

## IV

### Socrates and Some Socratic Successors

#### 1. THE LIFE OF SOCRATES

*Alcibiades*: Well, gentlemen, I propose to begin my eulogy of Socrates with a simile. I expect he'll think I'm making fun of him, but, as it happens, I'm using this particular simile not because it's funny, but because it's true. What he reminds me of more than anything is one of those little Sileni that you see on the statuaries' stalls: you know the ones I mean—they're modeled with pipes or flutes in their hands, and when you open them down the middle there are little figures of the gods inside.

Plato, *Symposium* 215ab

**Socrates of Athens (470–399)**<sup>1</sup> was born about ten years after the battle of Salamis, in which the Athenians and their allies had destroyed the Persian fleet. His family, despite his own protestations of poverty,

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<sup>1</sup>The chief evidence for Socrates, who wrote nothing, is found in the dialogues of Plato. Due to the survival of these dialogues, we know more about Socrates's life than that of any other ancient philosopher. In most of these Socrates is the chief character, but unfortunately Plato does not make it obvious when this character is presenting the historic Socrates's views and when he is presenting views of Plato at variance with the historic Socrates. (Throughout the dialogues Socrates represents philosophy, dialectical argument, itself, and so Plato holds on to the character even when he no longer puts Socratic views in his mouth. 'The Socrates,' as Aristotle puts it, may not have Socrates's views, but he never deviates from a complete commitment, in the Socratic style, to philosophical investigation.) We get a lot of help with this from Aristotle, who must have known the truth of the matter, for in his works he clearly uses Plato's dialogues to identify Plato's doctrines and the reasons Plato held them, and identifies the chief dialogues in which Plato's views are presented by the character Socrates (which he refers to as 'the Socrates'), and he clearly identifies the chief Socratic doctrines and opposes them to Plato's, identifying several dialogues in which Socrates (referred to as 'Socrates') speaks for himself rather than Plato. Stylistic studies of the dialogues have also helped date them, and sometimes one dialogue refers to another. All in all, opinion on the chronological order of the dialogues, and on which dialogues represent Socratic doctrines, is largely settled now. (See Irwin (1995) Ch. 1 for a good summary of the arguments.) Following current opinion, the earliest dialogues, which present Socrates's views and reflect his methods, are the *Apology*, *Charmides*, *Euthyphro*, *Hippias Minor*, *Ion*, *Laches*, and the slightly later *Euthydemus*, *Lysis*, *Hippias Major*, and *Menexenus* (Vlastos (1983)). When Plato wrote these works he seems to have accepted Socratic views. The *Protagoras*, *Gorgias* and the *Meno* put a capstone on this group of dialogues. Longer and more complex, they present crucial objections to Socrates's views, and defenses against those objections in the spirit of Socratic teaching, though they go beyond that teaching, or even contradict it, where it seems necessary. All three dialogues look forward to certain doctrines in the *Republic* which are put in the mouths of Socrates's Sophistic opponents, presumably because they could not be attributed to Socrates and represented something to which Socrates must somehow respond. This is all in preparation for the presentation of Plato's own views in his later work, views developed out of Socrates's thought, but now significantly and intelligently at variance with it. The *Crito* is normally included in the Socratic group, and almost all the views in it are Socratic, but I believe it belongs with Plato's middle dialogues for reasons I shall explain. For Socrates's life and thought we have, in addition to Plato and Aristotle, Xenophon's Socratic works, some comedies by Aristophanes and a few random remarks elsewhere. Xenophon is anxious to present a Socrates that will offend no one, and this deliberately uncontroversial Socrates is not to be preferred to that of Plato and Aristotle. The secondary literature on Socrates is very extensive, and, as usual, I cite only those items that have significantly influenced my own views. General works on Socrates from which I have learned much are Guthrie's *History* III (1969) and IV (1975), Vlastos (1971a), (1983) and Irwin (1977) and (1995), Santas (1979), Kraut (1984), Benson (1992), Penner (1992), Brickhouse and Smith (1994), and most especially Vlastos (1991). A very nice piece reconstructing Socrates's life in the context of Athenian politics is Nails (2009). I find I can make very little historical sense of the work of Leo Strauss and other Continental writers on Socrates, so my views are developed predominantly from the "Analytic" tradition, rooted in the work of Gregory Vlastos.

seems both to have been of some antiquity and to have enjoyed some prosperity, for he was able to afford the arms of a heavy infantryman, and was not relegated to the light infantry, or service as an oarsman in the fleet. Probably he was poor only in comparison to his aristocratic friends, though, characteristically, he made a standing joke of his poverty. He inherited upper class connections from his father, and was intimate with members of the Periclean circle. Late in life he married Xanthippe, whose name<sup>2</sup> suggests she was of good family, and had three sons by her, the eldest of whom was in his teens when his father was executed, at the age of seventy-one. Plato's *Phaedo* reports that Xanthippe, with the children, had been with Socrates from very early in the morning when his friends arrived for the discussion, and she spent time with him again just before the execution. She wept, observing that this would be the last time Socrates could talk with his friends. Probably the stories of her shrewishness, which receive no support from Plato or Xenophon, were a later invention, a plausible misogynist deduction from Socrates's supposed poverty and remarks in Plato's *Republic* about how the inevitable poverty of a virtuous man draws contempt from his family.

Though our sources may exaggerate, Socrates was notoriously ugly, with a pot belly, pug nose, pop eyes and 'pelican gait', and he made a joke of his appearance. At the performance of one of Aristophanes's comedies in which he cut a figure, he stood up so the audience could compare the character's mask to his actual face.<sup>3</sup> In manner, Socrates was said to be 'eiron', that is, sly or canny, a word suggesting sophistry as well as the concealment of one's true views. He was indeed ironic, going by Plato's dialogues, but not because of a desire to deceive. He resorted to sarcasm when annoyed, but Socratic irony is not to be found there, either. Rather, it occurred when he spoke truths that others might be expected to misinterpret, taking him to be lying or

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<sup>2</sup>'Xanthippe' means 'Yellow horse', and horse names generally indicated an older and richer family that served in the cavalry.

