" The philosopher affirmed that it was. Socrates asked whether he calls any science but this one "justice" (*δικαιοσύνη*). "None other than this," the philosopher answered (137d11-17).

According to the argument, judicial expertise punishes the licentious and lawless in the cities so as to improve them, knowing them to be bad and others to be good. Legal (punitive) justice is here depicted as a therapy to improve the souls of the wicked. Put this way, punitive justice bears a strong resemblance to the philosopher's earlier attempt to conceive of the relation between learning and psychic improvement: though a positive understanding of the good of the soul was lacking, he understood enough to reject recognizably deficient types (represented by artisans) and the practices that produce them. Punitive justice similarly recognizes and rejects or corrects deficient types (represented by the licentious and those who transgress the law). According to what Socrates and the philosopher have agreed in this latest stage of the discussion, punitive justice improves those who are

punished; given their earlier refutation of the philosopher's conception of how to improve the soul, however, one might ask whether the improvement of deficient types by punitive justice stands any better chance at success in cultivating legitimately good human beings. Indeed, if it could accomplish this, what need would there be for philosophy in addition? Or – if there were an art that could accomplish this, what need would there be for punitive justice?

This connection further explains why Socrates suddenly brought up punishment just after the deficiency of the philosopher's self-understanding became plain. In order to successfully promote philosophizing as beautiful and good, the philosopher would have had to consider thoroughly the possibility of its independence from and superiority to moral and political institutions in producing good psychic condition. He was so far from being aware of this possibility, however, that he had not even considered adequately what produces good psychic condition. He sought to learn only insofar as learning was considered to be a beautiful and fitting pursuit for a free person. But unless that which is held to be beautiful or fitting is determined to be so in accordance with knowledge of the human good, it promises no better enrichment than a reputation for whatever happens to be in vogue at a particular time and in a particular community, and usually among a particular group within that community. Someone who naively seeks to learn only what is held to be beautiful or fitting thus ends up subjecting his intellectual efforts to unexamined trends, subordinating his concern with truth to the determinations of unexamined opinion. He may cultivate his soul along certain lines, but without

any assurance that these lines accord with properly human excellence.⁴² In short, the city always exercises a limiting influence over psychic health; and to fail to reflect on this limiting influence is as good as to succumb to it.

Indeed, the notion that political institutions cultivate the soul in accordance with its healthy proportions involves a gross abstraction from the exigencies of actual political life. To be sure, punitive justice provides a therapy for wickedness in the city as a whole; but to what extent does it cause anyone to be good? In *Gorgias*, Socrates says that just as medicine and athletic training attend to the body's condition, so punitive justice and legislation attend to the soul's condition.⁴³ The implication is that "The medicine of punitive justice is required only when the gymnastics of legislation fails."⁴⁴ Socrates' silence on "the gymnastics of legislation" in the *Lovers* (he mentions law only in connection with punishing the lawless), together with his intense focus on "the medicine of punitive justice," point to a subtle criticism of the city. Rather than training each human soul toward its proper excellence, punitive justice establishes a floor beneath which human beings are not permitted to sink in wickedness by correcting or eliminating those who descend into vice—or even those who merely appear to threaten the good of the city or the good of the regime. Just as Socrates' interlocutor's program for the improvement of the soul is negatively determined by the ugliness of the artisan, and otherwise lacks content, so perhaps are the ends of actual institutions of justice vis-a-vis the soul

⁴² One of the lessons suggested by the boys' engagement with meteorological studies at the outset of the dialogue, which Socrates gently interrupts with a discussion about the beauty of philosophy and its definition, may be that those who seek to know the things in heaven and under the earth are as susceptible to this danger as anyone, though they might suspect it the least.

⁴³ Cf. *Gorgias* 464b ff.

⁴⁴ Burger, p. 239, note 69 to chapter 1.

negatively determined by what is perceived to be harmful to the regime, and otherwise lack content.⁴⁵

Furthermore, the premise that the same art that applies universally also applies to the particular case abstracts from yet another difficulty in equating the art of improvement with punitive justice, if we take such institutions to be law-based (as “punishing lawbreakers” suggests). As previously observed, it is unlikely that any universal program of improvement can adequately accommodate the highest good of each and every individual. Therefore, unless the perceived good of the regime coincides at all times and in all ways with the good of each and every individual (the likelihood of which seems vanishingly small), punitive justice runs the risk of stifling the good of some individuals, of producing a quality of soul in citizens similar to that which the life of the artisan produces.⁴⁶ Laws being universal, they are insensitive to the disparate character of the good for particular cases—much like Socrates’ interlocutor. His deficiencies and the city’s limitations when it comes to the cultivation of the soul prove mutually illuminating: just as someone lacking equity in matters of justice might fall back on the guidance of the laws (which does not raise him to virtue), so Socrates’ interlocutor, lacking equity in

⁴⁵ When asked in *Apology* to say who improves the young, the first answer Meletus gives is, “The laws” (*Apology* 24d). He proves unable, however, to name anyone who knows the laws better than virtually anyone knows them; in other words, Meletus is unable to name an expert in the knowledge that underlies the ability to improve human beings that he attributes to the laws. In the absence of such experts, the traditional answer is that the gods who sanction the laws and perhaps inspired the lawgivers possess this wisdom. *Lovers* is unique among Platonic dialogues in that the word “god” does not appear in it; indeed, no god is mentioned even in swearing (cf. Davis, *PPT*, p. 8).

⁴⁶ The destruction of Socrates by the Athenians is a case in point.

learning, falls back on the guidance of common opinions about the beautiful and fitting (which does not raise him to philosophy).⁴⁷

Socrates' next question at first seems redundant: he asked whether in the same way that "they" punish correctly, they judge by this science the good and the bad. The philosopher agreed it is by the same science (137e1-3). While it may seem they had gone through this already, Socrates had yet to connect a subject to the verbs for 'punish' (*κολαζω*) and 'judge' (*γινωσκω*) in reference to human beings. The subject of the third-person plural verb is not designated here—or above, at 137c1 ff., in connection with dogs and horses. Whereas one might straightforwardly guess that those who punish dogs correctly are kennel masters (dog trainers), and that those who punish horses correctly are horse trainers, it is more difficult to determine who "they" are who punish human beings correctly (cf. 134e4-6). The context would seem to point toward judges or jurymen (cf. 138d6).

Socrates paired correct punishment with improving when he asked, in reference to dogs and horses, whether the same art also judges good ones from bad ones. Then he paired correct punishment with discerning the good from the bad when he asked, in reference to human beings, whether the same art also improves. By the time Socrates asked whether punishment, standing alone, is equivalent to judging good and bad, the philosopher had already both implicitly and explicitly agreed that it is. Through several subtle maneuvers Socrates exploited the agreeableness of one side of the triad to expedite agreement about the two others

⁴⁷ In his treatment of justice in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle introduces equity (*επιεικεια*) as a correction of legal justice (cf. *NE* 1137a31 ff.; cf. also Burger, p. 104).

that are susceptible to doubt. First, that the art of punishment should be equivalent to judging good from bad runs up against the problem that punishment is sometimes used to inculcate behaviors that are useful from the point of view of the one who punishes, but that are perhaps not intrinsically good for the one punished.⁴⁸ This problem is less obvious in the case of humans than of animals, because the righteous ire that often triggers an impulse to punish human beings tends to ignore it: the apparent wickedness of the one to be punished easily eclipses any consideration for his private good on the part of the one desiring to punish.⁴⁹ That is why Socrates referred to human beings when pairing punishment with judging good and bad. Second, that the art of punishment should be equivalent to that of improvement runs up against the problem that those who punish do not always aim to improve those whom they punish. This problem is less evident in the case of punishing beasts of burden (which do not commit injustice), which is why Socrates referred to dogs and horses when pairing improvement with punishment. However, that improvement should be equivalent to judging good and bad seems so straightforwardly reasonable as to assist in concealing these problems when set prominently beside them. By means of these misdirections Socrates successfully avoided any objection to the equivalences of punishment to improvement and to judging the good from the evil.

Building upon the principle that the art that applies to one also applies to many, Socrates says they now agreed that “he” who knows one good or evil person

⁴⁸ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 105.

⁴⁹ Ronna Burger has pointed out to me that the very terminology of “punitive justice” – not “punitive good” or “improvement” – puts into question how the desire for justice is related to the good.

will also know many, and (with an apparently gratuitous shift from knowledge to ignorance) also that “he” who is ignorant of many good or many bad things of a certain type will also be ignorant of one good or one bad thing of that type (137e4-7).

Socrates next asked: supposing one was ignorant of the good and bad of one’s own species, does it follow that one would also be ignorant of oneself, whether one was good or bad? He asked the question first in reference to a horse, then to an ox, and then to a dog, before asking in reference to a human being.⁵⁰ After the philosopher agreed to this, Socrates obtained his further agreement that to be ignorant of oneself is not to be moderate. Then, switching from ignorance back to knowledge, he obtained agreement that to know oneself is to be moderate (138e8-a10).

First Socrates set up the equivalences of “improvement/correct punishment/judging good and bad”; then he expanded “correct punishment” to include “punitive justice.” His next aim was to bring first “self-knowledge” and then “moderation” under the same umbrella of equivalent terms. However, while the equivalence of “judging the good and bad of one’s own kind” to “self-knowledge” seems straightforward enough, it does not necessarily rule out the possibility that a bad human being could know himself, that he was bad. Such an allowance would undermine the equivalence of self-knowledge and the virtue of moderation. Socrates

⁵⁰ The bull or ox makes its first and only appearance here. Oxen are generally used for pedestrian tasks, such as carrying heavy burdens, and not for decorous pursuits. They are typically bulls, and typically altered so as to be less intractable. Accordingly, the virtues of an ox are strength, stamina, and tractability, at least by the standards of human use—perhaps a more significant departure from the beast’s virtues by the standard of nature than in the cases of horses and dogs.

therefore avoided this problem by taking a detour through the negative formula: “being ignorant of the good and the bad of one’s own kind” is the same as “being ignorant of oneself,” which in turn is the same as “not being moderate.”⁵¹ He completed the equivalence by turning back to the positive formula with an improper conversion of the sort to which the philosopher had proven insensitive: “(therefore) to know oneself is to be moderate.”⁵² The philosopher agreed even though, strictly speaking, from the premise that the self-ignorant are not moderate it does not follow that self-knowers are moderate.

Because moderation is a virtue, taking self-knowledge to be equivalent to moderation rules out the possibility of knowing oneself to be bad. It follows that bad things are done from ignorance and hence involuntarily, and therefore the only suitable punishment for those who are bad is that which educates and improves them.⁵³ Though Socrates arrived at this premise by bending the rules of logic, it is not only in harmony with what was previously agreed but goes some way toward supplying content to the term “correct punishment”—if, that is, education can be considered a form of punishment.

Could someone ruling by this art legitimately improve anyone without educating him in that art? Unless punishment were accompanied by such instruction, it seems any subject who did not himself already possess the science of

⁵¹ Is it possible to be good and yet ignorant of oneself, or evil and in possession of self-knowledge? The equivalence of self-ignorance and lack of moderation seems doubtful if not paradoxical in the case of those who are aware of their own ignorance, for they know this much about themselves: they are not so good as to be moderate. But would this awareness not constitute partial knowledge of the good and bad, and perhaps open the door to being moderate?

⁵² The first improper conversion was at 136b8-9 and e2-4 together with 137a13-b1: ‘if the wicked are useless, then the useless are wicked’ (cf. Bruell, *OMPP* p. 105 n. 7, and p. 106).

⁵³ Cf. *Apology* 26a.

improving human beings (and doing anything bad constitutes proof of ignorance) might be punished for acting in ways he could not have known to be wrong, and for reasons that are possibly beyond his understanding. This hardly sounds like a recipe for improvement. It seems a ruler of the sort Socrates describes could not improve all without instructing each: a difficult labor, to say the least.

Socrates observed that their conclusions appeared to embrace both messages engraved on the stone at Delphi.⁵⁴ The philosopher said that this did appear the case. Socrates next asked, with apparent redundancy, if it is by the same science (of justice and moderation) that “we” know how to punish correctly? The philosopher affirmed that it is (138a11-17). Carrying forward both the first-person plural subject and the dative of means, Socrates then asked, “Accordingly, that by which we know how to punish correctly, this is justice, and that by which we know how to distinguish both our own and others’ quality, moderation?” (138a18-b2). The philosopher agreed to this, and that it seemed justice and moderation are the same, and that Socrates spoke truly when he said cities are well-managed when the unjust pay the penalty (*οταν οι αδικουντες δικην διδωσιν*)(138b3-7).

As justice has just been designated the instrument of correct punishment, “those who do injustice” might in this context be taken to mean something like “those who punish incorrectly.” In that case the penalty for doing injustice can refer either to the sovereign penalty of learning and being made better, or rather to the natural penalty of suffering undesirable consequences as a result of acting immoderately or of managing the city poorly. In fact, on the basis of what has been

⁵⁴ On one side of the stone was engraved, “Nothing in excess”; on the other side, “Know thyself.”

said justice and moderation are the same in one sense, but different in another. From the point of view of the one who punishes, justice is the practical application of knowledge of good and bad human beings, which includes knowledge of oneself as a good human being, the same as moderation. From the point of view of the one punished, however, justice comprises the instruction necessary to become a good human being, that is, to become a knower of good and bad human beings; for such a person, justice as the path to moderation is not yet experienced as moderation itself.⁵⁵

Socrates asked whether this then is also political expertise (*πολιτική*)? He said in a simple narrative comment that the philosopher concurred (*συνδοκεω*)(138b9-10).

Once the art or science of improving human beings one and all is said to embrace moderation as well as all the rest, the domain of practice belonging to this art expands from punitive justice in the cities to city management in general. While individual treatment may seem to have submerged under general treatment, it is notable that Socrates now begins asking about terms for individual practitioners of this art.

Socrates next asked about the case in which one man correctly manages (*διοικεω*) a city—"is this one not named both tyrant and king?" (138b11-2). Blithely accepting the conflation of tyranny and kingship, the philosopher agreed the names are equivalent, that such a man manages the city by the kingly or the tyrannical art,

⁵⁵ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 106.

and that these arts are apparently the same as the former.⁵⁶ Similarly, the philosopher agreed that when one man alone correctly manages a household he is called manager and master (*δεσποτης*—a master of slaves), and that he manages well by justice rather than by some other art (138b11-c4).

The conflation of tyrant and king, the suggestion that there is an art of tyranny, and the identification of the tyrannical art with justice and moderation should come as something of a surprise. In the *Republic* Socrates holds up the tyrant as the most unjust and degenerate type of ruler and soul. Here, however, the suggestion seems to be that the form of regime, the rule of law, and the consent of the ruled are immaterial considerations when it comes to the question of correct management (or correct punishment or judging good and evil or the improvement of human beings).⁵⁷ The radicalness of the suggestion points perhaps to the seemingly superhuman requirements of such an art.⁵⁸

Socrates used the adverb “well” (*εὖ*) in connection with activities considered in the abstract: practicing (the art of) political expertise, the payment of a penalty by those who do injustice, and managing a household with justice. He used “correctly” (*ορθῶς*) when connecting these activities to a subject: the king, the tyrant, the

⁵⁶ To summarize, “the former” are: political expertise or managing cities well, moderation, justice, self-knowledge, judging the good and bad human beings (one and many), the science of justice, punishing correctly, and the art of improving human beings (one and many).

⁵⁷ In *Statesman* the Eleatic Stranger seems to waver over these distinctions as well. Originally he distinguishes king from tyrant on the basis of whether subjects are ruled willingly or by compulsion (276d-e). Later, however, it is unclear whether kingship is distinguished from tyranny on that basis, or rather on whether there is rule of law (291e). The rule of one who knows what is best might even transcend law (293c ff.).

⁵⁸ Cf. Aristotle, *Politics* I.i: Aristotle criticizes those who say statesman, king, household manager, and slave master are the same.

household manager, and the despot. The practice of an art is oriented by the good, the practitioners by correctness.

Socrates reviewed the practices and practitioners as follows: “It is the same one, as it seems: king, tyrant, statesman, household manager, despot, temperate man, and just man. And it is the same art: the kingly, the tyrannical, the political, the despotic, household management, justice, and moderation” (138c8-12).

From the list of agents to the list of arts two inversions in the order of articulation occur: whereas the household manager precedes the master, the masterful art precedes that pertaining to household management; and whereas the moderate man precedes the just one, justice precedes moderation.⁵⁹ Perhaps while the household manager holds a higher position in honor than a master, nevertheless mastery has priority over the art of household management by some other metric; and similarly with the moderate man and the just man in comparison with justice and moderation. If justice is the art that improves the human being, and moderation the condition of a human being so improved,⁶⁰ then justice would precede moderation in the order of becoming while moderation as a psychic quality would surpass justice. Perhaps in a similar way knowledge of mastery precedes that of household management in the order of becoming, while nevertheless the household manager surpasses the master in terms of psychic virtue. As for the king and the tyrant, the kingly art and the tyrannical – Socrates does not invert these, but for the first time he introduces “the statesman” (πολιτικός) as a person in possession of the political art.

⁵⁹ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 105 n. 7.

⁶⁰ Cf. Bruell, *OMPP*, p. 106.

Previously the philosopher had proposed that the beauty of philosophizing consisted in being able to follow what an artisan says about his art and to contribute one's own judgment in a way surpassing other laymen (cf. 135c8-d8). After demonstrating the absurdity of this claim, Socrates embarked on a long chain of questions about an art or science of human virtue and political expertise ostensibly designed to lend assurance to that demonstration (cf. 137b7-8). Bringing that chain of questions around to its starting point, Socrates asked his interlocutor, if it is ugly for the a philosopher to be unable to follow what an artisan says about his art or to contribute anything to what is said and done about it, "then when it is a judge or king or some other of those whom we now went through, is it not shameful for him to be unable either to follow these things or to contribute anything?" (138c13-d8).⁶¹

The philosopher responded by asking, "How would it not be shameful to be unable to contribute in these matters?" (138d9-10). The question shows that he agrees as to the seriousness of Socrates' suggestions about the content of what the philosopher ought to learn. Though the highest things are subject to dispute, both he and the other listeners seem to agree about the greatness or at any rate the beauty of being able to rule competently.

Socrates' inversion of "beautiful to be able to speak and contribute" to "ugly to be unable to speak and contribute" allows him to retain in part the form of the philosopher's proposition while raising the ceiling of what is beautiful. He was then in a position to present the philosopher with two alternatives: do they say the

⁶¹ The judge (*δικαστής*) had not appeared among those Socrates and the philosopher had just gone through, though at one point a plural verb without an explicit subject presumably referred to judges in connection with the art of correct punishment (cf. 137e1).

philosopher should be like the pentathlete and nearly highest, second in these things to all the others and useless when someone of them is available; or do they say that, first, the philosopher is not to permit another the rule of his own house or to be held second in these things, but must himself judge correctly and punish, if his own house is going to be well managed? By granting granting this, the second alternative (138e1-9), the philosopher allowed it is no longer merely shameful to be unable to speak or contribute to what is said and done by the artisan; it is further desirable to be able to practice for oneself in one's own house the sovereign art of which they have been speaking. The philosopher had disjoined philosophy from practical knowledge on the basis of the ugliness of artisans; Socrates uncovered at least one sort of knowledge his interlocutor could not but agree is beautiful to put into practice.

Expanding the second alternative, Socrates asked, "Next, doubtless, if his friends turn to him as arbitrator, or the city enjoins him to judge or prosecute some matter, is it shameful in these things, O Comrade, to come to light as second or third and not to lead the way?"⁶² The comrade said that it seemed so to him (138e10-139a3). Socrates does not entertain the possibility that a philosopher would seek out the role of arbitrator among his friends or the office of judge in the city. According to Socrates the philosopher should be content to strive to manage his own house well unless called upon to do more—though he should be competent to do more, if called upon.

⁶² If the second-place status already designates a useless and perhaps even wicked person, then what sort of menace does the third-place status designate?

Socrates concluded, “To us therefore philosophizing is far from being much learning and busying oneself over the arts” (139a4-6). Socrates reports that on his saying these things the wise one fell silent, ashamed by the things previously agreed, but “the ignorant one” said it was the case; and the others applauded the things agreed (139a7-9). At the beginning of the discussion, after “the wise one” paraphrased Solon as saying that the philosopher young and old should always be learning some one thing so as to learn the most possible in his life, Socrates briefly thought that his interlocutor might be “saying something” (133c7-10). Upon reflection, however, he felt the need to ask the philosopher whether he thought philosophy to be “much learning,” with the ultimate result that his interlocutor was not “saying something” after all, and being shown this he fell silent. Finally, as the lover who had devoted himself to speeches could not speak, the lover who had devoted himself to athletics was allowed the final word.

E. An Alternative Definition of Philosophy

In concluding the discussion Socrates avoided explicitly affirming that philosophy consists in learning the art of ruling and improving human beings, even though his final questions seemed to indicate that philosophy would not be beautiful or good without practical knowledge of these very things. The primary purpose for which he asked the long chain of questions outlining the political art was not, apparently, to demonstrate just what philosophy would have to become in order to be beautiful and good, but rather to illustrate by comparison with the most valuable knowledge imaginable just how trivial and insignificant his interlocutor’s view of

the focus and intent of philosophical learning was. And yet this additional illustration was hardly necessary, for he had already refuted the philosopher's position in the strongest possible terms (cf. 137a10-b1). What additional purpose then might Socrates have had for discussing the art of ruling and improving human beings?

As previously mentioned, exposing a charlatan philosopher before those who doubt the worth of philosophy runs the risk of confirming in their eyes that none but charlatans philosophize. For someone who takes philosophy seriously it would therefore be prudent not to expose a charlatan without also presenting an alternative vision of philosophy immune to the criticism and ridicule the charlatan calls upon himself. Accordingly, one would have expected the presentation of an alternative from Socrates after he exposed "the wise one"—in other words at the very moment he launched into his chain of questions about the art of ruling and improving human beings. The modesty of his conclusion, therefore, with its omission of any explicit formulation of an alternative definition of philosophy, is disappointing and puzzling, at least on the first read, and it would remain so were an implicit alternative not suggested by the content of his questions and the action of the dialogue.

The action of the dialogue indicates that there might be one art that it would not be frivolous for a philosopher to learn, even short of expertise. Pivotal to the demonstration of the uselessness and wickedness of philosophy defined as "learning many arts short of practical expertise" is the fact that there are practitioners of the arts available everywhere whose usefulness renders such dilettantish

understanding superfluous. Socrates' version of the political art, however, as knowing the good and bad human beings and of improving them one and all is so inflated that one could hardly expect to find experts in it anywhere. None of the interlocutors, at least, know anyone to ask about producing good psychic condition (cf. 134e4-7), which of course the improvement of human beings by justice to instill moderation would do. If experts in this art are not available, then those who learn it to whatever extent possible are not necessarily useless or wicked if their practical knowledge of it falls short of expertise, that is to say short of universal applicability.

Is philosophy then simply an inchoate form of political expertise, aspiring to knowledge of improving human beings one and all by ruling and punishing correctly? Barring any significant reflection on the implications of its content, Socrates' line of questioning in the final stage of the discussion seems to intimate this rather strongly. But given the problems with conceiving of knowledge of human improvement as a political art, which do in fact lurk beneath the surface of Socrates' questions, it seems doubtful that Socrates would conceive of his aims in this way. If justice, for example, must consist of instruction rather than punishment conventionally understood,⁶³ and if the knowledge of improvement to be sought accounts for the cultivation of qualities belonging only to a few exemplary human beings,⁶⁴ then it would be naive to assume the knower of this art could improve all human beings alike simply because he knows how to improve a few, or even one.

⁶³ This is implied by the identification of moderation with both self-knowledge and knowledge of good and bad human beings. If a good human being is moderate, then justice, the art that improves human beings, endows them with knowledge.

⁶⁴ An art of improving human beings that attends only to qualities virtually all human beings have could not promise to produce in the best human beings the best condition of which they are capable.

But if such knowledge could not in practice guide political institutions, then it could not be discovered without looking beyond opinions about the human good that actual political institutions support. It is not by accident that Plato furnishes a trans-political model of wholeness in the object about which the boys are disputing at the beginning of Socrates' narrative: the world itself and the cosmic revolutions of its celestial parts. The boys' pantomiming the motions of the cosmos represents the possibility of a more natural standard to judge psychic quality than emerges from the laws of the political community.⁶⁵

That being said, a philosopher must nevertheless be mindful of the city and the model of virtue its institutions point to. Because philosophy is itself an activity that arises within the context of political life, and therefore something about which opinions will persist, the goodness and beauty of philosophy will indeed be a question for any philosopher who conceives the aim of his learning as in some way trans-political. Indeed, as the *Lovers* illustrates, this is a question Socrates eagerly investigates; but some who claim to philosophize might simply take for granted the answer to it. The chief failing of Socrates' interlocutor in the *Lovers* is lack of awareness that he has received the opinions he holds about the nature and character of his activity from the city, and has never yet examined their worth.

In a way Socrates' relationship to his interlocutor is a microcosm of his relationship to the city. Just as "the wise one" understands the soul's improvement only to the extent of being able to denounce what leads to a defective psychic condition (practicing the arts) and cannot name what raises the soul to virtue, so the

⁶⁵ Whatever his view of the activity of philosophizing, the athlete did not dispute Socrates' suggestion that the world about which the boys were disputing is "great and beautiful."

city in its custody of all citizens is capable of correcting and eliminating defective ones (the lawless and unrestrained) but cannot promise to cultivate the rest in accordance with natural human virtue. (Or if the city does promise this, only someone who truly understood the virtue of a human being and what produces it could judge whether the city is justified in making such a promise or capable of fulfilling it.) Socrates' exposure of the shortcomings of his interlocutor's perspective is therefore a reflection of his general bearing toward the city.

F. Rivals?

Plato's *Lovers* begins with a dispute – actual or assumed⁶⁶ – about what sort of things are worthy of human interest and preoccupation. Socrates' chief interlocutor holds philosophizing to be superior to athletics, seemingly for the reason that the soul is superior to the body. As athletics produces good bodily condition through exercise, philosophy produces good psychic condition through learning. The philosopher to whom Socrates speaks, however, does not appear to discriminate between one form of learning and another—he holds it to be good always to be learning some one thing, whatever that may be, for one's whole life. But a human life is too short, and available learning far too extensive, for one person to learn all there is to know in this world. What's more, on the basis of what happens to artisans it would appear that the indiscriminating pursuit of one sort of learning to the exclusion of others can result in a defective psychic condition, just as manual labor or “unmeasured” exercise can result in defective bodily condition. If therefore

⁶⁶ The extent of the athlete's condemnation of philosophy is never fully clarified.

some learning is superior at producing good psychic condition, then one ought to prefer this to other kinds—or else why prefer learning to exercise, or “much learning” to being an artisan? Socrates does not take issue with the proposal that philosophy is lifelong learning; only he insists the philosopher give some thought to what sort of learning is in fact good, or even best.

To begin with, “the wise one” is unaware of his ignorance in these important matters. He has devoted himself to *μουσική* and presumes to be wiser than the athlete, wiser perhaps than Socrates, whom he rebukes for questioning someone about philosophy who by appearance alone should be judged an ignoramus. Socrates lets the athlete off and turns his attention to the philosopher, not because the athlete is ignorant and the philosopher wise, but because the philosopher claims to be wise and the athlete does not. The philosopher is in need of having his ignorance exposed. One cannot begin learning any matter before coming to recognize oneself as a beginner.

It is unfortunate for the philosopher that he calls Socrates’ attention to his ignorance in the presence of his beloved, before whom it must be painful to be exposed. Indeed, depending on the relative strength of his professed love of wisdom and of his demonstrable love of victory, this circumstance might result in his learning nothing at all from this encounter with Socrates. Love of victory is a corollary of the love of reputation, of being held in high esteem—especially by those whom one holds in high esteem. Any gratitude the philosopher might feel toward the one who put him into a condition in which learning the most important things became possible for him might therefore be swallowed by his hatred of the one who

caused him to fall in the opinion of his beloved. To admit he has learned anything is to admit he was deserving of the humiliation he received. The temptation may be strong to learn nothing, or perhaps to maintain a position he does not believe over against the lessons of Socrates, rather than admit failure (to say nothing of giving thanks).

From the perspective of Socrates' interlocutor, Socratic *elenchus* may seem nothing more than a form of punishment, though to a less ambitious or less interested party – indeed to others present, to Socrates' unnamed auditor or auditors, and to we, Plato's readers – it is rather a form of instruction. Even if Socrates did not necessarily benefit the most recalcitrant of those whom he cross-examined (though by showing them their ignorance he at least removed an obstacle to their improvement), he might well have benefited others present for the spectacle, by instructing and reminding them of the possibility of virtue surpassing that which the city manages to cultivate. And of course, in distancing his own activity from the useless and wicked pursuits of charlatans, Socrates shielded philosophy from the disrepute of some of its avowed practitioners.

Chapter 2: The Socrates of Plato's *Cleitophon*

Because Socrates eschewed political life, any benefit he conferred on his fellow citizens, anything that could be called a civic contribution, came by way of his private associations. As mentioned above, Socrates claims in the *Apology* to do the greatest good for the Athenians by exhorting them to virtue and cross-examining them,¹ though he does not there explain exactly how these exhortations benefit anyone. The *Cleitophon* attests that at least one of the Athenians was puzzled about this matter. In this dialogue, a statesman of Socrates' acquaintance explains how he came to the conclusion that spending time with Socrates was worthless, despite initially having been impressed by his exhortations to virtue. While the careful reader need not reach the same conclusion on the basis of this statesman's testimony (bearing other considerations in mind), this dialogue is nevertheless valuable to the project of uncovering the nature of Socrates' civic contributions, both what they were and what they were not.²

¹ Cf. *Apology* 30a-b, 36c.

² Plato's shortest dialogue has received much attention in recent decades, much of it responding to or building upon Clifford Orwin's excellent, groundbreaking commentary (see bibliography). Though not without exception, the prevailing trend of this recent literature has been to approach and interpret the *Cleitophon* through its relationships with companion dialogues, chiefly the *Republic*. Christopher Bruell has even asserted that it is only a slight exaggeration to say that all that can be learned from this dialogue in isolation is in what respect Socrates' teaching about justice (as elaborated in the *Republic*) could fail to satisfy the character Cleitophon (Bruell, *OSE*, p. 193). The following discussion is in part a response to the challenge posed by Bruell's assertion.

The *Cleitophon* consists of a private conversation between Socrates and the eponymous character, which can be summarized as follows: Socrates observes in impersonal terms that someone reported to him that Cleitophon was disparaging Socrates to Lysias, while highly praising Thrasymachus. Cleitophon responds by claiming the report Socrates heard was somewhat inaccurate: certainly, in some things he did not praise Socrates, but in others he did. Taking Socrates to be concealing anger behind the indifferent tone of his opening statement, Cleitophon says he would gladly clear the air if allowed to explain, not only what he blamed Socrates for, but also what he praised (406e8-12). Cleitophon does not want Socrates to be angry, and aims to soothe him by offering the praise he supposes Socrates desires and explaining the legitimacy of the blame he supposes Socrates abhors. Socrates says that it would be shameful not to listen when someone wants to benefit him. By learning his good points he could practice them, and by learning his bad points he could avoid them according to his strength (406e16-407a3). Cleitophon thereupon explains at length what he praises (Socrates' preeminence in exhorting others to virtue) and what he blames (that Socrates nevertheless seems incapable or unwilling to teach Cleitophon how to become virtuous). He finishes by urging Socrates either to explain these things if he can, or to refrain from exhorting him to virtue any longer. To these accusations and this combination of pleas Socrates apparently has nothing to say—the dialogue concludes with Cleitophon's harangue, Socrates having spoken only twice, briefly, at the beginning.

The silence of Socrates at the end of the *Cleitophon* is curious, but it is hardly the dialogue's only curiosity. Perhaps just as striking, though not so conspicuous, is

the fact that Socrates never asks a single question in this dialogue; even though the interlocutor speaks at length about what he has heard Socrates say, he only attributes two questions to him, both rhetorical (cf. 407d6-7). This feature is the first of many that distinguish the portrait of Socrates that emerges from Cleitophon's praise and criticism of him from the more substantial and, it can be expected, more complete portrait of the great man that emerges from the rest of Plato's writing.³ But of course the Socrates of the *Cleitophon* is not limited to what his interlocutor says about him; however little Plato thought necessary to furnish in addition, it is his Socrates who begins the dialogue and ends it in silence.

The *Cleitophon* confronts a possible legacy of Socrates that might result from failing to consider what he said within the context of his way of life and of the circumstances of the discussions that he had. Bertrand Russell once derided what one person reported about Socrates on the basis of the claim that "A stupid man's report of what a clever man says is never accurate, because he unconsciously translates what he hears into something that he can understand."⁴ In the *Cleitophon* at least, Plato demonstrates that one can still learn something valuable from such a report, if only a genius artfully presents it in such a way as to open the path to new horizons of understanding. A comparison is therefore possible, and perhaps

³ For a thorough discussion of the question of the authenticity of the *Cleitophon*, cf. Roochnik, "The Riddle of the *Cleitophon*." I am unaware of any attempt to defend the position that the dialogue is dubious against Roochnik's exhaustive analysis (and rejection) of the possible reasons for regarding it as such.

⁴ Cf. Russell pp. 101-102. Russell said this in the course of passing judgment on the historical value of Xenophon's Socrates. If Bertrand Russell was mistaken about Xenophon, as I believe he was, his statement was doubly unfortunate: unfortunate for students who, fearing to take issue with the claim lest they themselves be thought incapable of rising above the understanding of a mediocre thinker, might overlook a valuable source of wisdom; and for the master who, though by no means a mediocre thinker himself, speaking falsely about Xenophon nonetheless comes close to furnishing a true example of what he says.

essential to interpreting this dialogue, between Cleitophon's representation of Socrates on the one hand, and on the other hand the man that emerges after reconsidering Cleitophon's statements in context with the sparse collection of words and actions that Plato attributes to his hero in this short drama.

The difference between Cleitophon's Socrates and Plato's essentially comes to this: while Plato always displayed Socrates' thought in the context of its emergence in particular discussions, so that the flexibility of his philosophizing could be preserved, Cleitophon takes much of what he has heard Socrates say for universal principles. The result is that Cleitophon mistakes mere possibilities concerning what sort of knowledge human beings stand most in need of – possibilities Socrates explored in a variety of contexts – for actualities available to the initiated. This leads Cleitophon to expect to receive some benefit from Socrates outside of all proportion with what he (or any other human being for that matter) is capable of providing.

To establish these claims, it will be helpful first to articulate Cleitophon's understanding of Socratic philosophy, and then to expose its deficiencies by reconsidering certain points in the light of the dramatic context of the dialogue.

A. Cleitophon's Socrates

Cleitophon begins explaining that for which he praises Socrates by recounting a speech verbatim that he considers representative of Socrates' exhortations to all human beings to care about virtue. Cleitophon is so impressed with this speech that he even compares Socrates to a "god in the machine" of a tragic

drama (407a8), brought onto stage to take human beings to task and intervene in problems they seem otherwise prone to bring upon themselves. This hortatory speech begins by condemning human beings for endeavoring only to accumulate wealth, while neglecting to seek trainers or teachers in justice so that their sons and they themselves might know how to use riches justly.⁵ After condemning this behavior, Socrates (as quoted by Cleitophon) proceeds to persuade his audience to care about seeking an unconventional education in justice on several independent grounds. First, he vaguely suggests that knowing how to use riches justly is good because it somehow constitutes a part of the pursuit of virtue. Second, he claims that the conventional education is inadequate with regard to justice. Third, as evidence of the inadequacy of the conventional education he cites observable evils resulting from injustice: strife between brothers and between cities. Fourth, he appeals to the notions that injustice is hateful to the gods and that succumbing to pleasures is a matter of weakness in order to demonstrate that no one is willingly unjust (and therefore injustice is a matter to be addressed through education).

The several parts of the hortatory speech do not form an altogether harmonious whole. Pointing out the evils injustice visits upon those who suffer it constitutes powerful support for the notion that suffering injustice is to be avoided, but it does not support that of which the speech ostensibly sets out to persuade others, namely, to care about justice as something good in itself (as part of the pursuit of virtue). Furthermore, establishing that no one is willingly unjust on the

⁵ This reproach resembles the one Socrates directs at the Athenians in the *Apology*: caring to acquire as much money as possible, and reputation and honor, while neglecting prudence and truth (*Apology* 29d-e).

grounds that injustice is hateful to the gods constitutes a tacit admission that being unjust would otherwise be choiceworthy. In claiming it is good to be just, Cleitophon's Socrates uses arguments that suggest this goodness is only negatively determined by the badness of the alternative, or even that, under different circumstances, the alternative might actually be better (at least for the unjust agent).⁶

The hortatory speech lacks harmony because it does not rise above the level of the conventional education it criticizes, which is indeed inadequate when it comes to justice.⁷ Because Socrates (as quoted by Cleitophon) addresses all human beings, however, his best recourse is to persuade on the basis of generally held opinions, which are precisely those inculcated by the conventional education. But this of course constitutes another point of disharmony: by condemning the inadequacy of the conventional education with respect to justice, Socrates relies partly on its success at having inculcated certain opinions in his listeners.⁸

Cleitophon, for his part, both wondrously admires and highly praises the hortatory speech, but he does not say yet whether he agrees with it. He is moved by appeals to convention, he will praise them, but ultimately it is the prospect of happiness in virtue – which conventionalism cannot promise but which Socrates seems to hold out as the highest good – that Cleitophon is most eager to learn about

⁶ Cf. Glaucon and Adeimantus' speeches in *Republic* II (358e ff.)

⁷ I take Adeimantus' speech in *Republic* (see previous note) for another, more thorough criticism of the conventional education. Oddly, even the most "Socratic" argument of the speech Cleitophon recounts (that no one is willingly unjust) is couched in terms of conventional wisdom. According to Cleitophon, Socrates persuades human beings of this principle by pointing out that injustice is hateful to the gods, who see all and whom no one would willingly offend. But as we have seen, this argument tacitly admits that one would willingly be unjust if only one could avoid the notice of gods; cf. Blitz, pp.73-4.

⁸ Cf. Orwin, p. 62.

(cf. 410e9). Ignoring the rest, Cleitophon goes on to elaborate the first and least developed of the premises on which the argument of the hortatory speech is based, namely, that virtue and knowing how to use riches justly are good.⁹ He does so by way of summarizing a more conceptual speech he attributes to Socrates that he takes to follow from the hortatory one. He says that those who train their bodies but neglect their souls do something such as this: the ruling element they neglect, while they are zealous over that which is ruled (407e6-9). Just as the hortatory speech points out the error of caring about acquiring riches while neglecting to learn how to use riches justly, the conceptual speech points out the error of exercising the body while neglecting to care for the condition of the soul that is going to use it. A body in good condition only benefits the whole human being if it is put to good use; but it is only put to good use by a soul that is in good condition (or one that knows the use of the body). Cleitophon takes this claim to be analogous to what the hortatory speech says about riches, which apparently he takes to be saying that the goodness of riches is contingent upon knowing the just use of them. Does it follow that his interest in learning the just use of riches is tantamount to wanting to know how to benefit from using them?

Cleitophon's elaboration of what he has heard Socrates suggest about the benefit of knowledge and justice is both radical and complex—a surprising departure from the conventional reasoning of the hortatory speech. For example,

⁹ Clearly this premise appeals to Cleitophon above all. Someone who admired the hortatory speech merely on the basis of orthodox piety would presumably not feel himself in need of additional persuasion about behaving justly, though perhaps he would heed Socrates' warning for the sake of his sons. Similarly, someone who admired the speech merely on the basis of its warning about the evils of injustice would not necessarily consider himself in need of any new lessons, though he might worry about how his sons treated him. Cleitophon, however, is persuaded to care about justice and a virtue especially with his own condition in mind (cf. 408b7-c1, 410d6-10).

the principle that knowledge of the use of riches is a necessary condition for benefiting from them undermines the conventional notion of wealth as mere possession; after all, one would hardly count as an asset something that is useless or perhaps even harmful to one.¹⁰ Socrates, according to Cleitophon, therefore asserts that one should give up the use of anything one does not know how to use. Surprisingly, this principle applies even to that which would seem most emphatically to belong to an individual as an individual: it would be better for someone who does not know the use of his eyes or ears or body as a whole not to hear or see or make any other use of his body than it would be to make any use of it whatever. Saying it is the same with respect to art, Cleitophon invokes the additional principle that knowledge of the use of a particular type of thing extends to the use of any thing of that type: someone who merely possesses a lyre while ignorant of how to play it would likewise be ignorant of how to use anyone else's lyre (408e11-409a5). The unstated implication is that someone who knows how to use his own lyre would likewise know how to use someone else's; and the same would seemingly apply to one's riches and one's body: knowing the use of these, one would also know how to use those of others. Silent on this implication, Cleitophon likewise overlooks the question of who would benefit in that case—the user or the possessor.

Cleitophon says that this conceptual speech of Socrates concludes nobly as well. These principles (the benefit of a thing depends on knowledge of how to use it, knowledge of how to use a thing extends to the use of anything of the same type, and one should give up using anything one does not know how to use) extend even to

¹⁰ Cf. Xenophon, *Oeconoimicus* I.7 ff.

the most authoritative instrument of all, the human soul. Not knowing how to use this, one should prefer to be dead; or if that is not possible, then one should prefer to be a slave to someone with expertise in piloting human beings. Cleitophon says that Socrates often names this political expertise (*πολιτικη*), saying it is the same as judicial expertise (*δικαστικος*) and justice (*δικαιοσυνη*) (408a5-b6). Cleitophon's apparent interest in learning virtue from Socrates (or maybe the just use of riches, or how to benefit from the use of riches, bodies, and souls) evidently culminates in the desire for political expertise of the type described. By saying that this conceptual speech represents what follows from the hortatory speech, Cleitophon indicates that he understands Socrates' exhortations to virtue to carry the promise of a political teaching about how to benefit not only from one's own things, but also from those of many others.

Cleitophon takes Socrates to hold that knowledge is a necessary condition for benefiting from things as diverse as riches, instruments, bodies, and souls. But on the basis of the speech or speeches he has recounted, perhaps knowledge is more than this. Also said to be necessary for benefiting from using a body is having a soul in good condition. Is knowledge then the good condition of the soul? Cleitophon believes that justice is an art, that is, knowledge (409b6 ff.); is justice then the virtue of the soul? But in that case justice would not simply be a means to benefiting from the use of something, it would be an end in itself. Cleitophon's summary barely suggests this possibility because he fixates on the instrumental role of knowledge (as later he fixates on the instrumental, productive role of justice). He also fails to consider what it might mean for someone to know how to use his own soul. He

treats the soul as he does anything else to be used, without considering that the soul, as the ruling principle, is what uses things, and as the cognitive principle, is what knows the use of things. Ignoring what Socrates' conceptual speech suggests about the questions of self-knowledge and self-rule, Cleitophon turns his attention instead to the prospect of one person ruling over others. But not even this point is sufficiently clear: even if ruling one's own soul and ruling that of another is the same (as it might seem on the basis of the principle that knowledge of the use of one thing is equivalent to knowledge of the use of another of the same sort), that still might not be strictly equivalent to expertise in "piloting" human beings; for perhaps knowledge of the use of one and that of guiding many are different after all.¹¹ It is by no means evident on the evidence of his summary of Socrates' conceptual speech that Cleitophon has given sufficient thought to what he has heard from Socrates.

Concluding his praise, Cleitophon asserts that he has hardly ever in the past contradicted these speeches, or others very numerous and beautiful about how virtue is teachable and one should care foremost about oneself, and that he does not expect to contradict them in the future. He says Socrates' speeches are most hortatory and most helpful, and simply (*ατεχνος*, lit. "artlessly") such as to awaken us from sleeping (408b7-c3). Has Cleitophon actually heard Socrates say that virtue is teachable, or does he simply infer this from Socrates' exhortations to seek teachers and trainers in justice?

So much does Cleitophon praise about Socrates—or rather, so much would he praise if he did not feel he was left in the lurch regarding what to do next after

¹¹ Cf. Orwin, p. 63.

being persuaded to care about virtue. If virtue is teachable, he wants to learn it; but he has not yet heard what he would consider to be a full-fledged teaching. Wondering if others have learned more from Socrates than he has, Cleitophon makes an inquiry among those whom he takes to be members of Socrates' circle. Though he is no longer quoting or summarizing Socrates, what he asks the companions reveals much about his expectations and perplexities regarding the character of the teaching about virtue that he takes Socrates to promise, and therefore about his ultimate disappointment.

Being an outsider himself, Cleitophon does not know whether to call Socrates' associates "age-mates," or "those with the same desires," or simply "companions";¹² whatever might be the essential nature of their relation to Socrates, he goes and asks them what comes next after being exhorted (408c4-7). As becomes clear from his questioning, Cleitophon believes that without a universal teaching about virtue, or an art of justice that produces something in addition to people who are just, Socrates' exhortations would be senseless. He would simply be exhorting others to exhort still others, endlessly, like a chain letter that appeals to vague wishes, the fulfillment of which lies at the foot of the rainbow.¹³ To make sure he is not being taken in by a senseless project, Cleitophon asks the companions what they have heard from Socrates about how to begin learning justice (408e2-3), and particularly about the art of the virtue of the soul (409a3-4). He demands to hear this art explained on the model of medicine and gymnastic—arts that produce

¹² Cf. Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks* (hereafter *SG*), p. 171.

¹³ Cleitophon believes anyone who has been exhorted to virtue ought also exhort others. Apparently he has deduced or conjectured that this much at least belongs to the art of justice (or maybe virtue); cf. Bruell, *OSE*, p.197.

health, the virtue of the body. He likens his and the companions' situation to that of children who had cared and toiled over grains and grapes and other things that support and delight the body, and who were then reproached for neglecting to seek the art or instrument for making the body as good as possible, even though such a thing exists. If these children, after being persuaded to care about the good condition of the body, asked what arts they ought now to seek, the answer would easily be supplied: gymnastic and medicine. In the same way, Cleitophon asks the companions to explain what art makes the soul as good as possible, now that they have accepted Socrates' exhortation to seek such an art (408e3-409a4). According to Cleitophon the children would justly be reproached for neglecting to seek an art of the virtue of the body when such a thing exists. He does not consider what the children might have to do if medicine and gymnastic had yet to be discovered, or what difficulties they might encounter if common opinion instilled expectations about the art of the virtue of the body that were out of proportion with what would turn out to be the actual limitations of that art.