<sup>3</sup>The *Clouds* was performed first in 423 BCE, and presents Socrates as head of an atheistic school of natural philosophy, a purveyor of Sophistic wisdom, and an ascetic moral teacher. The picture of Socrates taking interest in physical doctrines (which in the *Clouds* seem to resemble those of Diogenes of Apollonia, who probably visited Athens around this time) is consistent with the report in *Phaedo* 96a, that Socrates took a keen interest in such things in his younger days, and with the tradition that he learned from Archelaus with whom he studied Anaxagoras. Socrates is not presented taking or asking for fees in the play (though Strepsiades, who is sent by his father to learn Unjust Argument from him, tells his father that he does!), and he and his students are depicted as impoverished, ill exercised and unwashed. Moreover, Socrates himself leaves the stage when Unjust Argument appears, and does not himself teach it. So the play seems to suggest a picture of Socrates that fits Plato, with Socrates's students, perhaps those who are corrupt already, adopting Unjust Argument, but not with Socrates's approbation or instruction. Remarks in the *Apology* would support this picture of Socrates's reputation being harmed by the behavior of his students, and the issue of the teacher's effects on his students is clearly on his mind in Plato's early and middle dialogues. Similar use of Socrates as a stock character occurs in others of Aristophanes's plays as well. It is well to remember that Aristophanes was a contemporary of Socrates, and by repute a friend, while Plato and Xenophon were both some 40 years or more younger. At the time of Socrates's trial, the freedom of expression of Periclean democracy was a thing of the past, and the memories of the comic atheist with his amoral students presented in Aristophanes had taken on a darker meaning for many. For Socrates and Aristophanes, Donald Morrison, "Socrates," Ch. 6 of Gill and Pellegrin (2006).

indulging in sarcasm.<sup>4</sup> Socratic irony is akin to that dramatic irony in which the audience understands the meaning or implication of the action or words, but the actors in the drama, due to some flaw of character, do not. This was a common device in Athenian tragedy, and Socratic irony was deliberately modeled on it, both by Socrates himself, and by Plato in his dialogues. Consider, in Sophocles's play, Oedipus's curse on whoever it was that had murdered the King—the audience realizes he is in fact cursing himself, but Oedipus does not, nor does any other character in the play except for the seer Teiresias. Moreover, the blindness of Oedipus to the meaning of his action is, in the end, due to a certain deficiency of character. Like a number of victims of Socratic irony, in the pride of his own supposed wisdom he simply will not understand, or own up to his own irrational passions. Similarly, when Socrates said he knew nothing about any matter of real importance, someone, especially a person proud of his own extensive knowledge, might take this to mean that Socrates was confident of none of his views, or that he had made no examination of the matter, or knew less than others about it. None of this would be true, and none of it followed from his assertion that he knew nothing about fine matters. Like the god at Delphi, Socrates took such misinterpretations of what he had said in all earnestness to be the fault of the hasty and inaccurate thinking of his auditor, thinking rooted in a flawed character, and he did not consider that he had a duty to straighten out anyone who asked no further questions. Further questions here would have revealed that he *also* thought that no one else knew anything of importance, that no amount of investigation would provide us with such knowledge, but that confidence was reasonable, even in the absence of such knowledge, as long as one's views on important matters were well tested and seemed adequate to experience. Further questions to the god at Delphi, who had declared that "no one is wiser than Socrates," would have revealed that he was commenting, not on Socrates's wisdom, but the ignorance of humanity in general.<sup>5</sup> What Socrates says is commonly true enough, but not in the way it is likely to be understood by those lacking in subtlety or humility.

But to be fair to his interlocutors, it must be noted that Socrates's claim that he knows nothing might well mislead someone engaged in ordinary conversation who was subject to no easily identifiable vice, for when

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<sup>4</sup>For Socrates's irony, see Vlastos (1987), and Vlastos (1991), Ch. 1.

<sup>5</sup>*Apology* 21a–22e. (This the standard way of referring to a text in Plato. It refers to the edition in 1578 of Plato's works by Henri Etienne in Paris, giving the page number and a letter occurring in the margin to enable more precise reference. So it refers to "Stephanus pages," "Stephanus" being the Latin for Etienne (Stephen). This pagination is reproduced in the margin of scholarly editions of the dialogues, so that anyone can find the passage, no matter what edition or translation they may have in hand.) Socrates even allows here that many craftsmen have a certain wisdom in their own crafts, but this does not mean they know anything about more important matters, like the nature of or the way to the best life or the best political arrangements.

one says “I know nothing of any importance,” we would interpret him, following ordinary rules of implicature, to mean that this was *informative about him*, so that it marked a distinction between him and other people, so that others *do* know things of importance. Here one might reply, though, that the nature of the discussion should make one wary of such ordinary rules of implicature, and one could always ask what he means, though a prideful person might find that humiliating. More deeply, a criticism of the ordinary rules might be implied—if we are really to understand, we can’t afford to presuppose as much as we usually do without examination. To question or suspend the conversational implications of what one has said is parallel to being skeptical about our unexamined assumptions, and a philosopher needs to do that. It can be hard for a philosopher to say what he wants to without being misinterpreted if others insist on assuming he means what seems to them to follow from what he has said, or to explain it, even though he has not said these things. “Do you mean . . .” should be a frequently occurring phrase in any philosophical discussion, given how often ordinary rules of conversational implicature fail in them.