According to the companion of Socrates by reputation most formidable (*επρωμενος*) when it comes to such things, the art that makes the soul as good as possible is of the very thing you hear Socrates discussing—justice. But Cleitophon wants more than the name of the art. Being ignorant of its content, he almost unwittingly follows Socrates' example and undertakes to discuss it. If justice is like medicine, he wishes to know, what does it produce? Medicine produces health in addition to doctors, and carpentry produces houses in addition to carpenters; so

what does justice produce in addition to just men?¹⁴ The same companion as before, Cleitophon thinks, said that the work of justice, that is, the art having to do with the virtue of the soul, was the advantageous; another said that it was the needful; yet another said that it was the useful; still another one said that it was the profitable.¹⁵ Cleitophon objects that these words apply to any and all of the arts. To act correctly, profiting, and doing the useful things—each art employs these things with respect to its proper work. For example, carpentry will declare what is practiced well, beautifully, and necessarily in bringing into existence works made of wood, that is, works of carpentry that may be distinguished from the art which both teaches and is taught (409a4-d1).

Something Cleitophon's objection brings out (something in fact already at stake when he mentioned artlessly caring about food and drink) is that each of the arts he cites not only produces something but does so by regulating or presiding over something else. Not any chance assortment of wood and other materials produces a house, but the advantageous one discovered by the art of carpentry. Not any chance or delightful assortment of food produces health, but rather the advantageous one discovered by medicine. Not any random, undemanding, or overly demanding regimen of bodily exercise produces health, but rather the

¹⁴ It seems that according to Cleitophon, an art that produces practitioners but nothing more would be no art at all, but rather something like the chain letter of exhortations: cf. Orwin, p. 66.

¹⁵ With one addition, this list matches Thrasyarchus' list of unacceptable definitions of justice in *Republic* I (*Republic* 336c-d). Thrasyarchus demands Socrates define justice, but prohibits him from answering anything to the effect that it is the needful (*το δεον*), the useful (*το ωφελιμον*), the profitable (*το λυσιτελων*), the gainful (*το κερδαλεον*), or the advantageous (*το συμφερον*). In the *Cleitophon* *το κερδαλεον* is missing, and *το συμφερον* is transposed from the end of the list to the beginning. Of course, in *Republic* I, Thrasyarchus ends up appropriating *το συμφερον* for his own definition of justice (which Cleitophon defends by modifying most grotesquely); cf. *Republic* 338c ff., especially 340a-b.

advantageous one discovered by gymnastic.¹⁶ Cleitophon fixates on the product of justice without considering what this art regulates, or over what matters it presides—a consideration that might be all-important when it comes to the relationship between justice and virtue. In the *Republic*, in which Plato presents Socrates undertaking his most detailed elaboration of the character of justice, justice (itself a cardinal virtue) is said to preside over the relation of the parts of the soul to one another.¹⁷

Cleitophon says that finally the one reputed to be the cleverest speaker said that justice produces friendship in the cities. When pressed, however (at this point Cleitophon begins using passive voice, with the result that it becomes unclear who the questioner was), this one was forced to agree, first, that the product of justice must be good, and second, that not just anything that is called friendship is a good thing. His definition of friendship therefore had to be restricted to unity of mind (*ομολοιαν*) between adult human beings on the basis of knowledge rather than mere opinion.¹⁸ But this won't do either, and for the same reason: as all present eagerly point out (or maybe Cleitophon himself points it out; his statement is grammatically ambiguous), other arts produce unity of mind on the basis of knowledge among practitioners, and these arts can still say what else they produce (409d1-410a7).

¹⁶ For carpentry, cf. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* III.1.7; for medicine and exercise, cf. Plato, *Lovers* 133e-134e.

¹⁷ Cf. *Republic* 441d ff.

¹⁸ What is called friendship among children or beasts is sometimes harmful, according to those present, as is unity of mind by way of opinion.

Cleitophon says that in the end he went and asked Socrates himself about justice, and Socrates told him it was harming enemies and helping friends (410a8-b2). Of all the speeches of Socrates that Cleitophon recounts, this is the only one where Cleitophon is clearly the target of Socrates' address. And perhaps Socrates' answer is fitting: one might construe Cleitophon's apparent concern to avoid being blamed by Socrates, and to propitiate Socrates with some modicum of praise, as attempts to act in accordance with the principle that one should benefit friends and harm enemies. By disparaging Socrates in his absence, Cleitophon did not treat him as a friend; but by attempting to conciliate Socrates with some modicum of praise, Cleitophon shows an aversion to becoming his enemy. In any event, if "helping friends and harming enemies" is how justice is commonly understood (perhaps as a corollary or correction to "giving back what is owed and telling the truth"), then Socrates only told Cleitophon what for the most part people observe justice to be.¹⁹

But later on, Cleitophon says, it appeared that the just man never harms anyone, but in all things tries to help everyone. Since Socrates did not speak to him consistently about justice – and Cleitophon pressed him on this point not just once or twice, but endured for a long time – Cleitophon gave up. He came to believe that, whereas Socrates exhorts others to care for virtue more beautifully than all other human beings, either Socrates is capable of this much and nothing more – as might happen with any art; for example, someone who praises the art of piloting as something valuable to human beings without himself knowing the art, and so too

¹⁹ Cf. *Republic*, 331b ff. Bruell regards the definition of justice as helping friends and harming enemies as "Socratic" on the grounds that, in the *Republic*, the auxiliaries of the best regime adhere to it by nature (cf. Bruell, *OSE*, p. 196-7); Responding to Bruell, Mark Kremer points out that this definition of justice could as easily be called conventional (Kremer, pp. 38-9, endnote 28).

with the other arts – and similarly someone could charge Socrates with respect to justice, that though he speaks well of it he does not for all that know it himself... (Cleitophon finishes this sentence without having said what the other possibility is). Continuing, he says that though he does not himself accuse Socrates of praising virtue though ignorant of what it is, nevertheless one of two things must be the case: either Socrates does not know, or he does not wish to share his knowledge with Cleitophon (410b2-c7).

It takes nine lines for Cleitophon to voice the charge that possibly Socrates does not know how to become virtuous (and to deny that he himself accuses Socrates of this), and only one to voice the charge that possibly Socrates knows it but does not wish to share his knowledge with Cleitophon. Charging Socrates with ignorance is a matter of greater delicacy than charging him with unwillingness to share knowledge because, according to Cleitophon, it would be senseless for Socrates to go around exhorting others to virtue unless he actually knew the art that makes human beings virtuous. Accusing Socrates of ignorance is therefore tantamount to accusing him of senseless behavior, which Cleitophon lamely tries to conceal by comparing him to someone who praises the art of piloting without knowing that art (which would still be senseless if such a person exhorted all human beings to care about learning piloting while neglecting to do so himself). In other words, if Socrates is not simply like a withholding god, then he is a madman. Cleitophon says that he is perplexed on account of these things, and therefore he will go to Thrasymachus and to whomever else he is able—that is, to those who say they are willing to teach what he wishes to learn (410c8-9).

Because Cleitophon is uncertain whether Socrates is senseless or merely withholding, he enjoins Socrates to stop exhorting him to care about virtue, but rather to tell him if he can, once and for all, how to become virtuous—just as he might, had he enjoined Cleitophon to be careful about the body, follow up with speeches about the nature of the body and the sort of therapy (*θεραπείας*) of which it has need.²⁰ (By implication, Cleitophon is asking Socrates to tell him what the nature of the soul is, and what sort of therapy brings it into good condition.) Referring to himself in the third person, Cleitophon says to put it down (*τιθημι*) that Cleitophon agrees it is absurd to make other things a concern, but to be careless of the soul, on behalf of which we labor at everything else; and suppose that he has spoken all the other things one by one that follow from these principles, which he just went through (410c9-d9). In his conceit, Cleitophon asks Socrates to assume that he has made an adequate summary of what is entailed by putting care for the soul before all other concerns. Someone less confident of his abilities would not make such a request before giving Socrates a chance to point out anything he might have overlooked, or, as would be more typical, to question him on any particular point to test his understanding.

Cleitophon follows up this final appeal with an ultimatum: if Socrates does anything else but say what Cleitophon wishes to hear, he will continue as he does now, to praise Socrates for some things to Lysias and others, but blame him also. Finally he declares that while Socrates is best when it comes to those who have yet

²⁰ This sentence contains the only occurrence of the word ‘nature’ (*φύσις*) in the dialogue. It also contains the only occurrence of *θεραπείας*, though *επιμελείας* and derivatives occur frequently throughout.

to be turned to caring about virtue, he is even a stumbling block when it comes to actually acquiring virtue and becoming a happy man (410e2-9). In remaining silent Socrates at least fulfills Cleitophon's demand to refrain from hortatory speeches.

Based on what Cleitophon says he heard from Socrates, what he asked the companions and what they answered, and other indications, one can briefly reconstruct his understanding of Socratic philosophy as follows:

- To become virtuous is to be happy.
- Virtue is the good condition of the soul.
- Because the soul rules the body, one cannot really benefit from having a body in good condition unless one has a virtuous soul.
- Benefiting from the body, or from anything else for that matter, requires knowledge of its proper use.
- Justice or statesmanship is piloting human beings by the rudder of their thought; it is knowledge of using human beings' souls and bodies. By implication justice must be the art by which one knows the use of one's own body and soul and how to benefit from it.

Is justice then the art that discovers how to benefit from using one's own things, and even from using what belongs to others? Is that all that virtue is? Or is justice rather the art that discovers the nature of the soul and the therapy for putting it in good condition? Cleitophon is certain, at any rate, that justice is an art that produces something.²¹

²¹ The *Cleitophon* has the highest density of occurrences of the word *τεχνη* and derivatives of any Platonic dialogue; cf. Roochnik, "The Techné Argument", p. 194.

B. Analysis of Cleitophon's Socrates

Owing partly, no doubt, to the dearth of questions attributed to him, the content of the philosophy of Cleitophon's Socrates is strikingly general. Socrates' hortatory speech is directed towards all human beings indiscriminately, and we do not learn the circumstances under which Cleitophon overheard it. As for the conceptual speech, we do not even know if it was properly a speech, or rather a distillation from several utterances or questions posed to different people at different times (as is suggested by Cleitophon's claim to have often heard Socrates call knowledge of piloting human beings "political expertise" and "justice" at 408b4). Cleitophon evidently believes himself capable of adequately reproducing the content of a particular discussion between two particular people as a speech, without any loss of significance. The only point Cleitophon attributes to Socrates for which both the circumstances and the interlocutor can be determined is the claim that justice is helping friends and harming enemies, which was Socrates' direct answer to Cleitophon's direct question. But Cleitophon does not know what to make of this response after hearing Socrates say something different on what might have been another occasion (when it is again uncertain whom Socrates was addressing; cf. the ambiguous *νῆπρον* at 410b1).

That Cleitophon finds it troubling for Socrates to speak differently at different times is the chief point of difference between him and Plato. Plato considered it essential to preserving the legacy of Socrates to represent him speaking always under certain circumstances and with certain people. Socrates'

saying different things at different times does not betray contradiction, which would indeed be troubling, but rather results from his habit of questioning people about what they think. Entertaining (examining) one opinion for the sake of argument on one occasion with one person, and a different opinion for the sake of argument on a different occasion with a different person constitutes no contradiction for someone whose own thoughts remain unexpressed. It is rather Cleitophon's generalized account of Socrates' philosophy that becomes involved in a contradiction, though not one that Cleitophon is aware of. This contradiction, which exposes the deficiencies in Cleitophon's understanding, which Cleitophon therefore cannot resolve for himself, can nevertheless be resolved by referring to what Plato has Socrates say and do in this dialogue.

a. Cleitophon's Error

The contradiction in Cleitophon's account of Socratic philosophy emerges from his expectations regarding the consequences of there being, as he supposes, a universal teaching about justice (which he infers from the exhortation to seek teachers of justice). On the one hand, he believes Socrates' exhortations (if sensible) entail that, to become virtuous, one must learn the art that discovers the nature of the soul and what sort of therapy puts it in good condition, which he takes to be justice. On the other hand, he does not object to the claims that anyone who is ignorant of justice should prefer to die forthwith, or that if such a person must go on living then he should prefer to enslave himself and his thought to someone who knows. Though Cleitophon might not realize it, his conception of the status of the

ignorant is ambiguous: in his own case, he wishes to transform ignorance into knowledge; but in general terms the only non-miserable alternatives to ignorance he acknowledges are either death or enslavement to a knower who takes over one's thought as a pilot the rudder of a ship. If the knower teaches what he knows, then where does this talk of mental enslavement come from? Does the knower of justice impart his knowledge to others, or does he simply rule them? Does Cleitophon wish for Socrates to instruct him about justice, or to take over the rudder of his thought?

The question whether the art of justice imparts knowledge also emerges in connection with the concept of "unity of mind" on which Cleitophon's discussion with the companions founders. That discussion is of great importance, for it affords a point of entry for Socratic philosophy that is neither couched in terms of conventional opinion (as the hortatory speech is), nor altogether restricted to the compass of Cleitophon's understanding (as the conceptual speech is). This is especially true of the conclusion, where the question of friendship as unity of mind is raised after Cleitophon appears to lose control of the discussion, which begins moving by its own momentum.²² This shift leaves open the possibility that Cleitophon might not himself have found anything objectionable about the clever

²² Cleitophon's loss of control is revealed by his lame efforts to conceal it: he switches from active to passive voice (beginning with *ερωτωμενος*, "he being asked," at 409d5-6), and then finishes with an ambiguous active form (*ελεγον* at 410a3, meaning either "I said" or "they said" with equal legitimacy). According to Davis this ambiguity suggests that Cleitophon and the others have attained unity of mind, though without thereby becoming friendly. He argues that this turn of phrase is symptomatic of Cleitophon's urge to resolve all wills into one (cf. Davis, *SG*, p. 171). While I agree that Cleitophon uses the ambiguous verb form deliberately – so as to gloss over the difference between himself and the others – I interpret his motive differently, as a lame attempt to conceal his having been reduced to a passive observer of a discussion that he himself initiated.

speaker's argument (that justice produces friendship in the cities).²³ More importantly, it also leaves open the possibility that the considerations that diffuse the clever speaker's argument (that friendship must be beneficial to be the work of justice, and unity of mind therefore must be grounded in knowledge rather than opinion) issue from the companions, who are more familiar with Socratic philosophy. These considerations are therefore deserving of closer attention than Cleitophon perhaps gives them. justification

Indeed, the points that friendship must be beneficial to be the work of justice, and that unity of mind must be grounded in knowledge rather than opinion, bear importantly on how one conceives of expert knowledge of piloting human beings. One would presumably not hand over the rudder of one's thought to someone without first trusting that he was actually a knower. One trusts another to be a knower either on the basis of knowing the same things in common, or on the basis of being persuaded to hold an opinion about him, namely, that he is a knower. In the former case, however, turning over the rudder of one's thought would be superfluous. It follows that someone with the political expertise of which Cleitophon has heard Socrates speak must be concerned with persuading the ignorant to hold that he is a knower, and that obeying him is desirable. But in that case justice or political expertise does not in its normal functioning produce knowers and teachers of justice; rather, it presides over the souls, bodies, and riches of human beings who do not understand the advantageous use of their own things. Depending on what is meant by "the just," this observation might point to an answer to Cleitophon's

²³ Cleitophon claims to have greatly admired a speech urging that justice is needful to prevent conflict, and the production of friendship would surely do that much.

perplexity: On the one hand, if “the just” refers to those whose minds the knower steers, then Cleitophon erred in conflating the product of justice with the knowers and practitioners of it; on the other hand, if “the just” are indeed the knowers of justice, then the work that justice produces in addition to them might be, first, persuasion about who the knowers are and how it is desirable to follow their guidance, and second, whatever benefit proceeds from this guidance (harmony between brothers and cities, perhaps). However, this answer involves a difficulty, for what prevents one of the ignorant from persuading all the others that he, rather than the true knower, knows justice and that it is desirable to follow his guidance? Unless true knowers are equipped to overcome charlatans in persuasiveness, they run the risk of succumbing to the rule of charlatans, or of being mistaken for charlatans themselves.²⁴

Furthermore, whom would this art benefit, and how? On the one hand, if justice does not impart knowledge but rather indoctrinates opinion, then it would not necessarily raise to virtue those over whose souls it presided,²⁵ however much it might prevent them from harming one another. On the other hand, it is not apparent how a knower of justice, if his soul were already in good condition, would derive any additional benefit from ruling others (to say nothing of the risk he would run in competing with false or deficient rival claimants to knowledge of justice²⁶). Would it not rather be preferable for a knower of justice instead to teach what he knows to

²⁴ Cleitophon’s position on justice in the *Republic* abrogates not only the distinction between knowers and charlatans, but also the claim to superiority of persuasion over constraint; cf. *Republic* 340a-b.

²⁵ The companions concede that unity of mind on the basis of opinion is sometimes harmful (409d10-e1).

²⁶ Cf. *Republic* 516e ff.

those who are capable of learning—fostering unity of mind on the basis of knowledge, which after all might be the good condition of the soul? Whatever this latter form of teaching might entail, it would at least be distinguished from merely indoctrinating opinion. Cleitophon, however, wants it both ways: he wishes admittance into the community of knowers of justice, but he demands Socrates instruct him in a way that amounts to ‘taking over the rudder of his thought.’

The universality that Cleitophon demands from any teaching about justice stands in the way of reconciling his portrait of Socrates with the Platonic one. Perhaps in recognition of the possibility, even the likelihood, that his habit of exhorting others and talking about virtue might generate in some of them the misunderstanding and frustration found in Cleitophon, Socrates often urged that he did not after all know what justice is, or virtue, or the good that all human beings desire.²⁷ And to the extent that his understanding fell short of what Cleitophon demanded of it, to the extent that his political philosophy was dynamic, ever testing itself in discussion with various interlocutors, Socrates told the truth. Indeed, even his speech and behavior in the *Cleitophon* is rather consistent with someone interested in continuing to learn about the very thing Cleitophon takes him to teach.

b. Socrates' Words and Deeds

It is uncertain whether, according to Cleitophon's testimony, he ever heard Socrates explicitly say that virtue is teachable, or if he only inferred it is from the exhortation to seek teachers or trainers in justice. Such an inference is not

²⁷ To list a few examples, cf. *Republic* 336e, 354c, 368b, 505a; *Apology* 20e; and *Meno* 71b.

surprising, but neither is it altogether justified: the availability of knowers and teachers of virtue does not follow from the need for such knowers and teachers. But if knowers and teachers about justice and virtue are unavailable, are human beings left with the tragic choice between slavery and death (as Cleitophon's understanding of Socratic philosophy would seem to indicate)? Or is there another alternative? Is it not possible to seek whatever knowledge one lacks (cf. *Meno* 80d)?

If we look to Socrates' behavior at the beginning of the dialogue, an affirmative answer to this last question presents itself. Cleitophon offers to explain for what he praises and blames Socrates so as to acquit himself of the resentment he believes Socrates feels as a result of the report that Cleitophon has disparaged him. He aims to mollify Socrates by gratifying him with praise, and by offering him an opportunity to redress that for which Cleitophon finds him blameworthy. In accepting the offer Socrates also points out his reasons for doing so, which have nothing to do with resentment or wanting to do what brings praise and avoid what brings blame. He accepts rather because, as he says, it would be shameful not to submit to someone eager to benefit him. By learning his good and bad points, he says, he could pursue the former and avoid the latter according to his strength.

Socrates does not say it would be shameful not to submit to Cleitophon's judgment about his good and bad points – to seek his praise and avoid his blame – he simply says that it would be shameful not to listen to that judgment on the off chance it should prove sound. Socrates will seize any opportunity to learn to become better, that is, to become virtuous. But since it is by no means certain that the one who attempts to instruct him knows what he is talking about, it is Socrates'

way (as even Cleitophon recognizes—cf. 408d1-2), if nothing prevents him, to go through with such a person what he says to determine if there is in fact something good in it—to determine if he has found an instructor in that most needful knowledge of the human good. There might even be some benefit to cross-examining a pretender to such knowledge: he might learn how certain opinions take hold in human beings, or what errors they are apt to lead to; and he might instruct the would-be instructor about the shortcomings of his point of view, to set him aright or at least to reign in the bold dissemination of his deficient understanding. But why then does Socrates meet Cleitophon’s “instruction” with silence?

Part of what makes the *Cleitophon* unique among the Platonic dialogues is that here something does in fact prevent Socrates from going through what has been said—namely, the one attempting to instruct him. Because Cleitophon has undertaken to instruct Socrates on his good and bad points on the grounds that Socrates resents being blamed and would prefer to be praised, Socrates cannot undertake to clear up Cleitophon’s perplexity in any way without behaving as though praise is of the highest value to him (which it is not).²⁸ Furthermore, because Cleitophon believes that exhorting others to virtue would be senseless if one did not in fact know an art of making human beings virtuous, Socrates cannot even plead ignorance of what virtue is without accusing himself and his exhortations of senselessness.

²⁸ I am grateful to Martin Sitte for bringing this to my attention through sharing a passage from Leo Strauss, “Lecture on Plato’s *Clitopho*, Notes Made by Morton Frisch,” Winter Quarter, 1950, University of Chicago.

Finally, even if there were some way around these difficulties, if at this moment Socrates were to offer Cleitophon any sort of account of justice, Cleitophon would almost certainly treat it as a general teaching on the model of the productive arts. He would believe himself to know much more than he actually knew, and while believing himself to have attained unity of mind with Socrates on the basis of knowledge, he would instead have simply turned his thinking over to an opinion received from someone who knows better. Essentially, Cleitophon has made the impossible demand that Socrates make him godlike precisely by treating him as a slave. The only alternative left to Socrates that does not involve harming Cleitophon, and might conceivably help him, is to keep quiet and hope that Cleitophon learns to take his lessons from what Socrates does in addition to what he says, that he continues thinking over what he has heard, and above all that he continues discussing justice.²⁹

Cleitophon's error was in believing Socrates to promise far more than he could possibly deliver. The dynamic character of Socrates' philosophizing was due to his finding it expedient constantly to explore new possibilities, or even to re-explore the same possibilities with different interlocutors. Cleitophon seems to have mistook for actualities some of these possibilities Socrates entertained for the sake of argument.

²⁹ If, as is usually inferred, the dramatic date of the *Republic* follows that of the *Cleitophon*, Cleitophon finally receives the account of justice he demands, but only after his understanding turns even more defective than it appears here. For the most thorough and also most amusing discussion of the possibilities surrounding the priority of dramatic date, cf. Davis, *SG*, p. 160.

Part II

Chapter 3

Xenophon's *Memorabilia*

There can be no mistake that Xenophon is in agreement with Plato that Socrates held it necessary to examine opinions about the just, the beautiful, and the good as a beginning to his philosophical investigations. On this matter Xenophon is explicit. In the opening chapter of the *Memorabilia*, he discloses the difference between Socrates and other philosophers by saying that he did not converse about the nature of all things in the same way that most others did. Socrates found fault with the others for investigating the nature of the world without first worrying about “the human things”—whether because they they already knew the human things sufficiently, or considered it proper to disregard them in favor of examining “the divine things.” Observing that philosophers who involved themselves in such matters were led to extreme and contradictory opinions – in which respect they resembled madmen rather than sages – about the nature of the world and about their own reasons for investigating it (I.1.11-5), Socrates conversed instead about

human things—examining what is pious, what is impious, what is noble, what is shameful, what is just, what is unjust, what is moderation, what is madness, what is courage, what is cowardice, what is a city, what is a statesman, what is rule over human beings, what is a skilled ruler over human beings, as well as about the other things, knowledge of which makes one a gentleman (noble and good) while those who are ignorant of them would justly be called slavish. (I.1.16)¹

¹ All quotations are from Amy L. Bonnette's translation (see bibliography), except where otherwise indicated.

While Xenophon is not altogether silent about the course and results of these investigations, however (cf. III.9, for example), he does not explicitly delineate the connection between them and that which he devotes the majority of the *Memorabilia* to explaining: the advice and example by which Socrates benefited friends, family, and fellow citizens.

Xenophon is similarly explicit that Socrates abstained from public life, but that this did not prevent him, according to his own self-understanding, from influencing political affairs through his private engagements. When Antiphon thought to insinuate that Socrates was unfit to prepare others for public life on the grounds that he did not himself engage in the city's affairs, Xenophon tells us, Socrates responded by asking whether he might engage in those affairs more by acting alone than by attending to there being as many as possible who were competent to engage in them (I.6.15). And yet, again, while altogether forthright on this matter, and not silent about the content of the political teaching Socrates implied he dispenses, Xenophon does not present it all at once but leaves to the reader the task of reconstructing this teaching from multiple, partial disclosures Socrates made in a variety of contexts and in discussion with diverse persons.

Xenophon treats the prospect of Socrates' making anyone virtuous in the same spirit of limited disclosure. He tells us that if anyone, conjecturing on the basis of what some have written or said,² believes that Socrates was best at exhorting

² Due to an ambiguous particle, the translation of the first clause of the first sentence of I.4.1 is open to two interpretations. Bonnette renders the sentence as follows: "If any, making a judgment on the basis of what some people write and say about him...." The ambiguity has to do with the relation of the particle *αν* to a participle, *τεκμαιρομαι* ("making a judgment"). Bonnette translates *αν* as "on the

others to virtue but incompetent to lead anyone to it, let him “examine not only what he asked in refuting those who thought they knew everything, in order to chasten them, but also what he passed his day saying to those who spent their time with him” (I.4.1). Xenophon straightforwardly raises the question of Socrates’ ability to lead anyone to virtue, but then, rather than explaining in equally straightforward terms the evidence for or against, he shares many accounts of what Socrates passed his day saying (sometimes exhorting, sometimes refuting, and always teaching),³ leaving it for the most part to his reader to make what he can of them. These accounts follow a progression from Socrates’ practical teachings relating to the general conduct of his life (I.4-II.1), to how he benefited family (II.2-3), and friends

basis of,” making “any” (τινές) the subject of τεκμαιρομαι. However, αν might simply be rendered as “as,” whereupon “some” (ενιοι) becomes the subject of the participle. The sentence would then begin as follows: “If any, as some, conjecturing, write and say about him....” S. R. Slings, on the basis of his preference for this latter translation (as far as I can tell he does not consider the alternative chosen by Bonnette), argues that Xenophon cannot be referring to Plato’s *Cleitophon* in this passage, and that this may constitute proof that Plato did not in fact write that work (Slings, pp. 77-8 and notes 141-2). He reasons that Xenophon by the time he wrote the *Memorabilia* would surely have been familiar with Plato’s earlier works, among which *Cleitophon* is supposed to count if it is authentic, and yet Xenophon would never have alleged that Plato wrote about Socrates on the basis of conjecture, for both of them were acquaintances of Socrates (Slings 82, 230). However, why distinguish so sharply? It would be in keeping with the principle of propriety that governs Xenophon’s prose for him to avail himself of an ambiguous turn of phrase to avoid overtly criticizing Plato (the criticism being that his presentation of the problem in the *Cleitophon* runs the risk of causing some readers to have contempt for Socrates). However, even if we accept both translations it remains possible that the *Cleitophon* is not authentic, or that Xenophon never read it. In fact, Xenophon’s reference may apply to his own work as readily as any other, as he may well have intended: for some might well conjecture on the basis of the amusing story of a the comical dialogue between Xenophon and Socrates that precedes this statement (cf. I.3.8-13) that Socrates was incompetent to lead human beings to virtue.

³ Slings also attests that there is some controversy about how many types of discourse Xenophon distinguishes, and how many he is encouraging critics of Socrates to attend to in the above quotation. He seems to prefer the interpretation whereby Xenophon encourages those who criticize Socrates, but have heretofore considered only Socrates’ protreptic speeches, to attend also to his elenctic and didactic speeches before judging his competence to lead human beings to virtue (Slings, p 78, note 145). This does not seem very charitable to the critics of Socrates to whom Xenophon refers. Cleitophon of the *Cleitophon* at least clearly attended to more than Socrates’ protreptic speeches in forming his judgment of the matter. However, Slings’ interpretation is colored by his project to discover if possible whether protreptics was considered to be a class of discourse unto itself in the ancient world. For our purposes there is again no need to distinguish so sharply. Nothing prevents an elenctic speech from being protreptic, and nothing prevents either an elenctic or a protreptic speech from being didactic.

(II.4-10), and finally, fellow citizens (III.1-7). This final section contains the most relevant content and furnishes the most striking foil for our study of Socrates' citizenship.

* * *

Xenophon opens Book III of his *Memorabilia* by saying he will now describe how Socrates assisted those who yearned for (*ορεγω*) the beautiful things by making them attentive (*επιμελω*) to what they yearned for. This statement governs the first seven chapters of *Memorabilia* III, which consist of a series of conversations between Socrates and men with military or political ambitions.

With a single sentence Xenophon indicates that Socrates associated with ambitious people, that he was able to benefit them, and that he benefited them by making them careful about that which they desired for which they reached, i.e., the beautiful things. Xenophon gives no overt indication how Socrates made the ambitious more careful about or attentive to the object of their ambition. If it is possible to yearn for something without giving much thought to what it is or why one yearns for it (as the previously insufficient attentiveness of Socrates' interlocutors suggests), then perhaps Socrates could make someone more attentive to it by helping him better to understand himself, what he yearned for, or both. This series of conversations could therefore contain or supply the materials for an examination of those who yearn for the beautiful things, and perhaps to some extent what is beautiful.⁴

⁴ Socrates does not ask any of the interlocutors in this series, "what is beautiful?" (cf. I.1.16). In the chapter immediately following the series (III.8) Socrates touches on this question in conversation with a man who explicitly disavows any ambition (cf. II.1.8). It would seem that asking, "what is

Xenophon is likewise silent as to the nature of the benefit Socrates' assistance conferred. Did he help those who yearned for the beautiful things to attain the object of their yearning? Did he help them by putting a stop to their yearning for that object, redirecting their desires elsewhere?⁵ Or did he benefit them in some other way? For that matter, did Socrates act primarily or solely for the benefit of those who yearned for the beautiful things when he helped them? Or did he do it also for his own benefit, or for the benefit of the city?

Of interlocutors who yearn for the beautiful things, i.e. honor and recognition, Xenophon gives us a progression from the nameless (III.1-3), to one who had not made a name for himself (Nichomachides, III.4), to those whose names at least were famous (Pericles and Glaucon, III.5 and 6), and culminating with someone who later became infamous (Charmides, III.7).⁶ Though the progression stops short of someone who has justly earned for himself a good name, it includes two who aspire to be elected general, one newly elected cavalry commander, two newly elected generals, one who wishes to preside over the city, and one whom Socrates ostensibly encourages to attend to the city's affairs. With "the beautiful things," Xenophon apparently refers to political honors.⁷

beautiful?" is not conducive to making those who yearn for the beautiful things more attentive to what they yearn for.

⁵ Xenophon says elsewhere that Socrates redirected the desires related to bodily needs along more salubrious channels in those with whom he associated (cf. I.2.2-5).

⁶ Pericles would have been overshadowed by his father and namesake, Glaucon by his grandfather and namesake. Charmides of course eventually shared the infamy of the oligarchic regime known as the "Thirty tyrants" (cf. *Hellenica* II.4.19).

⁷ It should be born in mind, however, that in the only conversation in the *Memorabilia* in which Xenophon names himself as an interlocutor (I.3.8-13), Socrates warns him of the dangers of being immoderate about his dealings with certain beautiful things (beautiful youths, as the case may be).

A. The Aspiring General

Xenophon opens the series of seven conversations by describing how, after Socrates advised an unnamed companion who aspired to be general of Athens to seek out Dionysodorus (since Dionysodorus happened to be in the city and professed to teach how to be a general), and after the companion had followed his advice, Socrates teased him and cross-examined him about the content and value of what he had learned thereby. The teasing that the companion receives brings to light his lack of awareness of what, precisely, he desires in yearning to become general. In this chapter Socrates explicitly articulates the virtues of a general and what sort of soldiers a good army requires. The discussion also introduces the theme of the relation between knowledge and praxis (to be further developed in later chapters), and reveals strong reasons why Socrates, in contrast to Dionysodorus, did not offer to teach what he knew for pay.

Socrates encouraged his companion to seek out Dionysodorus by admonishing him. Surely it would be shameful, Socrates observed, to strive to become general while yet having neglected to learn how to be one, though learning was possible; and surely someone who neglected this would be more justly penalized by the city than one who took up sculpting before learning how to sculpt. After all, the city puts its trust into the general in matters of war, and therefore it is possible for the general to benefit the city by acting well, or to bring bad things upon the city by acting badly. Socrates concluded by asking the companion, "Wouldn't someone be justly penalized, then, if he neglected to learn how to be general, while being attentive to being elected one?" (III.1.2-3).

The implication is that one who becomes general without the relevant knowledge about being general is far more likely to bring harm to the city than to benefit it. The comparison with sculpture implies that the work of the general is to shape the materials at his disposal into something beautiful. A poor sculptor merely wastes stone; a poor general wastes citizens. Socrates' warning recalls advice that he gives elsewhere about boasting (cf. I.11). He also refers obliquely to the scrutiny that those who hold public offices undergo upon leaving office.

The companion, who had evidently neglected to learn from anyone how to be general, was thus persuaded by Socrates to go learn from Dionysodorus (III.1.3). Whether he was persuaded from eagerness to benefit the city upon attaining the office he desired, or rather from fear of bringing harm upon it and being punished for negligence, is difficult to judge.

When the companion returned from being trained by Dionysodorus, Socrates teased him about what he had done (on Socrates' advice) to be attentive to what he yearned for. Socrates asked some men who were also present if the companion did not now appear to be majestic, as Homer called Agamemnon, from having learned to be a general?⁸ Observing that someone who has learned to play the cithara is a cithara player whether or not he is playing the instrument, and a physician is a physician whether or not he is practicing medicine, Socrates said that his companion "will continue a general from this point on, even if no one elects him," whereas someone lacking knowledge of medicine or generalship would never be a doctor or a general, even if elected by all human beings together (III.1.4). Only knowledge

⁸ Cf. *Iliad* 3.169-70. It is Priam who speaks, calling Agamemnon "majestic."

makes someone a general, and therefore one who wishes to become a general may attain the object of his desire without ever wishing or bothering to serve the city in the capacity of general. If justice also is knowledge, can something similar be said about the just man?⁹

At first Socrates encouraged the companion by suggesting that knowledge is a necessary condition for doing well as a general; afterward he alleged that knowledge of generalship is even sufficient for *being* a general and, teasing his companion about what he yearned for, alleged that this knowledge made him appear majestic. The teasing indicates that mere knowledge of generalship was not exactly what the companion desired.¹⁰ While the principle that knowledge is sufficient for being a general implies that the companion might consider himself a general after learning the art, it nevertheless fails to support the assertion that he now appears “majestic” as a result.¹¹ If the companion wanted to be general to appear majestic, he wanted the office because it is something conspicuously difficult and scarce, something that only a few are capable of attaining, and that only one or very few are capable of having at any given time. Knowledge alone is not like that. One person knowing something hardly prevents anyone else from knowing it as well. If the companion wished to be seen as a general, to appear “majestic,” then

⁹ Cf. III.9.5; Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates* (hereafter *XS*), p.57.

¹⁰ The reference to Agamemnon is decisive: for all of his care to appear majestic, Agamemnon's knowledge of generalship is somewhat dubious. As Carol McNamara observes, “Agamemnon may have borne the appearance of a noble king but his leadership in the Trojan War brings the Greeks to the brink of destruction, while they are saved by the wise and cunning Odysseus whom the Trojan King Priam likens to a less than noble-looking, rugged, restless ram (*Iliad* 3.165-225)” (McNamara, p. 226).

¹¹ While someone who knows the art of medicine, for example, might as well be called a physician, mere knowing does not distinguish him in appearance from the layman

even after learning to be general he was still far from attaining his desire.¹² The teasing raises the question that perhaps the companion had yet to ask himself, namely, what was it that he really desired?

After teasing his unnamed companion about the object of his yearning, Socrates asked him to say at what point his education about generalship began, not necessarily so that the others present could also become generals, but so that any of them who should one day happen to lead a squad or a company might understand better the matters of war (III.1.5). Knowledge has reverted to being a necessary condition for doing well, as opposed to an end in itself, much less an instrument for making a name for oneself in the city.

As immediately becomes clear, the education that Dionysodorus imparted to the companion hardly covered the range of subjects that a general should know: it consisted of tactics (*τακτικός*—ordering troops into formations) and nothing else. Socrates therefore enlightened the companion as to some other things belonging to generalship. In addition to tactics, the good general must also be able to provide equipment and provisions to his soldiers, and possess many other qualities “both in his nature and in his understanding.” Some of the requisite qualities are diametrically opposed: friendliness and fierceness, straightforwardness and deviousness, being guarding and being thievish, liberality and rapacity, caution and boldness (III.1.5-6). From this articulation it emerges that even knowledge is not

¹² In a conversation with his son about gratitude, Socrates says that children are benefitted most of all by their parents, who bring them from non-being into being and hence provide that they may “see” such beautiful things and “share in” such good things as the gods provide human beings (II.2.3). Insofar as Socrates distinguished between the beautiful and the good, he did so partly by noting the special importance of seeing in connection with the beautiful (cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 76; also *Oeconomicus* 7.13-16).

sufficient for being a good general (as opposed to simply being a general). The good general must possess not only the knowledge of when it is appropriate to behave according to one quality of character or understanding as opposed to another, but also the ability actually to behave in accordance with each quality at the proper time.¹³ If knowledge of generalship is sufficient for simply being a general, a good general nevertheless seems to require innate flexibility of character, to say nothing of experience, in addition.

Socrates conceded that tactics also are important. He explained the superiority of a well arranged army by comparison with carpentry: the good builder does not throw together materials in any haphazard way, but uses the strong materials where strength is most needed, i.e. above (to protect against the elements) and below (to support the weight of the structure); the softer materials he uses in between. The companion praised the aptness of Socrates' metaphor, for in tactics also the stronger soldiers (those who will face the enemy and encourage others) must be ordered in the front and in the rear, with those of uncertain mettle in between. Socrates then pointed out that the value of knowing how to order soldiers is contingent upon also knowing how to judge the good soldiers from the bad ones. Because the difference between good and bad soldiers is not as manifest as that between strong and soft building materials, Socrates reinforced this latest assertion by a different analogy: ordering soldiers is like ordering and hence judging whether silver coins are authentic (*καλός*) or counterfeit (III.1.7-9). Once again, knowledge –

¹³ If one forgets or suppresses moderation as a virtue, this passage taken together with III.1.6-9 furnishes the lesson from chapter XXV of Machiavelli's *Prince*.

in this case distinguishing good soldiers from bad ones and hence knowing the difference – is a necessary condition for doing well as a general.

Swearing by Zeus, the companion said that Dionysodorus did not teach how to judge the good from the bad, but left this for his students to determine on their own. Accordingly Socrates proposed that he and the companion consider how they “might avoid erring in these matters.” If they had to seize money, they agreed, it would be best to order those who love money in the front. With those facing danger, therefore, would it not make sense to order those who love honor in the front? The companion observed that these, at any rate, want to face danger for the sake of praise, and are easy to select, as they are highly visible (III.1.10). Apparently one judges good soldiers with a view to the end to be accomplished and their desire to achieve that end or their willingness to undertake to achieve it. Those who love money are good for seizing money because each of them desires a share of the spoils of victory; those who love honor are good for facing danger because they desire to be observed risking their own good for the sake of the common (whether the common good is money or something else is not clear); more precisely, they desire the praise they believe doing so will earn them. Together, the two examples show that the prospect of sharing in the spoils of victory (personal material gain) might be insufficient for making men behave like good soldiers (at personal risk). In discussing how to judge the worth of soldiers with a view to ordering the army well, Socrates and the companion are of course considering how to make an army good. The worth of an army seems to depend upon the presence in it of soldiers who do

not consider their own good, simply understood, preeminent. The companion himself is conspicuously a lover of honor.

Next Socrates asked the companion whether Dionysodorus taught him simply to order soldiers into formations, or also where and how one should order soldiers into different formations. “Not much,” he answered. Socrates observed that the fittingness of how one orders troops and how one leads is contingent upon many things (III.1.11).¹⁴ Just as knowing the quality of soldiers was found to depend on distinguishing what the soldiers love and whether it aligns with goals to be sought and risks to be taken by the common, so knowing good tactics depends on understanding still more mutable events and circumstances. To teach the art of the general adequately, one would have to be able to make one’s students prudent, both about human beings and about what brings victory or guards against defeat (cf. III.4.11).

Swearing by Zeus, the companion confessed that Dionysodorus did not make the things Socrates just mentioned clear. Also swearing by Zeus, Socrates advised his companion to go back to his teacher and question him again, “For if he has this understanding and is not shameless, he will be ashamed after having taken your money to send you away in such a wanting state” (III.1.11).

Among other things, this chapter reveals the problem that Socrates avoided by not taking money for the privilege of associating with him (cf. I.2.5-8, 6.3 ff.). His ability to point out to the companion what a general requires “both in his nature and

¹⁴ According to some manuscripts, Socrates says that the fittingness of how one orders troops and how one *speaks* is contingent upon many things (cf. Bonnette, p. 73 footnote c.). For a discussion of the significance of the basic principle of tactics to speaking, cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 58.

his understanding” to do well shows that Socrates was not ignorant about generalship. From Xenophon’ report, he even appears to have been more knowledgeable of generalship than a man who claimed to teach it as an art and took money for doing so (or at least more knowledgeable than one of that man’s students). But Xenophon also shows that Socrates understood that to be able to teach such an art to whoever paid would require not only making anyone who paid prudent, but also imbuing him with flexibility of character. Depending on the student, this task might prove incredibly challenging, not to say impossible. Someone who understood its difficulty would therefore hesitate to undertake it; in any event, if he was not shameless he would not promise to do so for money.

As Xenophon shows, Socrates did share his knowledge and his judgment in ways that proved beneficial to others, though perhaps not always as expected (not always by removing perplexity). For example, he prompted the companion, who had never sought to learn generalship from Socrates or anyone else, to consider the importance of knowledge to the object of his yearning. He started the companion, and others present for their conversation, on a track that might lead to considering just what it was that the companion desired, what would be required to obtain it, and whether those were things he either possessed or could acquire through study and application.

B. The General

In *Memorabilia* III.2, the second chapter in the series about how Socrates helped fellow citizens, Xenophon reports what Socrates once said when he

happened upon a man who had been elected general. Xenophon does not name the general, and the general does not speak. Of the four elected officials to whom or about whom Socrates converses in this series, this unnamed general is one of two about whose election Socrates does not express an opinion, and the only one about whose prospects he does not even imply a favorable opinion.¹⁵ The argument Socrates makes, that the beauty (nobility) of being general issues from the pure altruism of the general's task, thinly veils a reproach against any general who would think to put his own personal gain before the wellbeing of the soldiers he leads. The teaching of the chapter would seem to be that a good general rules justly, and that to rule justly requires putting others' interests before one's own.

Socrates spontaneously spoke to the general – who was clearly not one of his companions – about the beauty of the office he had attained and the source of that beauty in altruism. Offering undeserved flattery or praise can be an ironic form of reproach.¹⁶ Perhaps Socrates thought it just to urge this general to consider to whose benefit a general should especially attend.¹⁷ The general's complete silence is not surprising. The impropriety of a public harangue of a new general about his duties, responsibilities, and above all the connection between the beauty of his honor and the selflessness of his task would have been especially keen coming from a man who eschewed political affairs himself, who hardly even kept up his own

¹⁵ In III.3 Socrates withholds his opinion about the election of a *hipparch* (cavalry commander) though some of Socrates' statements to him imply a favorable opinion of his prospects (cf. III.3.10, 15). Socrates defends the decision of the Athenians to elect Antisthenes general in III.4; at the beginning of III.5 Socrates expresses his hope that Athens will be better off now that Pericles, son of Pericles, has been elected general.

¹⁶ Socrates praises both Pericles and Glaucon undeservedly, by their own admissions; cf. III.5.2-24, 6.10-13.

¹⁷ Socrates passes over such speeches in conversation with the *hipparch*, whose motives are avowedly benign (cf. III.3).

household according to conventional standards, and who depended largely on others.¹⁸

Socrates asked the general for what purpose he thought Homer called Agamemnon “shepherd of the people”?¹⁹ Did Homer call him that because, just as the shepherd should see to the safety of the sheep and provide for them so that “the purpose for which they are sustained” would be achieved, so the general should attend to the safety of the soldiers and provide for them so that “the purpose for which they go on campaign will be achieved”? Socrates adds that the purpose soldiers go on campaign is to become happier by overpowering their enemies (III.2.1). In other words, the general sees to the safety of his soldiers and provides for them with a view to making them happier. The point on which the analogy might break down, which Socrates concealed by discreetly neglecting to mention the purpose for which the shepherd sees to the safety of the sheep and provides for them,²⁰ is whether the general acts also for his own happiness and enrichment (his providing for the soldiers being a mere means). In the *Iliad*, Homer gives Agamemnon the epithet “shepherd of the people” just after relating how Thersites accused the famous king of using the Greek army only to augment his own honor and wealth. Homer thereupon relates how Odysseus rebuked Thersites on the strongest terms. Someone believing that generals can get away with the self-serving conduct of which Thersites accused Agamemnon might aspire to become a general

¹⁸ For eschewing political affairs, cf. I.6.15. For hardly keeping up his own household, cf. *Oeconomicus* 2; Plato, *Apology* 31b. For depending on others, compare III.11.4 with *Oeconomicus* 2.8; Plato, *Phaedo* 118a. For an amusing comment on the almost comic impropriety of Socrates’ exhortations to men like the general, cf. Strauss, *Xenophon’s Socratic Discourse* p. 191.