Socrates’s claim to divine communication may well have been similarly ironic, for it might suggest voices from the gods to the more superstitious (such as Euthyphro in Plato’s dialogue of that name), but a mere reluctance *could* be a divine sign, as any Greek would know, and given Socrates’s unorthodox picture of the gods as perfectly benevolent, wise and ethical, a reluctance rooted in moral misgivings would be a divine sign for him, arising from what was divine within him, that he ought not to do the thing. This means that a philosopher might use irony to protect himself from those who would be angry with what he is saying, while still saying it. We shall find the technique characteristic not only of some philosophers, but of some periods of philosophical thought, most particularly European thought in the 16<sup>th</sup> through the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Plato’s use of myth to express philosophical truths symbolically, though it is apparently intended to be taken literally by the unphilosophical, and the adoption of this technique by less orthodox religious thinkers as well as philosophers to get along with the theologically more conservative, is a related practice. But irony is implicitly critical of the person likely to be taken in by it (who perhaps generally is not even present), and expects those who understand to see through it, while the use of myth to express esoteric notions is *not* always critical of the person taken in by it. If it is, then we are dealing with a theological liberal who has a certain disdain for popular theological notions, though he may think it dangerous or unwise to contradict them directly. But it may not be, for it might not expect the philosophical truth the myth expresses to be all that it expresses. Unlike the ironist, the theologian may take it that there is something inexpressible in literal speech, not amenable to being dealt with in dialectic or argument, which is expressed in the myth, and perhaps also, as if it were myth, hinted

at in the literal philosophical truth. Usually he will take it that this truth is more important than any philosophical truth that might be debated by scholastic theologians. Later readers, especially Christians, often took Plato to be involved in the theologian's practice, and this produces a certain interpretation of what Plato meant that will be important to us when we get to these later readers, but we shall see it is best to assume that Plato engaged in the more severe, philosophical sort of irony, and thought that whatever could be meant, could, and should, be examined through dialectic and reason. So Plato used myth to help those who had not attained (and perhaps could not attain) a rational understanding.

Socrates's irony risked misunderstanding, and when misunderstanding occurs in the Platonic dialogues, he allows it to stand. But why? Was he playing with his young men, or protecting himself? Perhaps, but he also attached the utmost importance to their coming to the truth of themselves. He would discuss important matters with them, searching out objections to their views, and insist that they hazard conjectures on these matters and try to work out the truth, but he would not tell them what to think, and this often meant that he could not tell them what *he* thought, at least not in any straightforward manner. They would make too much of his authority if he did. Moreover, if they misinterpreted what he said because of their own presuppositions, Socrates would not straighten them out, except by deepening their confusion when he pointed out the absurd consequences of such a misinterpretation. We must learn ourselves how much our reactions arise from our own stubborn presuppositions, and teach ourselves not to read into a belief what only follows from further assumptions. This is one piece of self-knowledge to be derived from the experience of Socrates's repeated refutations. In the end, Socrates is convinced that only in this way can we really learn.

It has been suggested that Socratic irony betrayed a lack of charity. He was not willing to help others out of their perplexity. But if so, it betrays a certain robust respect for others' self-determination as well, and along with the conviction that people have to think through things themselves goes a certain optimism and favorable opinion of others' fundamental ability. Perhaps it even reflects his humility, for Socrates was unwilling to teach dogmatically what he knew might not even be true. Plato, Socrates's famous student, is perhaps more compassionate and willing to help when he proposes all sorts of non-intellectual means of "instruction" (including religious indoctrination with a suitable mythology, backed up with straightforward appeal to authority) in the *Republic* and the *Laws*, suitable even for that vast majority of people unable to arrive at the truth through dialectic, or to live with the tension of an incomplete grasp of the truth. Moreover, he seems to lay out in the clear a positive view as to what the best state is, so that we don't have to puzzle it out for ourselves. But the non-intellectual indoctrination here could be viewed as cynical, and controlling, in

particular since the ideal state bans myths that convey the wrong message, or, in the *Laws*, banishes atheists. It seems Plato doesn't trust us to arrive at the right answers ourselves, and does not want the wrong answers even discussed by anyone other than the philosophers who are to dictate our views. This is, one supposes, the rather stiff price of his compassion for those who cannot figure it out. But Plato, or Plato's "Socrates," might himself be ironic in proposing those ideal polities—they are what follows from the values of the upper-class young men in Socrates's audience, not necessarily what Socrates himself would prefer. If we are really committed to philosophical investigation as the road to a good life, would we accept such dogmatic shifts, or perhaps prefer a democracy, the only polity in which Plato allows there is freedom of speech? Perhaps his "ironic" praise of freedom in democracy is doubly ironic. The aristocratic young men, looking for an answer so they no longer have to think, would, of course, fail to see the value in this freedom to do philosophy, if they could only have the truth in its place.

Plato himself, in the *Sophist*, classifies Socrates as a Sophist of a beneficial sort, who leads his students to recognize their own ignorance.

The people who see this [i.e. that their opinions are self-conflicting] get angry with themselves and become gentler toward others; they lose their inflated and rigid beliefs about themselves, and no loss is more pleasant to hear or more long-lasting in effect. Just as doctors who work on the body think that the body cannot benefit from food until the internal obstacles to food are removed, so the purifiers of the soul think that the soul will not benefit from the teachings that are offered to it until someone shames it by refuting and removes the opinions that interfere with learning; thus the soul must be rendered cleansed and in such a state that it believes it knows only those things that it does know, and nothing more.<sup>6</sup>

Perhaps Socrates, had he thought anyone had the necessary teachings to provide the soul, would have seen the matter this way, as well. But he would have expected not merely acquiescence in a new set of opinions, but an understanding why those opinions were better, and he would expect a good student to question his would-be instructor, shaming him if that is what it comes to, to determine if this supposed knowledge was the real item. Socrates, it seems, thought *everyone* needed to inquire, not just those destined to be guardians, for in the world as it is, that is the only way for anyone to avoid error.

But to return to the person of Socrates, our topic at the moment, if we ask what the effects of his irony and sarcastic demeanor were on his personal relations, Socrates had many devoted friends, and most of those who knew him well must have been convinced of his good intentions. But clearly, he could make enemies of

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<sup>6</sup>*Sophist* 230b8-d4.

those more determined to present themselves as moral experts despite their lack of reflection, and apparently he did not mind doing so.