¹⁹ *Iliad* 2.243. Socrates also referred to Agamemnon as a paradigmatic general in the previous discussion for the majesty of his appearance (III.1.4).

²⁰ Cf. Strauss, XS, p. 59: “this would unbalance the comparison.”

especially with his own honor and happiness in mind. Socrates discourages this view, though without exactly denouncing it. He does not even mention it, though the way in which he does not mention it subtly points to it. Socrates did not ask the general to say what perhaps he could not with decency say in public, namely, why he wished to be general.

Socrates' theme becomes unmistakable after he asks about, and puts a certain spin on, something else Homer said of Agamemnon, namely that "He is both, a good king and a strong spearman."²¹ Though the assertion seems rather straightforwardly to constitute praise of both the public and the private military virtue of Agamemnon, Socrates urges a different interpretation. Was it not to indicate that Agamemnon would be a strong spearman, Socrates asked, not simply for contending well on his own against the enemy, but rather for being responsible for the whole army doing the same? And that he would be a good king for being responsible for the happiness of those he ruled, rather than for presiding beautifully only over his own life (III.2.2)? Homer only speaks well of Agamemnon, Socrates seems to be saying, for his efforts on behalf of the common, and by no means for anything he did privately or with a view to his own happiness.

Answering, as it seems, on behalf of the general whom he was addressing, Socrates declared that indeed the king is elected so that those who elected him might do well because of him, rather than to attend to himself beautifully; and that those who go on campaign to have the best possible life for themselves elect generals to be their leaders in this. Socrates concluded by saying that someone who

²¹ *Iliad* 3.179. It is Helen who speaks.

becomes general – yearning for something than which it would not be easy to find anything more beautiful, and abhorring its opposite, than which it would not be easy to find anything uglier – someone of this sort must forget his own good and attend by all means to the good of others. Xenophon adds a final word of his own, that “by examining in this way what the virtue of a good leader is, [Socrates] stripped away the rest but left the making of whomever he leads happy” (III.2.3-4). Did Socrates not always examine this matter in this way?

When Socrates teased his companion in the opening chapter of this series by suggesting that he could become a general without ever being elected, he raised the question, “just what does he desire, who wishes to be elected general?” When Socrates denied in conversation with the newly elected general that a general should have any regard for his own happiness, he raised the question, “why would someone desire to be elected general?”

C. The *Hipparch*

Memorabilia III.3 (the central chapter of the *Memorabilia*) features Socrates questioning and advising a young *hipparch* (cavalry commander) about his plans for improving the Athenian cavalry and thereby preparing to be the cause of some good for the city. Though the *hipparch* is confident of his abilities in other areas, he solicits Socrates’ advice about making the horsemen obey him. The theme of the insufficiency of knowledge alone for ruling is further developed in this chapter. Socrates advises the *hipparch* that it is not enough conspicuously to be the best and to know best what should be done: a good ruler must also be able to persuade

others who are ignorant both that he knows these things and that it is therefore safer and more beautiful to obey him than anyone else. In passing Socrates hints that there may be some difference between the ability to persuade and understanding, between speaking most and conversing most beautifully, and between what is most beautiful according to law (by which human beings understand how to live) and other beautiful things; in other words, between political expertise and philosophy.

There must be a certain delicacy, for a man who has recently been elected to command, to revealing how much he understands of what he should do, much less soliciting advice about it. In light of this delicacy, the *hipparch's* willingness to answer and even question Socrates seems to indicate that this conversation was rather private, perhaps confined to a few intimates. Xenophon introduces it by saying that he knows Socrates once conversed as follows with the newly elected *hipparch*. He vouches for the authenticity of no other conversation in this series.²²

²² Cf. Strauss, *XS*, pp. 56, 59. It is difficult to say whether the conversation is wholly private. Socrates does ask the young man whether he would be able to tell "us" why he desired the honor that has fallen to him. However, it is not uncommon for Socrates to refer to himself politely with the plural pronoun. Also, while Xenophon's statement he knows Socrates once conversed in such a way with a *hipparch* may suggest that he, at any rate, was also present, it is possible that the *hipparch* is Xenophon himself (Cf. C. McNamara, p. 229, and notes 11 and 13; cf. also Strauss, *XS*, p.59.). The evidence for this theory is circumstantial, but considerable. Xenophon certainly had much experience commanding cavalry: he wrote a treatise called *The Cavalry Commander* that describes and advises about that command from the perspective of an Athenian *hipparch*; in the *Anabasis* he relates how he outfitted a cavalry, the strategic value of which he understood his army to be in need (*Anabasis* III.3.6-19); the *Hellenica* indicates he also commanded this same cavalry under King Agesilaus, first in Asia and later, as it seems, in Greece (*Hellenica* III.4.20, IV.2.5-7, 3.1-23). While still young by the time of the Cyraean expedition, Xenophon was old enough to have already served in the military, and so it is possible that he was elected *hipparch* of Athens during the last years of the Peloponnesian war. Beyond his experience in the cavalry, there is also Socrates' advice in this chapter about using rhetorical speeches to consider. We know of Xenophon that he once persuaded an army to obey him, a young man, at its hour of need (cf. *Anabasis* III.1.15 ff.), and that he was known to posterity as "The Orator."

Addressing the interlocutor as simply “Young man” (*νεανία*), Socrates asked a question equivalent to one that the previous conversation touched on only obliquely: why did the young man desire to be *hipparch*? More specifically, he asked the young man if he would be able to say why he desired it. Socrates’ mode of initiating the discussion recalls the way elsewhere in the *Memorabilia* Alcibiades begins his discussion with Pericles (I.2.41): he does not simply demand an account of something, but challenges the speaker to prove himself capable of giving such an account. Could this young man say why he desired the honor of *hipparch* in the first place?²³ Perhaps he was not altogether aware of the nature of his yearning for the beautiful things.

From his youth, and from his willingness to learn from Socrates something of how to rule the cavalry effectively, we may assume that the young man has been elected *hipparch* in spite of a dearth of knowledge and experience. Socrates withholds his opinion as to the wisdom the Athenians showed in electing him. As to what Socrates thinks of the young man himself, a remark later in the dialogue indicates that his opinion was at least conditionally favorable.²⁴ That Socrates, who knows many qualities that a good commander must have “both in his nature and his understanding,” does not consider the *hipparch* a lost cause also seems to indicate a favorable opinion.

²³ The word for “honor” (*τιμή*) sometimes more narrowly designates military and political “office” (for example, cf. III.1.1). I refer to military and political offices as “honors” to highlight possible implications of this ambiguous usage.

²⁴ Socrates says that it would be easier for the young man to persuade others that it is advantageous to obey him than it would be to persuade them that bad things are more advantageous than good things (III.3.10). By implication, Socrates believes that it would be to the advantage of the cavalry to obey this young man. At minimum, this means Socrates thought obeying the *hipparch* would be better than anarchy; at most, it means he thought well of the *hipparch*’s prospects.

The *hipparch* is the first interlocutor in the series devoted to Socrates' benefit to fellow citizens whom Socrates asks plainly about himself, and what he desired in yearning for the beautiful things. (Nowhere else in the series does Socrates come so close to asking "what is the beautiful?") The *hipparch* is also the first interlocutor to pose a question of his own.

The young man did not immediately answer Socrates' question. Perhaps he really could not say why he desired to be *hipparch*. At any rate, Socrates pointed out what surely could not have been the young man's motive, i.e., to ride first among the horsemen: for in fact not the *hipparch* but the mounted bowmen ride in front of all the others. The young man agreed that he could not sensibly have desired to command for the sake of riding at the head of the cavalry. Socrates then pointed out something else that surely would not suffice to motivate the young man to seek the honor of *hipparch*: the desire to be recognized (*γινώσκω*). For, since even madmen are recognized everywhere, clearly recognition is not simply good. The young man agreed to this as well, but still did not venture to answer why he desired the honor of *hipparch* (III.3.1). So far the young man was content simply to listen to what Socrates said and to answer questions.

Together, the two insufficient grounds for desiring honor that Socrates asked about point toward being visibly at the forefront of men. Perhaps the desire to be visible at the forefront of men is a powerful motivation for seeking honors.²⁵ However, being elected is not alone sufficient to satisfy this desire: the *hipparch* for example does not appear at the forefront of his men physically, at least; and the

²⁵ Cf. footnote 12 above.

visibility of attaining such an honor, taken by itself, may amount to nothing better than being recognized as a madman (cf. I.7.3). Perhaps the young man had not adequately reflected on the insufficiency of attaining honor as a means of being recognized for excellence.

Finally venturing a positive suggestion as to why the young man might have desired to be elected *hipparch*, Socrates asked whether he wanted to increase the city's virtue where the cavalry was concerned, so that, should there be any need for the cavalry during his term in office, he might in leading it be the cause of some good for the city? The young man accepted this suggestion, answering somewhat less reservedly than before (III.3.2). The young man's own private good does not explicitly come into question. And yet, these motives may not be unconnected with the desire to be visibly excellent that Socrates had inquired about previously. Not for the sort of recognition that belongs to a madman would anyone seek honors, but perhaps for the sort that belongs to someone who has either increased the city's virtue or brought about some good for the city. In this way, certainly, the young man might beautifully make himself visible, as it were, at the forefront of men.

But how could anyone increase the city's virtue without yet knowing what virtue is? And how could anyone be the cause of some good for the city without first understanding what is good, and how to cause it? The young man's yearning for the beautiful things provides an occasion for inquiring about the good things. But can anyone ask, "What is good?" without also asking "For what is something good?" (cf. III.8.2 ff.). But what is good for others is not always good for the individual. Sometimes it is even bad for the individual. And what is good for the individual is

not always good for others. Sometimes it is even bad for others. Is part of Socrates' intention to turn the young man toward reflecting on this complexity?²⁶

Swearing by Zeus, Socrates observed that what the young man desired would indeed be beautiful, if he should be able to accomplish these things (III.3.2). Evidently Socrates was satisfied that, the young man's motives being what they were, he need not go through what he said to the general of the previous chapter. It is the weight of the conditional statement, rather, that precipitates the remainder of the conversation. Socrates casually asked, "The rule to which you have been elected is, I suppose, over both horses and riders?" The young man affirmed that it was, and Socrates asked him to say how he intended to make the horses better.²⁷ The young man said he did not think it his work to make the horses better. He believed that seeing to the condition of the horsemen, allowing each of them to see to his own horse, would suffice to improve the cavalry. Socrates asked how the cavalry would be of any advantage to the *hipparch* (and hence how he would be able to benefit the city) if the horsemen did not spontaneously care to furnish good horses, see

²⁶ Socrates does not urge the *hipparch* to forget his own good or disavow the desire for fame, but rather points out that the fame he desires is contingent upon his accomplishing some good. By doing so, Socrates prompts him to begin thinking about his desire, and about the question, "What is good?" McNamara agrees that elements of Socrates' conversation with the *hipparch* might serve to turn someone toward philosophy (cf. McNamara, p. 230, note 11).

²⁷ Plato's Socrates, too, uses a discussion of making horses better to segue into a discussion of ruling human beings in the *Lovers* (cf. *Lovers* 137c-d, pp. 49-50 above). Dealing with horses constitutes a good paradigm for dealing with gentlemen, for several reasons. Horses are the most beautiful beasts of burden, and the most useful for the most beautiful of pursuits; all horses, even those born in captivity, must be broken of the impetuosity of high spirit before becoming tractable enough to be used; and yet there are important and instructive differences between the training of horses and the training of human beings. According to Strauss, "The Socratic student of politics can learn something important by observing the training of dogs and of horses" (cf. Strauss, "The Problem of Socrates," p. 132). It is not a coincidence that Xenophon has Socrates begin educating Euthydemus in a bridle-maker's shop (cf. IV.2.1).

properly to their condition, or train them well—if, that is, the horsemen themselves were not as attentive to the virtue of the cavalry as the *hipparch* must be (III.3.2-4)?

Perhaps there was no reason to expect that the horsemen would be so attentive; and even if they were, perhaps there was yet no reason to expect them to succeed at making the horses virtuous. No matter how good the horsemen are, they are incapable of doing anything good if their horses are in such poor condition or are so poorly trained that they cannot be kept in order. There is a natural penalty, it seems, for neglecting to see to it that the horses are obedient, are in good condition, and do not quarrel with one another so much as to become pernicious to the military corpse and incapable of being used in concert against enemies. Saying that Socrates spoke beautifully, the young man pledged to try to care for the horses as best he could (III.3.4).

Only citizens from the wealthiest assessment filled out the ranks of the cavalry;²⁸ one might expect these to have been the most gentlemanly (cf. III.5.19), and thus to have cared enough for the virtue of the city to spare no expense in contributing to her military power. However, neither Socrates, nor the *hipparch* upon consideration, expected all of the horsemen in the cavalry to furnish themselves freely with well-trained horses in good condition. Perhaps no small portion of the wealthiest assessment of Athenians was recognizably made up of misers who, being inexperienced or ignorant in matters of war, or despising the honor that befits a warrior, saw nothing of the long-term profit or protection to be

²⁸ Cf. *The Cavalry Commander* I.9 ff.; the city evidently did remunerate each of the riders to some extent, both in the provision of equipment and in wages for service – *ibid.* 1.9, 23. Left to themselves, however, the riders obviously could use the city's fixed allowance either on good, expensive horses or on poor, cheap ones.

gained from the short-term investment in a good horse for service in the cavalry (or who, not being ignorant of this, would nevertheless take a chance against ever coming into danger while serving in the cavalry).²⁹ Even a miser, however, looks after what is needful for life; and in matters of war, effective equipment and especially being able to stay in formation are needful for life. If the *hipparch* could manage to teach the horsemen that being careful about the condition of their horses was in their best interest, perhaps this would encourage them to do so. But does nothing stand in the way of teaching human beings what is good? Or of convincing them of what is needful?

Next Socrates asked about the horsemen. He asked first if the *hipparch* would attempt to make them better at mounting horses. The *hipparch* agreed that this must be done, for those in the cavalry obviously came into danger of falling from a horse. Socrates then asked preposterously whether the young man planned always to fight on sand, the only terrain on which horses were customarily ridden in leisurely pursuits, or whether instead he would practice the cavalry on the various sorts of terrain where wars inevitably happen to take place. The young man agreed that the latter would certainly be better. He likewise agreed it would be better to attend to the horsemen hitting as many targets as possible (III.3.5-7). Each of Socrates' first three suggestions for improving the riders concern the acquisition of skills and bodily exercise, had nothing to do with character, and would benefit the riders individually no less than the cavalry as a whole; the *hipparch* blithely agrees to their value, pledges follow them, and says nothing more.

²⁹ Cf. McNamara, pp. 229-30.

Socrates next asked the young man if he intended to “sharpen the souls” of the riders by rousing their anger toward the enemy so as to make them stouthearted. Without exactly admitting that he previously had not planned to do this, the young man said that now at least he intended to try (III.3.7). He shows less confidence of succeeding with this task than of succeeding with the others.

When Socrates asked whether the young man had given any thought to how to make the horsemen obey him, observing that “without this neither horses nor good and stouthearted horsemen are any benefit,” the young man said that Socrates spoke truly and, for the first time, returned a question. He asked Socrates how best to turn the horsemen to obedience (III.3.8). Up to this point Socrates had been teaching the young man by questioning. The young man, by asking a question of his own, encouraged Socrates to speak freely and perhaps to share his understanding more overtly. While with regard to other points the young man showed confidence in his ability to carry out what was needful, or at least to make the attempt, he was eager to learn how to make the horsemen obedient to him. Perhaps he had misgivings on this point.³⁰

Socrates answered by appealing to what he said the young man surely already knew:³¹ that in everything human beings are most willing to obey those they believe best. He gave three examples: the sick, who obey most the one they believe a skilled doctor; those sailing on a ship, who obey most the one they believe the most skilled pilot; and farmers, who obey most the one they believe most skilled at

³⁰ The obedience of the Athenian soldiers is also the point on which Pericles the younger seems to harbor the deepest misgivings (cf. my comments on III.5, pp. 144-152 below, esp. 150-1).

³¹ Xenophon’s Socrates typically attributes knowledge to his interlocutor on precisely those points that they do not know and most need to know; cf. III.5.22-4, 6.10-13.

farming. Therefore, he maintains, it is plausible that in horsemanship, too, others will be most willing to obey whoever most apparently knows what should be done (III.3.9).

Because the pilot of a ship guards his own safety along with that of everyone else aboard the ship, he has a personal stake in the common project over which he presides. The master farmer, who nurtures the means for his own life and happiness, also stands to profit or lose from the work over which he presides. The doctor, by contrast, does not intrinsically have any personal stake in that over which he presides, that is, the health of the patient. A military commander bears some resemblance to all three. He guards against the dangers of defeat (dangers which he shares with the rest of the army), and he contrives to secure the advantages of victory; if what Socrates said to the general in the previous conversation is to be believed, however, he does this looking to the happiness of his soldiers rather than himself.

The replacement of “those believed to be best” at the beginning of Socrates’ statement with “those who most apparently know what should be done” at its conclusion calls attention to some familiar problems: knowledge is the most important thing for a ruler to have, yet those who must choose whom to obey may not possess the relevant knowledge themselves, and therefore they can be mistaken or deceived as to who is best, or who knows best what should be done.³² A sick person obeys the prescriptions of a doctor, not necessarily because the sick person

³² This possibility is the foundation upon which Gorgias builds the claim that, without himself knowing medicine, he could persuade the multitude to heed his medical advice before that of a real physician (Plato *Gorgias* 456b-c). Socrates might have alluded to it in III.1 by joking that knowledge alone made his companion appear majestic.

understands their merit, but because he believes the doctor knows what will restore his health. Those who sail on a ship obey the orders of a pilot, not necessarily because they understand the necessity, but because they believe the pilot knows what together they must do to bring themselves to port safely. And those who work on a farm obey the advice of a skilled farmer, not necessarily understanding as well as he does, but because they believe the skilled farmer knows best how to produce the greatest yield from working the land (cf. III.9.11). But how does someone come to appear skilled at medicine, piloting, or farming? According to Xenophon and his Socrates, the many believe the good man is the one they believe to be their benefactor.³³ On the one hand, the many can be mistaken as to what constitutes benefaction; on the other hand, those who are willing and able to make themselves visible to the many as their apparent benefactors may not after all be the best men, or know best what should be done.

The problem of appearing best to those who are ignorant of what makes someone best, however, turns out to be only the beginning of the problem. The young man asked, as though for clarification, if it would be enough for the horsemen to obey him if he were clearly (*δηλος*) the best among them. Socrates conceded that the others would follow the one who was clearly best, but only on condition that he also taught them that doing so was both more beautiful and safer for them (III.3.10). Being able to teach that it is safer to obey the one who is clearly best is necessary because some who are going to obey might doubt or forget that taking common

³³ Compare "It seems that most people define 'good men' as those who are their benefactors" (*Hellenica* VII.3.12), with "all... by nature... love those things by which they believe they are benefited" (*Oeconomicus* 21.29).

cause is usually the safest means of avoiding a common threat.³⁴ Being able to teach that it is more beautiful to obey the one who is best is necessary because some might believe themselves or others to be deserving of honors and obedience for reasons other than knowing best what is to be done.³⁵

The young man asked Socrates how to teach (*διδασκω*) the riders that it is more beautiful and safer to obey him. Socrates swore that the young man would accomplish this far more easily than if he had to teach them “that bad things are better and more profitable than good things.” In response to Socrates’ oath the young man asked if he was suggesting that a *hipparch* must attend to being able to speak (III.3.10-11).

“Teaching that bad things are better and more profitable than good things” might be rephrased as “presenting a stronger argument for what ought to be the weaker case,” or “making the weaker argument the stronger.”³⁶ Socrates is almost certainly referring to “what the many censure the philosophers collectively for” (I.2.31), namely teaching an art of persuasion such as that represented by The Unjust Speech from Aristophanes’ *Clouds*.³⁷ This manner of “teaching” would involve manipulating opinions, or speaking so as to persuade without yet imparting knowledge (which would undermine the deception). Presumably such rhetorical

³⁴ The sailing example is especially poignant in this regard (cf. III.5.5-6). For an example of why doubts might arise on this point, however, cf. the passage in Homer’s *Odyssey* in which the ship of Odysseus must pass by the cliffs of Scylla (*Odyssey* 12.80 ff.): Circe forewarns that the only safe passage is so close to the cliffs that some must be killed, a fact which Odysseus conceals from the others, lest each looking after only of his own life cause the destruction of all.

³⁵ This is the theme of the next chapter.

³⁶ Cf. Plato, *Apology*, 19b-c.

³⁷ Cf. Aristophanes, *Clouds*, lines 112-115, 885-1105. Even without this reference Socrates’ counseling a young leader of horsemen on this occasion calls for a comparison with his teaching a young horseman in the *Clouds*.

manipulation could serve as readily, however, to persuade that good things are better and more profitable than bad things, making them appear to be just as they actually are (though still without imparting knowledge). But why should rhetorical persuasion be considered far easier in this direction, as Socrates claims? Perhaps the deeds and accomplishments of a commander who persuades others that it is better to obey him are more likely to bear out his message if he is in fact a good commander than they would be if he were a poor one.³⁸

In the case of this young *hipparch* at least, Socrates maintains that teaching others that obedience is both safer for them and also more beautiful would be easier than, and therefore distinguished from, teaching others that bad things are better and more profitable than good things. Socrates implies that the *hipparch* would not be deceiving others if he persuaded them by means of rhetoric that it is to their advantage, and to the advantage of the city, to obey him.

The young man's inference from Socrates' statement – that Socrates was suggesting he attend to being able to speak – is subtle. Teaching that the bad things are better and more profitable than the good things is a special instance of making things appear a certain way, even if that is not how they actually are. In the context of inspiring obedience in a multitude, such simulation or dissimulation is best accomplished through speeches. The young man proves sensitive to the problem of appearances after all. The astuteness of his question notwithstanding, however,

³⁸ This suggestion is consistent with Socrates' warnings about boasting in I.7.3. Cf. also *Anabasis* VI.1.17 ff.: not long after Xenophon persuaded the Cyraean army to elect him as one of several generals, he was hard pressed to refuse being given sole command.

Socrates answered mockingly just before returning him a series of most serious questions:

Did you think... that you ought to command the cavalry by silence? Or haven't you pondered the fact that it is through speech that we learned all the things that we have learned are most noble according to law, things by means of which we understand how to live; and that if someone learns any other noble thing, he learns it through speech; and that those best at teaching use speech the most; and that those who have the most understanding of the most serious things converse most nobly? (III.3.11)

Socrates casually distinguishes between things that are most beautiful according to law, by means of which we understand how to live, and other beautiful things; between those who are best at teaching and those who have the most serious understanding; and between using speech the most and conversing (*διαλεγω*) most beautifully.