In another instance of irony, Socrates, no homosexual himself, liked to play at mock homosexual love, and often professed to be struck quite witless at the sight of some beautiful young man.<sup>7</sup> Homosexual pederasty among the Greeks was prevalent, at least in the upper classes, because of the custom of guarding their women well, and marrying late, so that a bridegroom would typically be in his thirties. A young man of 15 or so would acquire a mature man, not yet married, as a lover and mentor, though in theory the boy was not supposed to derive any pleasure from the sexual act if it did occur, and a genuinely pure relationship would involve no sex at all. A young man would hope he was attractive, of course, and be disappointed if mature men did not at least flirt with him. No doubt Socrates intended to mock the upper classes and their pretentious love making, and, typical of him, to insist sarcastically on following the hypocritically held picture of ideal pederastic behavior, rather than crude common practice, but he had gentler motives, too, for though he was chiefly interested in philosophical discussion with his young men, they must often have expected romantic interest, or at least a certain erotic appreciation. He wanted to put them off without insulting them, and they could figure out what he really wanted in their own time. Plato, himself a homosexual, took the point, and makes homoerotic love of the honorable sort into what we have come to call Platonic love, directed at the welfare and virtue of the individual in whom we see noble possibilities, rather than sexual fulfilment. The Freudian notion of sublimation is a development from this Platonic approach to love.

According to Plato's *Apology*, when Socrates returned from the battle of Potidiae at the age of thirty-five (in 435 BCE) the Delphic Oracle, questioned by Chaerephon, pronounced him the wisest of men. Socrates himself professed to find the pronouncement ironic, indicating that the wisest of men were those who, like himself, professed to know nothing. But his moral views might have appealed to the oracle, and there may also have been political import, for Delphi favored oligarchy and might have been responding favorably to Socratic criticism of democracy. In any case, Socrates must already have been philosophically active for his views to be known, even though he says it was only at this time that he began to question supposed experts, uncovering their ignorance and incurring their dislike. All this was in service of the god, to establish that the oracle was right, taken quite literally, or else find someone wiser than Socrates who could challenge the oracle

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<sup>7</sup>Those interested in Socrates's approach to homosexuality should look at his response to Alcibiades at the end of the *Symposium*, a young man so convinced of his desirability that he would not believe that Socrates's interest in him did not extend to sex.

and discover its true meaning. Socrates was not going to be caught out as a victim of the irony of the Gods, and he interprets this skeptical care as a form of piety, for he thinks the Gods *intend* us to be careful how we take their ironic deliverances. He states that he would continue questioning his fellow citizens, obeying God rather than the Athenians, even if the court ordered him to desist from his activity. He had an ethical duty to continue his questioning (the God would, of course, command him to perform his ethical duty), a weighty duty that the state could not ethically command him to ignore. The root of the sense of ethical duty would presumably be the nature of human beings as rational agents, so that the state may not make laws against free inquiry into the important issues bearing on the best way to live—that would be contrary to the most essential interests of its citizens as rational beings. The unexamined life is not worth living.<sup>8</sup>

Socrates was said to have studied under Archelaus, Prodicus and Anaxagoras. He seems, from Plato's *Protagoras*, to have been friendly with Prodicus, but not above poking fun at his fussiness about the precise meanings of words. Given Socrates's personality, such behavior does not preclude genuine respect for the man. Prodicus used his distinctions to avoid refutation rooted in equivocation, and Socrates seems to have taken an interest in this aspect of his thinking. Prodicus also told a story about Hercules, at the crossroads of life, deciding between virtue and vice, to propose speeches for vice and virtue to Hercules. Vice promises a life of pleasures, profiting from the hard work and virtue of others, while virtue asserts that the gods given nothing to us, not even pleasure, without toil and effort, that to have friends one must do good for one's friends, and to gain honor a person must do good for those he would have honor him. Virtue's way is the way ordained by the gods. It seems that his ethical convictions were like Socrates's, holding that virtue involved doing good for others, not gaining victories over them, and claimed the gods' support for the virtuous life. One can see why Socrates might have sent him some pupils who did not seem up to Socratic elenchic techniques.<sup>9</sup> The physical thinker Archelaus, too, was a personal acquaintance, but Plato says Socrates knew Anaxagoras not personally, but through his book. The *Phaedo*'s story of an intense early interest in the physical sciences is perhaps intended as typical Socratic sarcasm, for, though we should not doubt that Socrates was well acquainted with all the intellectual movements of his day, he seems to have deliberately avoided forming theories on scientific matters.

Socrates is also associated with various Pythagoreans in Plato's works, most especially Simmias and Cebes, students of Philolaus, who came to Athens with money to aid his escape. (That they are made his

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<sup>8</sup>*Apology* 30a-31a, 36c-37a, 38a.

<sup>9</sup>Xenophon presents Socrates using Prodicus's speech to exhort a companion to virtue.

respondents in the thoroughly Platonic discussion in the *Phaedo* carries very little weight, as that dialogue is not intended to represent Socratic views at all. But fictional as it must be, the discussion is surely set in a framework that is intended to be historically accurate.) In addition, some of Socrates's disciples, including Plato, took temporary refuge with Euclides and Terpsion at Megara after their master's death. (Euclides equated the primal Pythagorean One and the Good.) Socratic thought is more closely related to the Sophists than the Pythagoreans, and for his notion of forms he seems indebted perhaps to Anaxagoras rather than the Pythagoreans. The most explicit suggestions of Pythagorean influence, in the *Gorgias*, for instance, come in the transitional dialogues, where Plato probably intends to make Socrates refer views he himself did not advance to an outside source. Socrates's ethics, in particular, with its pacifistic bent, and possibly his optimistic assumptions about the world and the gods in the *Gorgias*, may have Pythagorean predecessors. Moreover, Socrates's conviction that everything real has a real definition, which we will examine below, seems a natural development of views like those of Philolaus. But he certainly did not absorb as much from Pythagoreanism as Plato did, and the visit of Simmias and Cebes does not show he did. No Sophist is reported to have offered to help Socrates escape, or to have been in attendance on him in his final days, but the Sophists perhaps had reason to avoid annoying the Athenians, and the Pythagoreans did not. Plato's dialogues suggest that he was on good terms with many of the Sophists, particularly those of his own generation, despite his skepticism about their ability to teach their young men virtue.

## **2. SOCRATES'S TRIAL**

I tell you, my executioners, that as soon as I am dead, vengeance shall fall upon you with a punishment far more painful than your killing of me. You have brought about my death in the belief that through it you will be delivered from submitting your conduct to criticism, but I say that the result will be just the opposite. You will have more critics, whom up till now I have restrained without your knowing it, and being younger they will be harsher to you and will cause you more annoyance. If you expect to stop denunciation of your wrong way of life by putting people to death, there is something amiss with your reasoning. This way of escape is neither possible nor creditable. The best and easiest way is not to stop the mouths of others, but to make yourselves as good men as you can.