In what way might those with the most serious understanding be distinguished from the best teachers, so as to justify speaking of them separately? Socrates tacitly indicates that the *hipparch* should resort to rhetorical persuasion for the sake of teaching (*διδασκω*) obedience, i.e., that rhetorical persuasion is a means of teaching. Teaching evidently has a low standing in the present conversation: it can be done without imparting knowledge or genuine understanding. The distinction between using speech the most and conversing most beautifully sheds further light on this issue. On the one hand, the best teachers use speech the most, but they do not necessarily converse most beautifully. Their pupils learn by way of hearing them speak the most rather than by conversing; perhaps their students are rather dull, or so numerous as to make no difference.³⁹ On the other hand, those who have the most serious understanding are not for that reason the best teachers,

³⁹ Cf. Plato's *Gorgias* 455a.

though they converse most beautifully. Perhaps those with the most serious understanding are somehow distinguished from the best teachers because they are more serious about understanding, or more interested in conversing beautifully than in being able to persuade many by using the most speech. This predilection would accord with Socrates' own disposition. Although Xenophon tells us that Alcibiades and Critias associated with Socrates to become competent in speech, and that Critias obliquely accused Socrates of teaching an art of speeches to slander him in revenge for a rebuke (cf. I.2.15, 31), the most Xenophon shares with his readers about this alleged art of speeches is how Socrates "made his companions more skilled in conversing" (IV.6.1).⁴⁰ On the one occasion Xenophon recounts of Socrates himself recommending the acquisition of something like an "art of speeches," it is in the context of assisting a promising young man whose just and benign intentions he has sounded out and whose abilities he does not seem to doubt.

The remaining distinction Socrates casually made about speech implies that some things are beautiful, but not according to law. It is unclear whether or not by these things too we might understand how to live. Does the distinction between teaching and understanding correspond to that between learning what is beautiful according to law and learning other beautiful things? To be sure, the laws neither converse nor impart genuine understanding.⁴¹ And yet by the laws we understand how to live. How else might we come to understand how to live?

⁴⁰ Consider also the two forms of address that Xenophon attributes to Socrates: he produced agreement in his listeners by going through a speech by himself, proceeding through what is most agreed upon; he made the truth visible to others by questioning and bringing the speech back to its assumption (IV.6.13-15).

⁴¹ Cf. Plato, *Republic* 492a ff.

Essentially Socrates advises the *hipparch* to use the most speech (rhetoric) to persuade his troops to obey him in things that are done both for their own safety and for the advantage of the city. By contrast, should the young man follow Socrates' advice, he will have been made to obey by conversing about his aims and how best to achieve them (cf. III.3.1). This difference recalls the contrast between the doctor, who commands patients singly, in private, for their benefit and not his own, and the pilot or the farmer, who command groups, publicly, for common enterprises in which they themselves have a personal stake. Evidently Socrates was confident of the young man's rhetorical abilities. What about his prospects for serious understanding and beautiful conversing?

The young man did not answer any of these questions before Socrates went on to ask several others. Xenophon sometimes indicates explicitly when in the drama of a dialogue Socrates asks another question before his interlocutor has finished silently considering how to answer a previous question (cf. III.6.4, IV.2.10). Xenophon does not explicitly indicate as much here. It seems that Socrates did not give the *hipparch* a chance to answer his questions about the beautiful things, teaching, understanding, speeches, and conversing, but simply asked one question after another without taking a breath, and abruptly changed the subject before the young man said anything about these matters. He asked the young man if he had pondered that a single Athenian chorus, such as one sent to Delos, was more than a match for any chorus from elsewhere, and that nowhere else were there so many good men gathered together as there were in Athens. The young man answered that Socrates spoke truly. He gave the same answer when, next, Socrates pointed out that

the Athenians' preeminence was not owing to their surpassing others in the goodness of voice, or in greatness and strength of body, so much as in love of honor, which especially urged them toward the noble and honored things. Socrates then asked the *hipparch* whether, accordingly, he thought that if someone attended to the Athenian cavalry, and if the horsemen held that their efforts would earn them praise and honor, the cavalry would be preeminent too, "in equipment of other arms and horses, in orderliness, and in readiness to take risks against the enemy." To this too the *hipparch* agreed, with some reservation (III.3.12-14).

Socrates stresses the importance of exciting love of honor when inspiring men to do that by which they might achieve victory.⁴² The problem with the Athenians is not that they lack love of honor, but rather that theirs is misdirected and debased. They care more about being reputed best in choral competitions than about being reputed formidable in battle. And yet the citizens being formidable in battle is not only beautiful but also necessary for the survival of a city. There is a natural penalty for men being incapable of facing enemies together. The Athenians' love for drama contributes to or is a manifestation of their decadence, which puts them in danger of being destroyed by their neighbors.

The specific form that love of honor takes in the case of the Athenians goes to show that love of honor may be disconnected from any particular good. Perhaps in pursuing honor through the choral competitions and not in matters of war the Athenians act no differently than someone who seeks honor for recognition without considering whether the recognition available to him is any better than that

⁴² Cf. pp. 114-5 above.

belonging to a madman. But is the value of fame acquired through military rule any less complex than that acquired in these other ways?

Socrates told the *hipparch* not to hesitate, but to “try to turn your men toward the things from which both you yourself, and the other citizens through you, will benefit.” Swearing by Zeus, the young man pledged to try (III.3.15). The *hipparch* is the only interlocutor in this series of chapters who Socrates allows might accomplish some good for himself through political office.⁴³ He is silent as to whether the things toward which the *hipparch* should try to turn his men would benefit them. To be sure, the city or the common is the primary beneficiary of the actions of soldiers in its army. That is why military action is beautiful. It is therefore odd, especially in light of Socrates’ previous conversation with the newly elected general, that Socrates included the *hipparch* as a possible beneficiary of the actions of his men. One must keep in mind, however, that Socrates only advised him to use rhetorical persuasion to teach obedience after sounding out his just and benign intentions, and with the confidence that those who obeyed him would be safer for doing so.

The dialogue began with Socrates asking the young man whether he could say why he desired the honor of *hipparch*. It ended with an exhortation to use the Athenians’ love of honor, evident in their regard for choral competitions, to excite them toward caring about military prowess. Socrates exhorted the young man to

⁴³ Even setting aside the ironic spirit of Socrates’ advice to Charmides (see below), the prospect of personal benefit that Socrates holds out as a motivation for him to become active in democratic Athenian politics concerns merely the indirect benefit, common to all citizens, of living in a better state rather than a worse one (cf. III.7.9).

examine his own love of honor, and gave him occasion to consider the conditions in which love of honor is at all valuable.

D. Nichomachides

Xenophon recounts in *Memorabilia* III.4 a conversation in which Socrates tries to soothe the contempt a courageous and ambitious man feels toward a newly elected general who has heretofore done nothing honorable beyond leading choruses.⁴⁴ This conversation is at the center of the series about how Socrates helped those who yearned for the beautiful things, and the first in which Xenophon names the interlocutor: Nichomachides, or “Battle-Victory.”⁴⁵ It takes up the problem, which Socrates mentioned in passing in the previous chapter, that some believe what is beautiful and deserving of honor and obedience can differ from and surpass what is good.⁴⁶ Therefore the one who is manifestly best and knows best what to do must be prepared to persuade others that it is more beautiful to obey him than to obey anyone else. In making the veteran soldier friendly toward the new general, however, Socrates does not use the sort of rhetorical speeches that he said a ruler should use to persuade those who are going to obey (cf. III.3.10, 11). Confining himself to instructing the soldier as to why it is better to obey the one who is best, he merely undertakes to refute the belief that it would ever be more beautiful to obey anyone else.

⁴⁴ In surrounding chapters Socrates suggests a program for channeling the Athenian’s love of honor from choral competitions toward military prowess. Such a program could not be taken seriously unless competence in leading choruses could be translated into military prowess.

⁴⁵ Despite Nicomachides’ tried and proved valor (as evidenced by his scars) and his evident ambition, he is unknown outside of this conversation (cf. Bonnette, note 16 to *Memorabilia* III).

⁴⁶ Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 76.

Seeing Nicomachides on his way from the election, Socrates asked who had been chosen generals. Socrates' interest in the election was evidently not sufficient to compel him to attend. Nicomachides was angry with the Athenians for not electing him despite his many campaigns, his advancement in the ranks, and the wounds he had received from the enemy; but for electing Antisthenes instead, who had never even served in the heavy infantry, who showed no distinction in the cavalry, and who understood "nothing other than how to gather wealth" (III.4.1). Nicomachides' opinion of the Athenians recalls and confirms the one that emerged in the previous conversation, that their care for wealth and victory in choral competitions might surpass their esteem of military prowess.⁴⁷ As Socrates' next question indicates, however, this does not necessarily mean that they were mistaken in electing Antisthenes general.

This conversation is rife with comedic elements. A man called Battle-Victory is mistaken about what a general requires to attain victory in battle—a barrier to self-knowledge, as it seems. Furthermore, the Athenians, behaving as was typical of them, did not choose Battle-Victory to lead them in war because they favored a chorus leader instead—a man called Weakling no less! Rather than trying to turn the Athenians' love from the chorus leader to Battle-Victory, however (as he might encourage others to do: cf. III.3.12 ff.), Socrates tries to make Battle-Victory friendly

⁴⁷ The previous chapter revealed that the Athenian horsemen could not be depended upon to bear the expense and trouble of furnishing themselves with good horses, or to see that their mounts are sufficiently provided for and well trained, without encouragement from their commander (III.3.3-4). No one, however, was a match for Athenian choruses (III.3.12).

toward the victory-loving chorus leader who has lately become general.⁴⁸ If that means he is trying to make Weakling's beloved friendly toward him, this also seems to be an instance of Socrates exercising his particular brand of erotics and acting as a go-between (cf. II.6.28; also III.11.5 ff.). At one point Socrates even comes close to speaking of Weakling's willingness to *purchase* victory in battle!⁴⁹

Overlooking whatever significance Nicomachides attached to his own qualities and experience, Socrates asked whether understanding how to gather wealth is not a good thing when a general must see to the provisions of the soldiers.⁵⁰ A debate over what made Antisthenes a good candidate for general ensued, in which Socrates slowly but surely gained ground against Nicomachides. Socrates' argument can be reconstructed as follows: to be sure, being able to gather wealth is not sufficient for being general, for otherwise even merchants could be generals. But Antisthenes also possessed another quality suitable for a general: he was a lover of victory. That his choruses always won in the competitions demonstrated that he loved victory more than the wealth he spent to attain it. Socrates did not question Nicomachides' oath that there is no similarity between leading a chorus and leading an army.⁵¹ Nonetheless, if Antisthenes' lack of musical experience did not prevent him from being a good chorus leader (because he was able to procure the services of the best teachers of song and dance), then why should his lack of military experience prevent him from being a good general? If

⁴⁸ The situation is reminiscent of that in II.2, where Socrates tries to soothe his son's frustrations over the verbal abuse of Xanthippe, his wife, without even attempting to put a stop to the Xanthippe's behavior. For Xanthippe's reputedly intractable character, cf. Xenophon's *Symposium* 2.10.

⁴⁹ In Xenophon's *Symposium* Socrates says that he prides himself on pimping (cf. 3.10, 4.56-60).

⁵⁰ Competence to procure provisions for the soldiers holds second place in Socrates' list of the virtues of a general (cf. III.1.6).

⁵¹ His later statements, however, undermine that assertion (cf. III.4.6).

Antisthenes could also judge who were best in matters of war and use them, then he would plausibly be victorious there as well (cf. III.1.9 ff.). Socrates added that Antisthenes would likely prove even more willing to bear personal expense for victories in war than he had heretofore been for victories in choral competitions—for victories in war are shared by the whole city, whereas choral victories are shared only by one's tribe (III.4.2-5).

Socrates does not distinguish qualitatively between the beauty of attaining victory in war and that of attaining victory in choral competitions; a victory is more beautiful according to the quantity of people who share in it.

Attempting to identify the principle behind Socrates' defense of Antisthenes, Nicomachides asked if he was saying that it belongs to the same man both to lead a chorus (*χορηγεῖν*) beautifully and to be general (*στρατηγεῖν*)? Socrates explained he was saying that, "whatever someone presides over, if he knows what is needed and is able to procure it, he will be a good presiding officer, whether it is a chorus or a household or a city or an army that he presides over" (III.4.6). If knowledge makes someone a general, it does not yet make him a good general; he must also possess many things "both in his nature and in his understanding" that *enable him* to procure what he knows is needed, and to do what he knows should be done (cf. III.1.6).⁵² Apparently that goes for leading a chorus, a household, an army, or a city. Nicomachides' battle-scars prove his willingness to strive for victory even at the cost of life, but they show nothing of what in fact makes a person a general, much less a good one (cf. III.1.4, 6; 9.10 ff.).

⁵² Cf III.1.6; Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, p. 62.

Swearing again, Nicomachides expressed astonishment over hearing Socrates say that good household managers would make good generals (III.4.7). His surprise might be due to the thesis itself, or to the fact that this particular man was advancing it: Socrates' way of life was conspicuously at variance with conventional household management,⁵³ and possibly Nicomachides knew and esteemed him most of all for his reputation as a soldier.⁵⁴ Nicomachides' remarks suggest that in his view a household manager is hardly better than a merchant.⁵⁵ His contempt likely stems from the purpose of household management being to produce wealth, or the material conditions for life—mere life rather than living well. To be sure, these materials are also required for more elevated pursuits such as war, but perhaps men like Nicomachides are liable to forget that.

In response to this oath, Socrates suggested they go through and compare the works (*εργα*) of household managers and generals. Nicomachides acquiesced. He agreed without reservation that the following are common to both: making those who are ruled heedful and obedient, ordering others to do that for which they show vocation, punishing the bad and honoring the good, exciting goodwill among subordinates, winning allies and helpers, being fit to guard property, and being attentive and fond of labor as far as their own works are concerned.⁵⁶ At this point Nicomachides insisted that, though they share all these in common, yet doing battle

⁵³ Cf. *Oeconomicus* 2.

⁵⁴ Cf. Plato, *Symposium* 220d ff., *Laches* 181b.

⁵⁵ Cf. *Oeconomicus* 20.27-9.

⁵⁶ Making those who are ruled obedient was a major theme of the previous chapter (cf. III.3.8 ff.). Being able to judge the good and the bad is of course a prerequisite to ordering others to do that for which they show vocation, and to punishing the bad and honoring the good (cf. III.1.9, 4.4-5; also Plato, *Lovers* 137c ff.). Socrates says exciting goodwill among subordinates is beautiful, and Nicomachides that it is fitting; neither insists it is necessary. In the list of the virtues of the general, Socrates pairs fittingness to guard with "being thievish" (III.1.6).

(μαχεσθαι) is not common to both. Socrates pointed out enemies, whom it is advantageous to overcome, nonetheless arise for both. Nicomachides admitted as much, but insisted that Socrates was leaving something out: just how skill in household management (*οικονομικός*) is supposed to be advantageous to someone who has to do battle (III.7-11). As someone who had worn himself out on campaign (and not without some advancement), and who seems to have held merchants and household managers in contempt, Nicomachides evidently understood nothing so conducive to victory in battle as the valor that had always been demanded of him as a soldier in the ranks (cf. III.1.8, 10). Valor, however, which he held to be the chief means of acquiring the beautiful things he yearned for, does not even belong among the specific virtues of a general (cf. III.1.6).

Socrates responded that skill in household management in fact benefits most when it is necessary to do battle. The good household manager, who knows both the value of gaining victory in battle against the enemy and the consequences of defeat, “will eagerly seek out and furnish what is advantageous for victory, and attentively examine and guard against what brings defeat.” He will fight energetically if he sees preparations are sufficient, and no less importantly, he will avoid joining battle if they are not (III.4.11). The importance of exercising caution was likely difficult for Nicomachides to accept. It is held to be beautiful for a soldier to endanger himself for the common good (cf. III.1.10, 5.3). There is no danger to a general as general, however, that is not also a danger to the whole army and the whole city. The value of the beautiful things as Nicomachides understood them dissolves around generalship, because in generalship everything becomes a matter of prudence.

After exhorting Nicomachides not to look down on men who are skilled at household management, Socrates issued a general statement denying any qualitative difference between ruling a household and ruling a city: the two differ only in the multitude of those who are ruled.⁵⁷ (This conclusion was foreshadowed by Socrates' distinguishing quantitatively but not qualitatively between the beauty of attaining victory in war and of attaining victory in choral competitions.) The greatest similarity between private and public rule, Socrates said, is that "neither takes place without human beings, nor is action taken in private affairs through some human beings, in public affairs through others" (III.4.12). In other words, whether in public or in private, actions are carried out by the human beings who serve, who follow the orders of others who rule them. Insofar as service is concerned, a free human being serving public affairs (as a soldier in the ranks, for example) does not differ from a slave serving private affairs. Socrates concluded that those preside well both in private and in public affairs who understand how to use the human beings who serve, while those who lack this understanding fail in both. The position that knowledge is decisive when it comes to ruling does not merely dissolve the value of the beautiful things as Nicomachides understood them—it also undermines the notion that all so-called free persons are even politically equal.⁵⁸

From the silence with which Nicomachides reacted to these final statements can be read something of why those who are going to obey must be taught that obeying the one who understands best is not only safer but more beautiful. Among

⁵⁷ Cf. Plato, *Statesman* 258e-259b; compare Aristotle, *Politics* I.1.

⁵⁸ Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 63.

them there may be some like Nicomachides who are liable to expect recognition for being more equal than they are, who believe themselves superior on grounds different from knowing best what is to be done. Such a person might hold it more beautiful for others to obey him, or someone like him, than it is to obey the one who is manifestly best.⁵⁹ Such a person would presumably have nothing reasonable to say, however, against a clear-sighted argument to the contrary that revealed some possibly unsavory truths.

For related reasons, Nicomachides' silence also gives some indication why those who spoke and wrote about Socrates may have harbored doubts about his competence to lead anyone to virtue (cf. I.4.1). Socrates evidently rejected some of the ways in which men like Nicomachides were wont to award honor. In answering the charge that Socrates corrupted the youth, Xenophon mentions the particular accusation that Socrates made his companions dishonor their fathers, relatives, and friends. He did this by teaching that what is genuinely honorable is knowing what one should and being able to explain it, and then by proving to be superior in just this respect (I.2.52 ff.). In other words, Socrates taught that one should obey the person who knows best, and Socrates clearly knew best. His evident superiority, however, did not prevent the accuser from blaming Socrates for having persuaded the young that he was worthier of honor than their fathers. Evidently the accuser, much like Nicomachides and virtually any soldier seeking fame in courageous acts

⁵⁹ In the *Hiero*, Simonides encourages the tyrant about his prospects for happiness by asking which would give more pleasure to a sick person, being visited by a private person or by a ruler. His suggestion is that the sick person would be cheered more by a visit from the ruler. Hiero does not think to object that this might not be the case if the private person in question was a doctor (cf. *Hiero* 8.4).

conventionally understood,⁶⁰ attached beauty and honor-worthiness to some things independently of their being good. On the basis of the thesis that what is beautiful can differ from and surpass what is good, some who yearn to be recognized for beautiful things might be satisfied with acquiring an honor or station in which it is possible to accomplish some great good, without yet knowing how to go about doing so. Such people, covetous of the beautiful things, might even seek to undermine the good person's claim to them, hating him and calling his virtue corruption.⁶¹ To Socrates, such a course was hardly different from madness (cf. p. 123 above).

E. Pericles

In the fifth chapter devoted to how he benefited ambitious fellow citizens (III.5), Socrates discusses with Pericles, son of the great Pericles, how The Athenians might be made better in matters of war. The greater part of the conversation consists of Pericles expressing lack of confidence in the Athenians while Socrates sanguinely presents evidence that the virtue for which their ancestors were celebrated has not been totally effaced. He also suggests remedies for their current decadence, such as adopting the pursuits of their ancestors, other Greeks, or even barbarians. Socrates' blithe optimism repeatedly provokes Pericles into expressing what worries him. When he finally mentions what perhaps he finds most worrisome – that the Athenian soldiers he is going to rule are disobedient – Socrates answers at

⁶⁰ Socrates, too, had a reputation for courage on the battlefield—but his courageous deeds consisted of retreating calmly in defeat and assisting his friend, Alcibiades, in saving himself and his armor (cf. Plato, *Symposium* 220d ff., *Laches* 181b).

⁶¹ For a case similar to, and no doubt modeled on that of Socrates, cf. *Cyropaedia* III.1.38 ff. For Xenophon's own experiences with this problem, cf. *Anabasis* III.1.14, 25; V.6.25, 6.1, 10; VI.1.32, 5.13 ff., 6.34; VII.5.6, 6.8 ff., 7.38; in contrast, cf. *ibid.* VII.5.10, 7.11.

length, first attributing the Athenian soldiers' lack of obedience to their having been led by unskilled generals, and then inaccurately and ironically giving various reasons why this criticism does not touch Pericles himself. In other words, Socrates helps Pericles to see what he himself might do to put a stop to that which annoys him about those he is going to lead in war (cf. III.8.2). To be sure, insofar as the quality of an army and hence the fate of the generals commanding it depends also on the quality and the character of the soldiers of which it is composed, Pericles is fittingly dispirited by the Athenians' depravity. However, it is no less his responsibility as general to improve the condition of his soldiers than to command them.⁶² Therefore Socrates helps him consider how to attend to the condition of the Athenians, making a special point of exhorting Pericles to see to his own understanding of his role as general. If the previous four chapters set out Socrates' general understanding of political rule and its attendant difficulties, the present chapter introduces particular difficulties a ruler of the Athenians faced in the latter days of the Peloponnesian War.

Socrates thinks Athenian decline began around the time of the political ascendancy of Pericles' famous father, and suggests remedies that tend to reverse policies instituted by him, which implies Socrates' opinion as to the source of the city's troubles.⁶³ The name of Socrates' interlocutor thus carries a double-significance: first, it occasions criticism of the long-term moral and political affect of the elder Pericles' policies on the Athenians; and second, in connection with Athenian depravity it calls to mind the ultimate fate of the younger Pericles, who

⁶² Cf. III.3.5; cf. also what is implied in the sculpture metaphor at III.1.2.

⁶³ Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 66; McNamara, p. 233.

was executed unjustly and unlawfully after winning a victory at sea.⁶⁴ (A causal relationship between these two themes may be implied.) Socrates does not himself spontaneously lament the developments that his interlocutor brings up, but he is conscious of them. Despite what he has concluded about the means of rehabilitating the Athenians, however, Socrates does not seek to become general and take matters into his own hands.⁶⁵ He confines himself to conversing with someone who has become general, who is disheartened about present conditions, and who can be made willing to listen to advice. This conversation might be an instance of Socrates making as many as possible competent to engage in politics (cf. I.6.15), though his expressed confidence in the younger Pericles is highly conditional (cf. III.5.21-24). What are his thoughts on the prospect of reforming the Athenians?

Socrates initiated the conversation by saying that Pericles being elected general gave him hope that the affairs of the Athenians might be improved with a view to military prowess and reputation, and to dominating enemies. Pericles confessed that, though he wishes for what Socrates spoke of, he was perplexed as to how to bring it about. When Socrates offered to examine with him what might be done at present by calculating (*διαλογιζομενοι*) about these things, Pericles readily agreed. They started off the discussion with a review of the Athenians' strengths as compared to those of the Boeotians, their closest neighboring enemies. Socrates mentioned five or six advantages before Pericles called attention to some of the

⁶⁴ After the victorious naval battle at Arginousae, the intact Athenian ships had come to shore when the generals gave the order for certain ships to disembark again to collect the bodies of the fallen. Suddenly a storm came on, and those charged with the task abandoned it. This insubordination (overlooked at the time), or at any rate the failure of the army to gather the fallen from the sea, later resulted in the generals being condemned to death. Pericles was among those executed (cf. *Hellenica* I.6-7, esp. 7.2, 15, 32).

⁶⁵ Socrates survived Pericles by six or seven years.

difficulties the Athenians were nevertheless having. The advantages were sheer numbers, numbers of those in good bodily condition, solidarity of countrymen, love of honor and high-mindedness,⁶⁶ and the celebrated virtue of ancestors (to excite courage and emulation in the present generation). In Socrates' view, the Athenians were superior in most of these things; Pericles, by contrast, more often confined himself to admitting the Athenians were not inferior or blameworthy (III.5.1-3).

Apparently unable to focus for long solely on positive elements of the Athenians' current circumstances, Pericles questioned whether the advantages Socrates mentioned were sufficient to offset the state of fear arising from recent defeats that the Athenians had suffered at the hands of the Boeotians. Unperturbed by Pericles' impatient protestation, Socrates pointed to a silver lining: while virtue may sleep amidst perceived safety, she awakens especially amidst fears, as is seen in the behavior of those sailing on ships (III.5.4-6). Amidst common dangers men come together, each striving to do the utmost in common cause; therefore if the Athenians were disheartened about the threat of the Boeotians, they were all the better prepared to obey whoever they believed might deliver them from the perceived danger.

Willing to entertain the possibility that the Athenians were now indeed more inclined to obey, Pericles proposed examining how to turn them toward loving again their ancient virtue, fame, and happiness (III.5.7). Evidently he was conscious of the fact that fear alone might be insufficient for making the Athenians obey, at least if one must sometimes command them to face dangers for the sake of the beautiful

⁶⁶ It is a little unclear whether these are distinct advantages. I follow Hude's emendation: "*μεγαλοφρονεστατοι*" for the manuscripts' "*φιλοφρονεστατοι*"; cf. Bonnette, p. 81 footnote e.

things rather than for mere safety.⁶⁷ Socrates suggested by way of an odd and somewhat inaccurate comparison with seizing wealth that the way to encourage the Athenians to attend once again to virtue and preeminence was to show them that these things had belonged especially to them from ancient times.⁶⁸ They could teach the Athenians to regard virtue as their own, and to love it for that reason, by reminding them about the virtue they had heard belonged to their ancestors about whom they had heard. Socrates recommended reminding them of stories involving heroes, and not discounting adventures involving gods. He allowed that stories such as those from the more recent wars with Persia, whose truth could be corroborated, might also be helpful. Socrates admitted that the Peloponnesians also excelled in those wars. His final statement about the superiority and strength of those who repelled the Persians are sufficiently ambiguous as to allow that perhaps the Peloponnesians of those times eclipsed the Athenians (III.5.8-12).

Confronted with many fine points from the Athenian legacy, Pericles wondered how the city ever began to decline. Socrates opined that the Athenians grew lax and neglected themselves through overconfidence during the time of their recent ascendancy (III.5.13). This opinion corroborates his previous assertion relating to the behavior of sailors amidst perceived safety, and tacitly casts blame on the generation of which Pericles' father Pericles was the most famous leader.

⁶⁷ The story in the background of this conversation is a case in point. On the one hand, the beauty of obeying a command to gather fallen comrades from the sea could hardly be questioned; the arrival of a storm, on the other hand, would have argued just as strongly against the safety of doing so (cf. III.3.10).

⁶⁸ The comparison is not accurate because, unlike fame and virtue, wealth is sought after for private material benefit, and its possession does not intrinsically depend upon merit or even perceived merit. Perhaps for those reasons, however, wealth can certainly be loved as 'one's own' (cf. *Republic* 330c). Socrates also mentions seizing wealth in connection with taking risks for praise at III.1.10.

After dwelling for some time on how one might encourage the Athenians to love once again their ancient virtue, fame, and happiness, Pericles was inclined to ask how the Athenians might at present recover their ancient virtue.⁶⁹ Socrates responded with two suggestions: first, the Athenians might find out the pursuits of their ancestors and adopt those pursuits (to honor their ancestors, not to emulate them); and second, they might find out the pursuits of the Greeks who were currently considered preeminent in virtue and adopt those pursuits (to emulate the other Greeks, not to honor them) (III.5.14).⁷⁰

Socrates' suggestion reminded Pericles of the contrast between the virtuous Spartans and the decadent Athenians. Though the point being considered was how to reform the Athenians, Pericles indulged in enumerating their many faults, as though despairing of their ever changing for the better. He seemed most worried about rampant insubordination, though he also spoke of mutual hostility between Athenian citizens. Socrates continued trying to soothe Pericles' doubts (which only provoked him to give them voice) by reminding him of a few examples of the Athenians' current behavior that proved they were not totally depraved when it came to working together and obeying: they were orderly in naval matters, they had no trouble obeying those who officiated athletic contests, and in choruses no one was more obedient than they. These examples only reminded Pericles of another evil, for while the plebeians who filled out the navy and the choruses proved willing

⁶⁹ Virtue is the lynchpin of the beloved triad; without it, fame and happiness would be difficult to acquire or retain.

⁷⁰ Socrates does not entertain the possibility of the Athenians doing better than their ancestors – allowing that possibility would be at cross purposes with nurturing love of ancestral virtue – but he does consider the possibility of their proving superior to the foreign Greeks in their pursuits; cf. Strauss, *XS* pp. 66-7.

to obey those who ruled them, those of the so-called gentleman class that filled out the ranks of the cavalry and the heavy infantry were most disobedient. Socrates countered that the Council of the *Areopagus*, at least, was both august and orderly (thus proving that some, at least, of the gentleman class were worthy of that name), and that therefore Pericles need not despair (III.5.15-20).

Still resisting, Pericles finally maligned the Athenian soldiers in general—those whom he, as general, was going to lead. “‘And yet,’ he said, ‘in what concerns the soldiers – where there is most need to be moderate, orderly, and obedient to rulers – they pay attention to none of this’” (III.5.21). Speaking at greater length than anywhere else in the conversation, Socrates responded with his only overt criticism of the Athenians: perhaps the Athenian soldiers had become immoderate, disorderly, and poor at obeying as a result of being ruled for the most part by generals who did not know the first thing about how to rule, but were content to extemporize.⁷¹ Comparing generals with other sorts of leaders – of cithara players, of choruses, of dancers, of wrestlers, and of pancratists – Socrates observed that while the leaders of musicians and athletes were able to demonstrate having learned the things they oversaw, most of the generals were not able to do so. With evident irony, Socrates explained that he did not consider this criticism to touch Pericles, who, he asserted, had both inherited from his father and gathered from every other possible source things advantageous to generalship, and had taken care

⁷¹ The affect of good or poor rule on the quality of the soldiers is a theme that first emerges in III.1 with the sculpture comparison. It also comes up in III.2 with the argument that Agamemnon was a “strong spearman” as a result of making his army strong. It is explicitly the theme of III.3. Chapter III.4 gives some indication why some who did not know how to rule might nevertheless aspire to become generals (cf. pp. 145-6 above).

not to be unknowingly ignorant of anything of this sort, having spared no expense or trouble to learn whatever he perceived he did not know of such matters. In response Pericles frankly confessed that Socrates' irony was not lost on him: he was aware that Socrates said these things, knowing they were not true, only in order to teach him to what he must attend to be general; and of course he agreed (III.5.21-4). Pericles' despair over his soldiers obeying him, and the neglect and blame dodging to which his despair inclined him, appear to be what Socrates began the conversation on purpose to remedy. At any rate, at no other point in the conversation did Socrates speak at such length, at no other point did he spontaneously criticize the Athenians, and at no point previously did he even implicitly exhort Pericles to attend to his own condition.

Having finally rendered his interlocutor receptive to advice and willing to take responsibility for making the Athenians better in matters of war, Socrates urged Pericles to consider some very concrete domestic military strategy. He asked if Pericles had heard of the skirmishing strategy used by the Mysians and Pisidians who lived freely, though they frequently raided the Persian King's land from the mountains in which they lived. Would not this strategy be usefully employed in the mountainous Athenian territory, especially where it bordered on the land of the Boeotians? Would not a force of young, lightly-armed Athenians be able to do harm to the enemy and defend their own land if they were stationed in the mountains for this purpose? Pericles had heard of such things and believed they could be useful (III.5.25-7). His unhesitating willingness to outfit and deploy soldiers in whatever way might be useful, even if this meant adopting foreign skirmishing strategies, at

least goes to show that Pericles did not suffer from the prejudice that sacrifices the useful to the beautiful.⁷²

Socrates concluded that, if “these things” pleased Pericles (no doubt he referred to being attentive to his own understanding, as much as to any strategy they just discussed), then he should attempt them. Accomplishing any one of them would be beautiful for Pericles and benefit the city; failing to accomplish any would neither harm the city, nor bring ugliness (shame) upon him (III.5.28). Socrates was silent about what would be good for Pericles, or what might bring harm upon him.

F. Glaucon

Xenophon lets there be no mistake as to the folly of the Athenian rulers who extemporized, knowing nothing of how to rule (cf. III.5.21), by representing in the sixth chapter of the series someone who aspired to take charge of the city’s affairs while knowing nothing about them (III.6). He reports that Glaucon, son of Ariston, before reaching the age of twenty, planned to persuade the Assembly to allow him to preside over the city. Because his family was unable to stop him from making a fool of himself, his brother Plato and his uncle Charmides prevailed upon Socrates to intervene. The chapter continues on the theme of the troubles in Athens in the latter stages of the Peloponnesian War, and concludes with a warning from Socrates for Glaucon to refrain from the city’s affairs until he had proved competent to engage in

⁷² Heavily-armored Greek infantry, whose virtue and strength consisted in holding together in a phalanx and engaging with the enemy at close quarters, generally held skirmishers in contempt, to say nothing of barbarians (whom they greatly surpassed as a result of this virtue). Hence Nicomachides put serving without distinction in the heavy infantry on a level with serving with distinction in the cavalry which, though outfitted from among the gentleman-class, was nevertheless at the time still a skirmishing force (cf. III.4.1, 5.19).

them profitably. Knowledge and understanding of the business of ruling, of course, is a necessary condition for doing well in these matters.

Much as Socrates made use of Pericles' disposition to rail against the Athenians in order to bring him around to the point of listening to advice about putting his own affairs in order, Socrates draws Glaucon into a discussion that ultimately causes him to face his own limitations by first speaking of how beautiful the object of his desire is, and how elevated he himself would become upon attaining it. Chancing to meet Glaucon, Socrates asked him if he intended to preside over the city. Glaucon admitted he did. Swearing by Zeus, Socrates said this was beautiful, if indeed anything else among human beings was. As though to satisfy the curiosity he had just elicited about what was beautiful among human beings, Socrates immediately listed some beautiful things that presiding over a city seems to afford the possibility of doing: being able to obtain one's own desire; being able to benefit friends, household, city, and fatherland;⁷³ and also earning a name for oneself, first in Greece, and then maybe even among the barbarians, like Themistocles.⁷⁴ This list was evidently adequate to Glaucon's interests. When he heard these things, Xenophon says, it pleased him to remain speaking with Socrates (III.6.1-3).

Swearing by the gods, Socrates implored Glaucon to explain how he would begin to do good works for the city (III.6.3). In the same ironic spirit in which he

⁷³ To this point the list loosely follows the plan for the part of the *Memorabilia* spanning I.3 – III.14: Socrates' own way of life (I.3-2.1), how he benefited family (II.2-3), how he benefited friends (II.4-10), and, among other things, how he benefited fellow citizens (III.1-14).

⁷⁴ The sphere within which one may benefit others by political rule seems to be confined to one's own political community; this limitation does not, however, prevent one from becoming famous even elsewhere; cf. Strauss, *On Tyranny*, p. 89.

addressed Pericles in the previous chapter, Socrates draws Glaucon's attention to the things he must take care to learn by pretending confidence in his already knowing these things.

Glaucon did not answer right away how he planned to benefit the city, but paused to consider. Before he could call anything to mind, Socrates asked him about the prospects of benefiting the city financially. For example, Glaucon could plausibly enrich the city if he knew its revenues and expenditures, for he might then endeavor to increase the former and decrease the latter. Glaucon frankly admitted not knowing these things, but he was confident the city could nevertheless be enriched through warfare. Socrates agreed this might be done, provided one knew the military power of the Athenians to exceed that of their enemies so much as to ensure victory. Glaucon conceded that such knowledge would be necessary, admitting he could not provide it either in speech or in writing. This being the case, Socrates delicately asked whether they should postpone giving advice about war, and generously allowed that these things were after all weighty matters. Perhaps Glaucon was not to be blamed for having yet to consider them. Socrates claimed to know, however, that Glaucon had at least reviewed the domestic guard-posts, so that, knowing which of them were vital and how many guards were sufficient to outfit each, he could advise the city about which ones to enlarge and which ones to remove. Swearing by Zeus, Glaucon opined that the guard-posts should all be removed on the grounds that they altogether failed to prevent produce from being stolen by invading armies. Socrates asked whether Glaucon's plan to rid the countryside of guard-posts might result in rampant banditry on the country. Had he

reviewed this matter in person—or how else did he know that the guard-posts guarded badly? Glaucon admitted to conjecturing it. Once again they agreed to postpone giving advice on such matters until they could do so on the basis of knowledge rather than conjecture. Socrates confessed knowing Glaucon had also neglected to visit the silver mines, and so could not say why they produced less wealth than previously. He generously observed, however, that the mines were after all said to be a squalid sort of place, which should be excuse enough for ignorance when it came time to give advice about them. Glaucon admitted at this point that it was not lost on him that he was being ridiculed. There was, however, one more point Socrates could not resist calling to Glaucon's attention. He claimed to know that Glaucon had not neglected to learn for how long the produce from the Attic countryside was capable of continuously sustaining the city, and how much annually it was necessary to supply from elsewhere, "so that the city may never come to be in need of this with you unawares" (III.6.10-13).⁷⁵

Tacitly admitting ignorance of these all-important matters, Glaucon complained that Socrates spoke of a huge task if these things too were necessary to learn. Socrates did not object to Glaucon's assessment of the magnitude of the task of presiding over a city, but instead put it into perspective by comparing it to the task of managing a household: one would not manage even one's own household beautifully without knowing all of its needs and attending to them. But the city is composed of more than ten thousand households; it would indeed be difficult to

⁷⁵ The Athenians ultimately lost the Peloponnesian War because the Lacedaimonians not only deprived them of what came from the countryside but also eventually won control of the grain the Athenians were accustomed to importing by sea.

attend to them all at once. Socrates suggested that Glaucon begin by attempting to enlarge just one household, that of his uncle (which was depleted). Should he prove capable of that much, then he might try to benefit a larger number; but if he could not benefit one, how would he benefit many? Just as a number of talents are more difficult to carry than a single one, there is a great quantitative distinction between the difficulty of ruling a city and that of ruling a household (III.6.13-4).

Glaucon claimed he would not be unwilling to benefit his uncle's household, if only his uncle should want to obey him. With a familiar turn, Socrates asked Glaucon if he thought he could persuade many to obey him when he could not even persuade one (III.6.15)? Of course there is a difference between persuading many together and persuading one person in private conversation. However, Socrates insists that one must know one's business before taking action, and that it is better to practice first on what is smaller before applying oneself greater things. This policy entails that, whatever differences there may be between persuading a multitude and conversing in private, prudence demands that one take care of being able to converse in private before attempting to persuade the multitude.

Socrates warned Glaucon to beware pursuing his desire for a good reputation in such a way that he obtained a bad one instead. Do not those who say and do that which they do not know earn blame rather than praise? And consider those who know what they say and do: "you will find in every work that those who have good reputations and are admired come from those who have the most understanding, while those who have bad reputations and are held in contempt come from the most ignorant." Therefore Socrates exhorted Glaucon to acquire knowledge of what he

wished to do. On condition that he surpassed others in such knowledge before attempting to preside over the city, Socrates would not wonder if Glaucon obtained the good reputation and admiration that he desired (III.6.16-18).

Of the beautiful things that Glaucon yearned for, there were those he wanted to obtain for himself, and those he might obtain on behalf of family, of friends, or of the city. Socrates cross-examined Glaucon with a view to his understanding of the good at the farthest remove from himself: the good of the city. Might Glaucon benefit from a similar examination of his understanding of his own good?

G. Charmides

The final conversation in the series features Socrates explicitly encouraging a seemingly reluctant Charmides (who would later join the leadership of the murderous oligarchic regime known as the “Thirty Tyrants”)⁷⁶ to take a hand in the city’s affairs (III.7). He ostensibly attempts to help Charmides overcome his shame and fear of public speaking by inciting contempt for the rabble of which the Athenian Assembly is composed. The lesson of this chapter is initially difficult to judge because, first, it seems out of character of Socrates to rouse someone’s ambition rather than moderate it, and second, it seems astonishingly reckless of Xenophon to recount such a story here. Xenophon’s avowed purpose for writing the *Memorabilia* is not only to show how Socrates benefited others but to clear Socrates of the charges against him, one of which was that he made the people with whom he associated dangerous to the city (Cf. I.1.1,

⁷⁶ Not as one of “The Thirty” in Athens proper, but as one of the ten who ruled in Piraeus. Cf. *Hellenica* II.4.19.

2.17-48.). Relating how Socrates at one time encouraged someone to be politically active who later abetted Critias during his infamous reign seems ill suited to that purpose.⁷⁷ Xenophon's account of this event, however, supplies several indications that Socrates' encouragement of Charmides is not as straightforward as it initially appears.

Taking this conversation at face value, for example, it does not seem to belong under the heading, "how Socrates benefited those who yearned for the beautiful things by making them more attentive to what they yearned for" (III.1.1). To say Socrates made those he benefited *more* attentive implies that they already desired "the beautiful things"—i.e., political honors, as the previous six chapters bear out. Charmides' apparent reluctance to seek such honors by garnering public support suggests that he did not spontaneously yearn for them.⁷⁸ Appearances, however, can be deceiving. Perhaps Xenophon's grouping of this conversation with the other six indicates that Charmides, despite his hesitation to partake in the democratic government, was not altogether free of political ambition; perhaps his reluctance to preside over the city was somehow conditional (as his later history confirms).

Additionally, the reason Socrates gives for encouraging Charmides – his political ability – is somewhat lackluster: however evident his understanding of political matters may be in word, his ability has not yet been proven in deed.⁷⁹ There are, further, indications both here and elsewhere in the *Memorabilia* that Charmides' political ability

⁷⁷ "In the eyes of a loyal democrat Socrates' action could well appear as an act of corruption" (Strauss, *Xenophon's Socrates*, p. 73.).

⁷⁸ Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p.72.

⁷⁹ As the previous discussion bears out, over and above the requirement for merely *being* a ruler (knowledge), there are additional requirements for ruling well (flexibility of character, skill at public speaking and acquiring provisions) that would not be evident on the basis of private counsels.

was less than exemplary. For example, only a few lines above, Socrates mentioned that Charmides' household needed enlarging before asserting that someone who is unable to manage a single household successfully should not attempt to preside over the city's affairs (III.6.14). Though Charmides' household may have been impoverished through no mismanagement of his own, at the very least he seems to have had difficulty restoring it.⁸⁰ And of course Charmides was later associated with the political leaders whom Socrates criticized for making the Athenian citizens fewer and worse (I.2.32). Most strikingly, Charmides himself reacts with surprise when Socrates claims to know him to be a competent ruler (III.7.3). Why would Socrates, who was at pains to urge moderation to so many other ambitious men, rouse the ambition of a man of questionable promise? Or was Socrates' praise of Charmides' political ability an ironic means of cautioning him, as was his praise of Pericles' efforts to learn generalship in III.5, and of Glaucon's understanding of political affairs in III.6?

Moreover, if Socrates' reason for encouraging Charmides is doubtful, the manner in which he goes about it seems almost designed for failure. He encourages Charmides to seek political honors in the democracy by analogy with athletic contests: just as it would be cowardly for someone capable of winning an athletic contest not even to compete, so is it cowardly for someone capable of presiding over the city to refrain from even trying to influence the Assembly. Surely this analogy could not fail to remind Charmides, who once came to private misfortune as a result of training to

⁸⁰ Charmides' comments in Xenophon's *Symposium* on his poverty make clear that this condition had been imposed upon him (*Symposium* 4.31). It is a matter of record that the Athenians confiscated Charmides' property in 415 and sentenced him to death *in absentia* for his alleged involvement in the profanation of the mysteries; what property they actually returned to him after they recanted that sentence in 407 seems to have been significantly diminished (cf. Debra Nails, pp. 91-2).

compete in an athletic contest,⁸¹ of personal risks to be weighed against the prospect of shame in such matters! Furthermore, Socrates assures Charmides that there is no more danger and no more shame in presenting his political views in public than there is in private on the grounds that the Assembly is made up of harmless ignoramuses whose ridicule is not worth considering. Surely it was unlikely that Charmides, whose property was taken from him by the Athenians and who dared not return home for many years lest they kill him, would fail to appreciate the true strength of the *demos*! Finally, would not ridding Charmides of his awe of the opinion of the *demos* significantly weaken Socrates' effort to shame him into taking part in the city's affairs?

Most striking of all, however, is the apparent hypocrisy of Socrates' criticism of Charmides. As someone whose knowledge of political matters seems evident from the advice that he gave, but from no actions that could be attested, Charmides bears no small resemblance to Socrates. In fact, up to the point in the exchange when Charmides admits to being ashamed and afraid of standing before the multitude (III.7.5), one could with justice change the names of "Socrates" and "Charmides," since they both appear to be guilty of the same neglect. After Xenophon has furnished so many examples of how Socrates advised statesmen or would-be statesmen beautifully and censured them correctly (III.1-6), his reader might well judge that Socrates would have been able to preside well in "matters in which it [was] necessary for [him] to participate, since [he was] a citizen" (III.7.2-3), and wonder what prevented Socrates from doing so.⁸² Was it

⁸¹ In Plato's *Theages* Socrates reports that the *daimonion* told him that Charmides should not train to race in the Nemean games as he planned. This he told Charmides, who trained anyway, to his misfortune (Plato, *Theages*, 128e).

⁸² Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 72.

not hypocritical of him to criticize Charmides for hesitating to attend to the city's affairs? Or did Socrates have better justification for abstaining from public life than Charmides had?⁸³ Only from considering the similarity of the two men no less than questioning their differences, and bringing to bear lessons from previous chapters, do the underlying lesson and justifying purpose of this chapter come to light.

If Xenophon did not in his own name say that Socrates witnessed the superiority of Charmides' abilities, one would be tempted to read Socrates' praise as altogether ironic.⁸⁴ However, Xenophon opens the chapter by saying that Socrates saw that Charmides was more able (*δυνατωταρον*) than those who at that time presided over the city. To be sure, this was small praise: one can infer how skillfully the city was managed by examining previous chapters, especially III.5 and III.6; nonetheless, Socrates apparently singled Charmides out as someone who stood a better chance of benefiting the city by taking a hand in its affairs (if only he were made willing to stand before the Assembly) than those who were in fact handling them.