Plato, *Apology* 39 cd.

The condemnation of Socrates by the Athenians made him the founding martyr of philosophy for later thinkers. The accusation was that Socrates was an atheist who failed to show proper respect to the city's gods, introduced new divine beings of his own, and corrupted the city's youth, presumably by teaching his atheistic opinions.<sup>10</sup> Socrates replied that he believed there were gods, and sacrificed to the gods of the city, pointing up the inconsistency of taxing him with his odd belief in his *daemon* while accusing him of atheism. Perhaps he did, but this did not answer the unstated sense of the charges. Even if no act of impiety could be pinned on Socrates, even if he did not introduce new divine beings of the sort the physical philosophers favored, divine beings such as Anaximenes's air or Empedocles's Love, even if he believed in the gods of the city, clearly he was skeptical about the traditional stories about them, and he certainly aired his opinions among the young. He may have been no atheist, but he was certainly a heretic. The *daemon* who prevented his engaging in politics, and, Xenophon tells us, forbade his preparing a defense in the final trial, represented Socrates's own moral doubts, the higher morality of the intellectuals elevated to a divine sign, and most of the jury would have understood that well enough. In defense of Socrates, a private *daemon* would not have been too much out of the way in a traditionally religious Greek—it would have been rather like a modern Christian holding that he really did receive God's guidance when he prayed—but for Socrates to claim that his belief was of this sort was rather insulting, given his criticism of traditional religion and his known penchant for irony. For the religious conservatives in the jury his defense must not have carried much weight. If indeed he *did* have something like the more traditional beliefs, his bent for irony worked against him.<sup>11</sup>

As for corrupting the youth, the formal intention was that he taught young people a religion different from the city's, criticizing ordinary beliefs, which was no doubt accurate, but in the background of the formal charge lay the suspicion that Socrates, by teaching an anti-democratic political theory, undermined the faith

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<sup>10</sup>See Brickhouse and Smith (1985) for the charges against Socrates and his defense against these charges. It is ironic that Plato, in his *Laws*, would exile all atheists from his ideal city. Plato spent most of his life trying to show that Socrates really was no atheist, at least in practice, and held beliefs about the Gods and the afterlife that would lead people to behave well rather than corrupting them. Given his sensitivity to the topic, we might well suppose that Plato is on the verge of misrepresenting his master here, who might have been far more straightforward in his criticism of traditional religious beliefs than Plato suggests.

<sup>11</sup>In any case, we cannot expect much help from Plato here, who was strongly committed to theism, and insisted in the *Gorgias* that Socrates at least should have been committed to it. It is significant, though, that Socrates only claims in the *Apology* to believe in the gods just like anyone else, and he surely was not accustomed to argue in favor of their existence, or the charges could not have been brought. So we must conclude that Socrates was at best a theist without any explicit philosophical defense of his theism, and without the habit of making reference to it in his discussion of ethical issues.

of his students in the democracy and its institutions.<sup>12</sup> Ordinarily no one much cared about religious deviance as long as people performed the sacrifices and were properly circumspect in presenting unorthodox views. How serious were Socrates's oligarchic leanings? Socrates was probably opposed to engaging in politics, democratic as well as oligarchic, because of the corrupting influence of power, and political activity aiming at it. Although Critias was an admirer and Charmides a pupil, both of them members of The Thirty, the oligarchic oppressors of 404, Alcibiades, a democratic hero if ever there was one, also associated with him. But his principles, which included a steadfast adherence to the letter and spirit of the law, were bound to put him in opposition to whoever was in power, and as it happened, most of his life the democrats were running things. Socrates says in the *Apology* that some democratic hostility towards him arose from an incident in 406, when he was presiding over the Assembly of 500, and opposed the assembly's wishes in the case of the generals at Argusinae. The generals were being tried for failing to pick up the men in the water after a battle when a sudden storm came up, with the result that most of them drowned. The assembly wanted to try all the generals together, but Socrates refused to allow it since Athenian law specified that they be tried separately. He was nearly impeached.<sup>13</sup> On the other side, Socrates pointed out that he refused to cooperate with the Thirty in 404, when ordered to put another man under arrest. Socrates went home and did nothing, for the action was illegal, and he would surely have suffered for this had the Thirty not been overthrown shortly afterwards, and, perhaps, had not his student Plato, nephew of Critias, a member of the Thirty, intervened on his behalf. His loyalty was to the community and its laws, not to any political ideology. Socrates saw all actual governments as seriously defective, but did not consider the loyalty of a citizen to the state and its laws to be contingent on the state's success in realizing the ideal government. He certainly opposed the cynical pursuit of one's own advantage, as well as ill-considered actions driven by anger and frustration, in violation of the agreement.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, it would have been easy for many to discount the subtleties of Socrates's position, and observing

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<sup>12</sup>As Brickhouse and Smith (1985) point out, the amnesty put into effect after the democratic restoration specified that one could not be charged for general misbehavior during the Oligarchy, but only with the violation of specific laws, so the corruption charge against Socrates could probably only have been brought to trial by linking it to the law against impiety. There was no law against political discussions with young men. For a less friendly view of Socrates's crime, see Stone (1988)—Irwin (1989a) criticizes Stone's views.

<sup>13</sup>The very fact that Socrates remained in the city during 404, rather than withdrawing to the hills with the democrats, may have hurt him in the eyes of the democrats as well. His claim that he never left the city at all if he could help it was not much of an excuse, and if he was rather old for the life of a guerilla, he was known to be a stout-hearted fellow who might have chosen that life nonetheless if his convictions demanded it. So one might conclude he had no real democratic convictions.

<sup>14</sup>These views are clear in the *Crito*, discussed below.

his criticism of the existing democracy, presume a preference for oligarchy.

It seems likely, then, that Socrates was condemned because, in the old way, he continued criticizing democratic institutions when speaking to his young men. There was an amnesty extended to all following the democratic coup of 404, and the accusation should have concerned only actions occurring *after* that, but even if it did, the condemnation violated Athenian democratic ideals, which included freedom of speech. No doubt, it was expected Socrates would, following custom, go into exile, even that he would do so without waiting to be tried, but he stayed for the trial and defended himself in a most unorthodox manner. First he refused to break off his discussions with the young or to curb his tongue in criticizing the democracy, then provoked the jury to the death penalty by proposing a reasonable fine<sup>15</sup> only under pressure from his friends, after first suggesting that he should be publicly maintained for his services to the state. Finally, he refused to make his escape, just as he had refused to leave under the Thirty. He wanted to rub the Athenians' noses in the injustice they were perpetrating.<sup>16</sup> This is not to say that he did not attempt a real defense. Within the limits of what he saw as just and right, Socrates's defense was quite thorough and competent. But he stayed within the limits of what he saw as just and right, knowing that it wouldn't do the job, and had no compunction about provoking the jury—quite willing to give his life in service to his ideals, Socrates devoted himself right to the end to instructing his fellow citizens in virtue.

### 3. NIETZSCHEAN CRITICISMS

CALLICLES: Somehow you keep twisting our arguments this way and that, Socrates.

Plato, *Gorgias* 511a.

After prolonged research on myself, I brought out the fundamental duplicity

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<sup>15</sup>The initially proposed fine of a mina would have been perhaps a third of his annual wages as a stone mason. The thirty mina fine proposed at the urging of his rich friends, who gave themselves as surety, would not have been viewed as terribly onerous, for the jury no doubt expected him all along to draw on the resources of rich friends.

<sup>16</sup>One should note the deep irony of the *Apology*. A good part of the audience clearly saw Socrates's unconventional behavior as disrespectful to the law, but in fact he was only being respectful to it to an unaccustomed degree, and their impression of his actions in fact revealed only their own deep disregard for justice and the law. So Socrates is required by law to propose a fine that he thinks fits his 'crime,' and, at first, rather than propose a fine that will mollify the jury, he does just that, suggesting that he be maintained as a benefactor to the state. He refuses to bring his family before the jury to plead for him, since they are required to decide the case on its merits, and ought not to be swayed by appeals to sentiment. The whole speech is a trenchant critique of the usual way of negotiating justice in Athens.

of the human being. Then I realized that modesty helped me to shine, humility to conquer, and virtue to oppress.

Camus, *The Fall*

Socrates became a hero to the philosophers of later Antiquity because of his courageous death, and his insistence, in the face of Sophistic relativism, on the existence of objective ethical ideals accessible to reason, but since Nietzsche he has not always been looked on so favorably.<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche objected that Socrates's identification of virtue, skill and power with knowledge, in particular, with knowledge of such objectively valid ideals as the good and the just, was a psychological ploy. It was a self-deceptive attempt to gain a sense of power over others through knowledge, and actual power over them by drawing them into a game of intellectual investigation eroding their commitments, and subjecting them to public ridicule. If they would not play the game, then he could bring all the energy of Socratic sarcasm to bear on this refusal. If they wouldn't play, they must have known that they have no justification for their views, and they deserved pity or contempt. Socrates could even gain a satisfying, and, of course, delusory, sense of power over the larger social order, when its self-appointed defenders failed. Contempt for our society's poor showing in comparison to the objectively valid ideal often sustains us psychologically despite our impotence to change the situation. We remain *above* it, treating it as a person who, though powerful, could certainly benefit from our instruction. Intellectualization of the Socratic sort is an ideal psychological defense against the recognition of our own impotence and in consequence, as well as an underhanded way of seeking power in human affairs while pretending an interest in higher things.

Surely, we might also say, Socrates's disclaimer of knowledge was insincere. After all, the man did have definite views about the good, to which he held tenaciously, even as he asserted he had no right to such firm beliefs. Moreover, a certain will to power, and lack of charity, is revealed in Socrates's insistence that people work things out for themselves. The hidden, unadmitted strategy is to produce a debilitating sense of incompetence, softening his audience up so they will accept his own, modestly suggested views out of admiration at his skill and out of identification with the aggressor. If he had had real compassion for his young men, and real doubts about his own ability to know, Socrates would not have been so ironic. Indeed, by disclaiming power as his aim, and subjecting himself to the ideal of knowledge (an ideal of his own making!),

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<sup>17</sup>For this section see Dannhauser (1974). In Nietzsche himself, note especially *The Birth of Tragedy*, Sections 11-16.

and then seeking to ‘help’ others realize their ‘true’ selves by bringing them into conformity with that ideal, Socrates introduced a dangerous strategy of self-deception into life and thought, corrupting the straightforward instinctual life embodied in the philosophies of his predecessors. Henceforth, one could only seek power under the cover of other aims. Henceforth one must lie.

As psychological analysis, this contains uncomfortable truths for any intellectual, but it is doubtful that Socrates was so bad a person. In learning any excellence, be it intellectual or not, one has to face the humiliating experience of falling short of the ideal. Middle and upper class children in our own society often deal with this in music lessons. We can simply repudiate the ideal, and treat the lessons as an infringement of freedom, but if we are attracted to the image of ourselves as a good musician, that strategy has serious drawbacks. To become good at the difficult task of playing the instrument, we must subject ourselves to the ideal, learn to take criticism and respond to it constructively, and learn how to respect ourselves for our efforts and commitment even if accomplishments come slowly. Of course, one need not undertake anything difficult in life (a truth often missed by ambitious parents of youthful music students), but many natural aims require the learning of difficult skills, a good deal of prestige can be acquired in this way, and the natural urge to power is satisfied in part by the possession of such skills, so it is not unreasonable to suggest that most people would do well to learn how to live with the commitment to unattainable ideals that is required to develop them. Nietzsche certainly thought it worth the trouble. His objection was not so much to Socrates’s urging his students to meet high standards as to Socrates’s insistence that *his* standards are somehow built into the world, and required of us whether we choose them or not, and, more particularly, his insistence on seeking the *truth*, an absolute reality in which a justification of only *one* choice of ideals (his choice, of course) could be grounded.