When asked, Charmides readily admitted to holding someone soft and cowardly who was competent to win athletic contests – and thereby gain honor for himself and reputation for his fatherland – but nevertheless did not want to compete (III.7.1). Socrates' next question, however, put Charmides on guard: asked whether someone would plausibly be held a coward who was able to benefit the city but nevertheless

⁸³ Cf. Socrates' response to Antiphon's question how he could claim to know anything about politics without himself engaging in the city's affairs (I.6.15).

⁸⁴ Consider how Socrates was wont to say that he knew Pericles had sought out every available source of knowledge about ruling soldiers well (though Pericles admitted that he had not), and that he knew Glaucon knew about the Athenian guard posts and how long domestic produce could sustain the Athenians (though Glaucon admitted ignorance of these things).

hesitated to do so – though he might thereby gain honor for himself⁸⁵ – Charmides allowed that such a person might be held cowardly, but wished to know the point of the question. Socrates says he thought Charmides hesitated to attend to the city's affairs though he was able, and though citizenship placed a necessity upon him. Charmides was surprised to hear Socrates credit him with political ability, and asked in what sort of work Socrates had observed it. Socrates pointed to certain private associations between Charmides and those who did in fact practice politics, in which he had witnessed Charmides advising beautifully and blaming correctly. Charmides modestly objected that there is much difference between private conversation and competing amidst the multitude (i.e., speaking before the Assembly), implying that Socrates' observations were insufficient evidence of his political ability. (The absence of evidence of his ability would ostensibly repudiate the implication that he was cowardly for hesitating to attend to the city's affairs.) Socrates diffused this objection by pointing out that someone able to count does so just as well amidst the multitude as alone, and those who play cithara best alone also play best amidst the multitude (III.7.1-4).

The principle behind Socrates' rebuttal recalls the teasing to which he subjected the companion whom he sent to Dionysodorus to learn the art of generalship (III.1.4). The companion, he said, was a general simply by knowing the art, though he had not been elected, just as someone who knows how to play the cithara is a cithara player whether or not he happens to be playing an instrument. It is presumably according to

⁸⁵ Socrates is silent on the prospect of enhancing the reputation of the fatherland through benefiting the city. This may imply that what is beneficial to the city may not always enhance the reputation of the fatherland, or vice-versa.

the same principle that a cithara player should play just as well amidst the multitude as by himself (if in fact this is the case): knowledge alone makes him the player that he is. However, just as Socrates' teasing remark was small comfort to the companion, who likely wished not only for knowledge but also for public recognition, Socrates' rebuttal of Charmides' objection ignores the important role that recognition plays in certain matters, such as politics. The accuracy of a given counter is unmistakable to everyone, and the excellence of a given cithara player nearly so. The ability of a ruler and the desirability of obeying a given person, however, are not so transparent (cf. III.3.10, III.4 as a whole).

Socrates imputes knowledge of how to rule, the necessary condition for being a ruler, to Charmides. Perhaps this is the respect in which Charmides surpasses those who currently attend to the city's affairs. But while Socrates may sometimes claim that knowledge alone makes a ruler, he also implicitly acknowledges that more is required for someone to rule *well*: an adaptable character (III.1.6); aptitude at procuring resources on behalf of the army or the city (III.4.6, 11; 6.14); and most importantly in this context, the ability to speak persuasively, even to a multitude, about whom it is better to obey (III.3.9-11). Charmides might have diffused Socrates' rebuttal by pointing to the last of these requirements and forswearing the ability to meet it. As it turns out, however, in his thinking the salient difference between private speaking and public speaking lies not in rhetorical skill but rather in the heightened feelings of shame (*αἰδώς*) and fear (*φοβός*) that a human being is apt to suffer when standing before the multitude (III.7.5).

The reason behind Charmides' hesitation to attend to the city's affairs suggests a solution to one of the chapter's puzzles, namely, how the story of Socrates' encouraging someone who apparently did not spontaneously seek political honors belongs in this section of the *Memorabilia*. Socrates claims to have formed his judgment about Charmides' political ability from having overheard him advise beautifully and blame fittingly in private conversations with statesmen about the city's affairs. These activities indicate that Charmides was not indifferent to the handling of the affairs of the city. He was willing to venture his thoughts, judgments, and opinions in certain company with a view to affecting changes and influencing decisions in the political arena, provided he could do so while remaining invisible to the multitude and their scrutiny, of which he was in awe from shame and fear. If being competent to benefit the city belongs among the beautiful things (cf. III.6.2), then Charmides turns out to have yearned for the beautiful things after all, though his ambition was kept in check by shame and fear of public speaking. But how did Socrates benefit this man, whose case was in many respects similar to his own?⁸⁶

Overlooking other important differences between conversing in private and persuading the public (which Charmides did not mention), Socrates attempted to diffuse Charmides' shame and fear of the Assembly – or rather to eliminate them as factors to be considered in the discussion – by rousing his contempt for the private individuals that made it up. He explained that Charmides essentially felt shame and fear before the

⁸⁶ Passion, not prudence, kept Charmides from the public eye. Socrates, by contrast, was unashamed and fearless even before the multitude, as is perfectly evident from his behavior preceding and during the trial for his life. That is why one could not with justice change the names of Socrates and Charmides after this point in the chapter.

senseless and the weak (e.g., the fullers, shoemakers, carpenters, smiths, farmers, merchants, and retailers who constituted the many) even though he was evidently unashamed before the most sensible, and fearless of the strongest (those who had first place in the city, with whom he conversed in private). Recalling the comparison with athletic contests, Socrates asked whether this behavior was any different “from fearing the amateurs even though one prevails over those who are in training?” (III.7.7). On the one hand, Socrates persisted, Charmides easily conversed with those who had first place, some of whom despised him, and he was superior to those who were attentive to conversing with the city;⁸⁷ but on the other hand he hesitated, fearing ridicule, to speak amongst those who never even thought about politics and who did not despise him (III.7.5-7). After pointing out the individual weakness of the members of the Assembly, Socrates no longer addresses Charmides’ fear but focuses exclusively on his shame and aversion to ridicule.

Charmides answered these questions and assertions by returning to the question whether knowledge is sufficient for political efficacy. Socrates seemed to him to be saying that someone capable of giving sound political advice in private among those who were more sensible of such matters should be confident that his advice might prevail also in public where the judges were amateurs. But, Charmides asked, didn’t Socrates see that those amateurs who made up the Assembly often ridiculed even those who spoke correctly? (And therefore might not Charmides’ shame be justified?) Socrates countered that in fact even those who were sensible of political matters, with

⁸⁷ It is in keeping with his rhetorical denial of any difference between public speaking and conversing in private that Socrates uses the word “converse” (*διαλεγω*) here to describe public persuasion.

whom Charmides conversed in private, sometimes ridiculed those who spoke correctly. Therefore Socrates wondered how Charmides, who handled the ridicule of statesmen with ease, was unable to find a way to approach the amateurs of the Assembly (III.7.8).

One point stands out from Socrates' advice. Some of the statesmen with whom Charmides conversed in private despised him (III.7.7), and even ridiculed him (III.7.8). Taking this fact together with Socrates' favorable judgment of Charmides' political ability, a solution to the puzzle as to why Socrates would encourage Charmides to take a more direct hand in political affairs begins to take shape. Charmides gave sound advice and blamed correctly about political matters in private conversation with those who were attentive to speaking to the multitude. But some of these same statesmen nevertheless despised and ridiculed him. Charmides' sound political ability was ineffectual in the democracy because he hesitated to compete with those who were first in the city in the only arena in which they might be overcome, that is, before the Assembly. In other words, his sound political advice fell on dead ears as long as it lacked popular support, and it would lack popular support for as long as he neglected so much as to utter it in the public forum.⁸⁸ Supposing Socrates also esteemed Charmides' persuasive ability, perhaps he encouraged him in part so as to promote the voice of wisdom in the political arena.

By the same token, however, it was before the Assembly that the statesmen whom Charmides presumably opposed also had strength. One need not have been sentenced to death by the Athenians, have had one's property confiscated by them, or

⁸⁸ One might infer from the demagogues' contempt for Charmides something about the spirit in which the general in III.2 reacted to Socrates' harangue.

have heard about the trial and execution of the generals after the battle of Arginousae to understand the threat posed by the many taken together. Furthermore, though Socrates suppressed this fact, the Assembly was composed not merely of artisans, merchants, and retailers, but also included the few demagogues who presented it with targets for its approval and its wrath—those whose ridicule Charmides endured in private where it had no teeth. As long as Charmides could not make himself “popular” in the democracy, his fear of addressing the multitude was therefore somewhat justified. Perhaps this was why Socrates focused far more on diffusing Charmides’ shame.

Socrates concluded his advice to Charmides with an exhortation of three parts: to care about self-knowledge; to avoid what the many do, meddling in the affairs of others before first seeing to their own; and not to neglect the city’s affairs if Charmides could improve them, for, with these things “having beauty,” not only the other citizens but also Charmides’ friends and he himself would benefit (III.7.9). These exhortations reveal several things about Socrates’ view of Charmides, which may be listed as follows:

- 1) Charmides lacks self-knowledge, particularly about whether or not he might be an effective statesman in the democracy.
- 2) And yet he would nevertheless deign to meddle in the affairs of others without aspiring to the potential honors or exposing himself to the potential scandals of the public contest in the democracy.
- 3) Perhaps most importantly, Charmides evidently needs reminding that his welfare and that of his friends might align with the welfare of the multitude.

As Xenophon's intended readers were no doubt aware, Charmides did finally manage to take a direct hand in the city's affairs only after it became possible for him to do so without answering to the multitude—when the Spartans imposed an oligarchic interim government on Athens following the Peloponnesian War. This fact impels us to consider the statesmen with whom Charmides conversed in private about the affairs of the city who did *not* despise him, and also his “friends,” to the welfare of whom Socrates refers in his concluding advice. Did these statesmen and friends belong to the party favoring an oligarchic government?⁸⁹ Do the policies of the regime known as the “Thirty Tyrants” inform us somewhat about the content of some of Charmides' private discussions? Certainly Charmides' sympathies toward oligarchic government might account somewhat for his shyness toward publishing his views before the democratic Assembly.

The above considerations suggest a solution to yet another of the chapter's puzzles, namely, why Xenophon did not observe his customary silence on a matter of such controversy, but instead volunteered the story of how Socrates once encouraged the infamous Charmides to engage publicly in the affairs of the city. Perhaps Socrates did so not only to promote wisdom in the political arena, but also to compel Charmides to moderate his partisan allegiances, which courting the favor of the Assembly would require him to do.

Given the problematic character of Socrates' encouragement, however (its likelihood to call Charmides' attention to cautionary experiences, and the cross purposes of Socrates' shaming him into action on the one hand, and diffusing his

⁸⁹ Cf. McNamara, p. 239.

feelings of shame on the other), it is difficult to judge how far Socrates wished or expected his advice to carry Charmides toward thoroughgoing public engagement with the city's affairs. Perhaps he did not wish to encourage him without also warning him not to become too deeply involved in what were, after all, dangerous undertakings. Or perhaps he considered ironically praising Charmides' political abilities, and drawing his attention to the purpose for the privacy of some of his conversations, sufficient warning of the imprudence of his partisan dealings.

These allusions to Charmides' partisanship also shed light on the final puzzle – the apparent hypocrisy of Socrates' censure of Charmides. It is odd of Socrates to censure Charmides for holding back from the public fray because of course he did not enter it himself. The considerations that held Socrates back from direct involvement in the democratic government, however, were different from the fear and shame that held back Charmides. Socrates knew well that it is one thing to converse beautifully in private so as to "have the most understanding of the most serious things," and quite another to be able to teach and persuade the public (III.3.10-11). If he was not confident of his ability to move the Assembly to follow his advice under any circumstances,⁹⁰ and unwilling to compromise his fidelity to what he understood to be best, he would have regarded it as imprudent to risk provoking the Assembly's displeasure by frequent, ineffectual public entreaty. This presented no problem for Socrates, because for the same reason that he was indifferent to the prospect of public ridicule (not to say

⁹⁰ His inability to restrain the Assembly at the trial of the generals of Arginousae is proof enough that he could not.

enmity),⁹¹ he would have been insensible to and unmoved by acquiring an unmanly reputation for having neglected to engage directly in the city's affairs.⁹²

However great his political wisdom, without a fool-proof means of persuading a multitude, Socrates would not have been politically efficacious so long as he was answerable to the Assembly and its caprice. Charmides and his ultimate fate therefore stand as a warning of the private and the public cost that a politically engaged Socrates, to be at all efficacious, would have to exact. The ruler who is unable (or, in Charmides' case perhaps, unwilling) to persuade the public must have recourse to force. Charmides' later history illustrates the disadvantages and injustices of that alternative. The chapter that apparently shows Socrates to be rash, therefore, actually stands as a testament to his moderation and justice.

H. Xenophon's Socrates

In Plato's writing the reasoning behind certain practical details of Socrates' citizenship – his turn to political philosophy, the limits he imposed on himself regarding civic involvement, and the nature of his benefaction and civic contribution – must be inferred and extracted from the context of his philosophical activities as presented in the dialogues. In Xenophon's writing, by contrast, the reverse is the case. Xenophon represents Socrates' theoretical understanding of how to rule, and intimates some of Socrates' reasons for refraining from political affairs himself,

⁹¹ Cf. *Euthyphro*, 3d-e.

⁹² Xenophon's Socrates frequently swears, "By Hera!"—an unmanly oath.

only gradually, in parts revealed under various circumstances from practical advice he gave to various people. It can be reconstructed in broad strokes as follows.

According to Xenophon's Socrates, knowledge is a necessary condition for being a ruler—a general, for example. In fact, knowledge is a sufficient condition for simply *being* a general. It is not, however, sufficient for doing well; one requires additional qualities of character and understanding to become a good ruler. Moreover, one cannot rule well without justice; and ruling with justice demands that one place the good of those whom one rules before one's own private good. That is why it would be difficult – not to say impossible⁹³ – to find anything more beautiful than ruling human beings.

Even flexibility of character and understanding is not enough: a good ruler must also be able to persuade others who are ignorant both that he knows these things and that it is therefore safer and more beautiful to obey him than anyone else. Because a ruler addresses many human beings together, he must be skilled at speaking so as to produce agreement without understanding; it is not enough simply to converse beautifully in private.

But skill at speaking to crowds so as to produce agreement without understanding can be disjoined, at least for a time, from actual political prudence; in the eyes of many, what appears beautiful and honorable, and worthy of obedience, may be disjoined from what is in fact best. As a result, many of those the Athenians have chosen to be generals and political leaders have not even known how to rule, but simply extemporized. Because part of the task of the general is to see to the condition of the soldiers, this tendency has resulted in Athenian decadence, even in

⁹³ Cf. Strauss, *XS*, p. 59.

the ranks of the military. The worst sort of extemporizing, ignorant, aspiring Athenian ruler knows nothing of the city's revenues and expenditures, her relative military strength, what is needful to be done with outposts, why the silver mines produce less than previously, and most importantly, for how long the Athenians could subsist off of domestic produce.

There is a natural penalty, it seems, for obeying over a long time anyone other than the one who knows best what should be done; there is a natural penalty for persuading others to obey before acquiring the requisite knowledge. That is why "Those who have good reputations and are admired come from those who have the most understanding, while those who have bad reputations and are held in contempt come from the most ignorant" (III.6.17). A ruler must know his business before taking action, and it is better to practice and test oneself first on what is smaller, before attempting greater things. This allows time to consider what one desires, what is required to obtain it, and whether what is required is something one possesses or can acquire through study. By conversing with the ambitious about such things, Socrates benefited them individually by raising their awareness of the difficulties they faced and starting on the path to resolving them (or ultimately, perhaps, avoiding them altogether by turning to different pursuits); and of course he benefited the city by preventing the unworthy, or the yet-to-become-worthy rulers from sinking her further into decadence.

Even Socrates' encouragement of possibly worthy political actors contained a kernel of warning. The political wisdom available to human beings is not inconsiderable, but there is no guarantee that wisdom will prevail in the political

arena. If ruling consenting human beings requires producing agreement without imparting knowledge, then in a democracy the best speaker determines what is to be done; but there is no guarantee that the most prudent will always be the best speaker, and therefore the statesman who champions prudence might have a difficult and possibly hazardous career in democratic Athens. The alternatives to persuading the many are either using force, to which Charmides and Critias eventually resorted; or, as was Socrates' way, attempting to disseminate political wisdom as widely as possible through private associations.

Socrates held that there is only a quantitative, not a qualitative, difference between ruling a household and ruling an army or a city. If others held there to be a qualitative difference, it is because the latter are more perilous than the former. Love of honor, ambition, consists of wishing to be recognized for excellence. There are ways to be recognized, and ways of being at the forefront of men, however, that are neither beautiful nor good. Therefore, if it is reasonable to desire what is good for oneself, then a reasonable human being faced with the precarious character of public life might well be content rather to rule himself and his household well. Socrates' manner of conversing with others about their political ambitions was not incompatible with their eventually turning away from these, and discovering others perhaps less dangerous and no less pleasant.

CONCLUSION

Being in a state of ignorance regarding general prescriptions for the improvement of the human soul – its good condition, what sort of therapy improves it, and what corrupts it – does not remove the powerful need human beings feel for a means of securing virtue and happiness; nor does it prevent them from making certain attempts, and occasionally pretending to the knowledge they lack. The very laws by which human beings learn how to live are a testament to that. If Socrates, to the extent that he made progress in acquiring that most needful knowledge, did not discover it to be of a sort commensurate with popular desires and expectations, nonetheless he did contrive a means of rendering his philosophical activities beneficial to his fellow citizens. In discussion justice and making speeches every day about virtue, Socrates probed what sort of requirements a general art of the human good would have to fulfill, what sort of desires motivate efforts to discover it, what sort of alternatives or second-sailings are in fact available, and to what sort of excesses human beings might be prone as a result of their ignorance about such matters. Accepting the necessity of his place in the city, he nevertheless aspired to – and reached – a better understanding of these matters than the city's traditions could supply.

To be sure, the Athenians ultimately misunderstood Socrates and the benefit he conferred on them. There were many reasons for this: learning that what one has taken for happiness or the means of securing it is no such thing can trigger resentment toward the one who points this out;¹ and those who love honor and find it in garnering a reputation for benefiting others might envy anyone who detracts from that reputation, either by appearing to compete or by exposing their deficiencies.² However, if Socrates did not deliver to the Athenians the happiness they believed they wanted, nevertheless by awakening them to the problematic nature of their desires and opinions he endeavored to remove certain obstacles to their achieving at least some sort of contented life.

And of course, as the cases of Plato and Xenophon testify, he was sometimes able to do far more. Through his own example Socrates demonstrated that, when traditional channels prove insufficient to provide knowledge of what makes the soul better, improving the soul coincides with making progress in the search for such knowledge. And where a general art or science of politics and the human good might be unavailable, there is nevertheless much progress a human being can make in prudence.

¹ Cf. *Republic* 516e ff.

² Cf. *Apology* as a whole; *Hipparchus* 228b ff.

LIST OF REFERENCES

1. Benardete, Seth (2002). *Encounters and Reflections*. Ed. Ronna Burger. University of Chicago.
2. Blits, Jan H. (1985). "Socratic Teaching and Justice: Plato's *Cleitophon*". Reprinted in *Plato's Cleitophon: On Socrates and the Modern Mind*. Ed. Mark Kremer. Lexington Books (2004): pp. 71-85. [Originally in *Interpretation: A Journal of Political Philosophy* 13 (1985): pp. 323-33.]
3. Bonnette, Amy L. (1994). Trans. Xenophon: *Memorabilia*. Cornell University.
4. Burger, Ronna (2008). *Aristotle's Dialogue with Socrates*. University of Chicago.
5. Bruell, Christopher (1999). *On the Socratic Education: An Introduction to the Shorter Platonic Dialogues*. Rowman& Littlefield.
6. Bruell, Christopher (1987). "On the Original Meaning of Political Philosophy: An Interpretation of Plato's *Lovers*" in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*. Ed. Thomas L. Pangle. Cornell: pp. 91-110.
7. Davis, Michael (1985). "Philosophy and the Perfect Tense: Plato's *Lovers*" *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal* vol. 10 (Winter 1985), p. 75-97.
8. Davis, Michael (2011). *The Soul of the Greeks: An Inquiry*. University of Chicago.
9. Kremer, Mark (2004). "Socratic Philosophy and the *Cleitophon*" in *Plato's Cleitophon: On Socrates and the Modern Mind*. Ed. Mark Kremer. Lexington Books.

10. Lambe, W. R. M. (1927, 55). "Introduction to *The Lovers*" in *Plato, With an English Translation*, Volume VIII. Harvard University, William Heinemann LTD.: pp. 308-11.
11. Leake, James (1987). Trans. *Lovers [or, On Philosophy]* in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*. Ed. Thomas L. Pangle. Cornell: pp. 80-90.
12. McNamara, Carol (2009). "Socratic Politics in the *Memorabilia*" in *Polis* 26.2: pp. 221-45.
13. Nails, Debra (2002). *The People of Plato, A Prosopography of Plato and Other Socratics*. Hackett Publishing. Indianapolis.
14. Orwin, Clifford (1982). "On the Cleitophon". Reprinted in *Plato's Cleitophon: On Socrates and the Modern Mind*. Ed. Mark Kremer. Lexington Books (2004): pp. 59-70. [Also reprinted in *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues*, ed. Thomas L. Pangle, Cornell (1987): pp.117-131. Originally "The Case Against Socrates: Plato's *Cleitophon*". In *Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15:4 (December 1982): pp. 741-53.]
15. Roochnik, David L. (1984). "The Riddle of the Cleitophon" in *Plato's Cleitophon: On Socrates and the Modern Mind*. Ed. Mark Kremer. Lexington Books (2004). [Originally in *Ancient Philosophy* 4 (1984): pp. 132-45.]
16. Roochnik, David L. (1986). "Socrates' Use of the Techne-Analogy" in *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*. Ed. Hugh H. Benson. Oxford (1992). [Originally in *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 24:3 (1986): pp. 295-310.]
17. Russell, Bertrand (1945, 61). *History of Western Philosophy*. London. Allen and Unwin.
18. Slings. S. R. (1999). *Plato: Clitophon*. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries. Cambridge.
19. Strauss, Leo (2000). *On Tyranny*. Revised and Expanded Edition. Ed. Victor Gourevitch and Michael S. Roth. University of Chicago.
20. Strauss, Leo (1998). *Xenophon's Socrates*. St. Augustine's.

21. Strauss, Leo (1989). *The Rebirth of Classical Political Rationalism*. University of Chicago.
22. Strauss, Leo (1970). *Xenophon's Socratic Discourse: An Interpretation of the Oeconomicus*. Cornell.
23. Velkley, Richard L. (2011). *Heidegger, Strauss, and the Premises of Philosophy: On Original Forgetting*. University of Chicago.