Was Socratic skepticism insincere, then? Socrates claimed that his more theoretical views had withstood all attempts at refutation to date, and that he had taken considerable trouble to seek out refutations, and thus he had good reason to commit himself, provisionally, to the views he held. He did not claim that his views were, like those of a professed expert or technocrat, rooted in an infallible grasp of ultimate reality, or absolutely reliable and certain for some reason that he was able to set forth. That is, he rejected the claim that there were views that it is unreasonable to subject to further examination, and he expected any true view to survive repeated examination. It may be that the ideals of free and open discussion advanced by this Socratic liberalism are self-serving. Perhaps the Socratic world view stands up well to such discussion while other world views do not, even though they might do better on other, more pragmatic, tests. Still, plausible assumptions underlie the determined commitment to further discussion, and the provisional commitment to what has

survived discussion so far. Surely in time we often do learn better, if allowed to investigate so that truer or better views eventually establish themselves, and the refusal to look at the justification for one's views surely serves the purposes of self-deception and intellectual tyranny over others far more effectively than honest investigation. Perhaps the real test comes when one discovers that one's views heretofore cannot be justified, and new views have to be adopted. But if a person changes his mind in that situation, and many do, it is not so easy to say that he is simply trying to push his own views, that his rational investigation is *just* a trick.

Again, it may be that Socrates's insistence on self-restraint and humility, rooted in the suspicion that one may have gotten things wrong, is a paradoxical assertion of power, but that does not rule out altruistic aims, or a sincere interest in discovering the truth. Even if we seek power in all we do it does not follow that we seek nothing else, or seek power only for selfish aims, and never for the sake of our friends or the realization of our ideals (though perhaps it may be suggested that we identify with our friends and ideals, so that our aims are not so altruistic as all that, after all). It does not even follow that our desire for power, pervasive as it is, always dominates our activities, and is never set aside or deliberately frustrated to realize other aims. Nor does it follow that desires initially rooted in the urge to power may not acquire a life of their own, and even come to oppose that urge, sometimes, in the end. As for the philosophical mistake that Nietzsche wishes to uncover, the failure to recognize that there are no absolute ideals provided by the world, and that no ideal at which we aim, including knowledge and reality, is anything more than a construction of our own to give shape to our lives and further our own power—it was not evident to Socrates that it was a mistake. Indeed, if it be suggested that Socrates believed in objective ideals because he wanted to, since it enhanced his power to do so, not because of the evidence, the same point can be brought against Nietzsche's skepticism about such ideals. Isn't this simply one more gambit? He argues that we invented the ideal of truth for our own aims, and so we are naive about ourselves if we don't join him in his relativism. So, *he* joins in the intellectuals' game, a game he knows well. If he disqualifies those with ulterior motives, Nietzsche disqualifies himself as well as Socrates.

But Nietzsche was subtle. He knew what he was doing, and would grant our point. He is not as critical of Socrates as some think, for he does not despise the more complex accomplishments of higher culture in favor of the barbarians, as some think. Without the invention of truth, and the games that go with it, we would not have the sciences and the intellectual disciplines, and that would be a great loss. But, he warns, Socrates's invention creates not only the opportunity for great systems of thought, and discoveries in the crafts, but also new opportunities for bullying and oppression (using what Plato and Socrates might have called 'rhetoric').

We may turn from the creation of thought and the discovery of truth, in awareness of our own weakness, to the corrupt assertion of power over those who have not the intellectual training and ability to defend their views of the world. Even if we do not share Nietzsche's rejection of the notion that there is a single, real truth, he can warn us against the smug confidence that our views are right just because we are so good at defending them, and against intellectual oppression, but he does not intend to object to the genuinely powerful intellect "creating its own truth," nor to its laying out that "truth" for others to adopt if they find it attractive.

So what shall we say of Socrates? Was he an intellectual oppressor, hiding his game from himself? Cautiously, I think not. Not everyone who seeks the truth and insists on subjecting untested common views to examination is an oppressor. One might well leave others alone in their views, unless they seem to be worthy opponents (that is, worthy allies) in the enterprise, able and anxious to hold up their end of the argument, or are students sincerely seeking training in the severe discipline of truth-seeking. Of course, Socrates's views about the good and the urgency of seeking it pushed him farther than this. He actively goaded others into taking up the game, and recommended the search for truth to all. But there are signs of a gentle respect for his interlocutors, nonetheless. The very inconclusiveness of the Socratic dialogues suggest that he left room for his auditors to pursue their own views and their own lines of investigation, and his irony arose in good part out of a respect for intellectual independence. He was willing to point up difficulties, but seems to have avoided pressing his own opinions.<sup>18</sup> Rather, he challenged people to form views of their own that would stand up to his, or anybody else's, criticism. Moreover, he seems to have been convinced that everyone of normal intellectual ability was competent to investigate the truth. He makes the experts' theories responsible to common sense and everyday experience, authorizing common people to make their own judgments about the accuracy of theoretical opinions, especially in questions of morality and politics, thus freeing them from the tyranny of that invention of the Greek enlightenment, the scientifically trained expert. So he proclaimed that the unexamined life was not worth living, recommending to *all* the pursuit of philosophy. Socrates was more a liberator than a tyrant.

But he also made enemies of those who wish to be right without taking the trouble to examine their views. In Plato's *Apology* Socrates is made to argue that, though he had been accused of intellectual pride, it was actually his accusers who suffered from that fault. He easily maneuvers his accuser, Meletus, into the assertion

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<sup>18</sup>See especially Vlastos (1991), Chs. 2 and 4, for Socrates's "populist" approach to philosophy contrasted with Plato's "elitist" approach.

that every Athenian except Socrates is an authority on the right way to live, which not only reveals the man as a flatterer, but also makes clear the central notion of anti-intellectualism, the conviction that nothing of real importance is of any difficulty, and that every man, as long as he follows ordinary views, is bound to be right. The anti-intellectual is generally more presumptuous than the intellectual, and easily as presumptuous as anyone trying to justify a claim to expert knowledge. He is less likely to listen to criticism, and more sure of himself. What really rankles him about the intellectual is the fellow's hesitations where everybody else (everybody who counts) is so sure. How dare he throw our view of the world, our way of living, into doubt? The dogmatism and arrogance perceived in the freethinker by the anti-intellectual is more often than not projected. He cannot imagine someone actually suspending judgment, or committing himself, perhaps passionately, as Socrates did, to a way of life while remaining willing to re-examine its intellectual foundations at any time. If we avoid romanticizing the anti-intellectual, we see more clearly Socrates's true worth.

#### 4. SOCRATES AND SOPHISTIC RELATIVISM

What do you mean, Dionysodorus? I have often heard, and have been amazed to hear, this thesis of yours, which is maintained and employed by the disciples of Protagoras, and others before them, and which to me appears to be quite wonderful, and suicidal as well as destructive, and I think that I am most likely to hear the truth about it from you. The dictum is that there is no such thing as falsehood; a man must either say what is true or say nothing. Is not that your position?

Socrates, in Plato's *Euthydemus* 283<sup>19</sup>

In his *Euthydemus*, Plato considers Socrates's response to Sophistic notions about reality.<sup>20</sup> In the dialogue, Socrates meets up with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. These brothers are now getting rather old,

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<sup>19</sup>Translation by Benjamin Jowett.

<sup>20</sup>In Plato's later dialogues, the subject of the dialogue returns in a more complex form, but the resolution of the problems in the *Euthydemus* is retained, though with adjustments to account for predication of contradictories not only of particulars, but also of Forms. If a Form is a real thing, one can presumably assert contradictories of it truly in different respects, so that it, at least, may be shared in by one thing and not another, or be known by one person and not another. The Protagorean doctrines connected with the compresence of opposites in things are discussed more carefully in the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist*. The *Euthydemus* looks like a preliminary exercise for this later work. I discuss it here because I think it states the views of Socrates on the Sophistic paradoxes, as they stood before the addition of Plato's metaphysical apparatus. These views, I assume, like so many other views of Socrates, are modified to fit the new metaphysics and epistemology of Forms in the Middle and Later dialogues, but are never abandoned.

and their earlier claim to expertise in war and generalship, later extended to battle done in the law courts, has now been extended to Sophistic techniques promising invincibility in argument. Their claim is to be so skillful in wordy warfare that they can refute anything anyone says, true or false. (Perhaps we should note that *offensive* warfare is their specialty, and a devotion to defensive warfare produces rather a different sort of wise man in the Mohists of China, more oriented to production and cooperation.) Their refutations are for the most part the stuff of low comedy, depicting the evil effects of Sophistic pragmatic relativism on its less talented practitioners, and illustrating the absurdities to which the doctrine leads. But the brothers also present more serious arguments, those which form the groundwork for the Protagorean position. So they argue that no one can say anything false, for whatever one says, one says one of the things that are, since things that are not are not there to be said. They then draw the further conclusion that no one can contradict anything that has been said.<sup>21</sup> The positive side of Protagoras's views, however, is not presented in the dialogue, and the absurdity of the Sophists' ideas is amplified here due to the fact that Plato never mentions the pursuit of pragmatic values within the world of experience, which Protagoras wished to substitute for the pursuit of truth and reality.<sup>22</sup> The brothers do not ever seem to be in a *constructive* mood.

Moreover, they claim to be able to impart virtue by teaching their offensive techniques for winning arguments, apparently assuming that virtue is what produces victory, and identifying victory with victory in a more or less formal contest, not in actually persuading, say. One is reminded a bit of the more technical aspects of legal practice, or, more to the point, of a technique of distraction, drawing *oneself* away from problems in one's position by the assurance in advance of being able to answer any problem that comes up, through formally fallacious argumentation.<sup>23</sup> Some people actually do draw comfort from their ability to

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<sup>21</sup>*Euthydemus* 283e-286c. Euthydemus and Dionysodorus were presumably real people, since Plato's other characters seem to have been real people, but nothing is known of them beyond what is in the dialogue. The central argument is explicitly attributed to Protagoras in Plato's text—one cannot say what is not, for to say something is to do something with it, and so must involve having an effect on what is said when one says it, but what is not cannot possibly be affected. For an interesting discussion and good translation of the relevant passages, see Denyer (1991), Ch. 2.

<sup>22</sup>For Plato's own treatment of the argument here, as well as that discussed in the next paragraph, see the discussion of the *Theaetetus* and *Sophist* in the next chapter. Of course, one might suppose that pragmatism is bankrupt from the beginning if not backed up with an account of what is good, objectively speaking. Perhaps that was an objection Socrates would have raised. Plato himself, we shall see, does not in fact think that an account of the good can be given. So he has to find more subtle objections.

<sup>23</sup>One has to assume that people were rather less practices in argument than they are nowadays to imagine the pair being taken seriously, but it helps to remember that Plato *is* a satirist. Probably they covered themselves a little better. Moreover, the real problem faced by someone adopting their techniques is concealing from himself that it is trickery, or, better, no doubt, that some people succeed in making a plausible case *without* trickery.

counter others' arguments in such shoddy ways, no doubt assuming that what they do is all the "genuine experts" do when they argue for their positions, so that they are put on a par with anyone they might encounter, and need not even consider that they may be wrong. The cockiness with which an anti-science enthusiast will take on real experts in biology, astronomy, even mathematics, testifies to the existence of such people. To do the job right, of course, they would have to *show* first that no one can know or be reasonably sure about anything, from which skeptical position it will somehow follow that *they* can be quite reasonably sure about everything.

Many of the absurdities advanced by the duo arise when they argue that opposite qualities cannot be attributed to one and the same thing, and resist all Socrates' attempts to attribute opposites to a single thing in different respects. For instance, someone who knows some things, they argue, must know all things, or else be at the same time both a knower and not a knower, which is impossible. Why is it impossible? Plato thinks they can only regard it as impossible if they refuse to recognize a common underlying reality to which contrary characteristics might attach in different respects. Socrates is a reality which can be a knower in respect of one truth, and not a knower in respect of another, but the Sophists insist that the two sentences asserting Socrates' knowledge and ignorance refer to different facts, and since they are different facts, and so independent of one another, they cannot be facts involving the same thing. Two different facts can no more involve the same subject than two different tables can have identically the same legs.<sup>24</sup> So a theoretical basis is provided for the brothers' approach, for it is shown that one cannot be mistaken about anything, and any attempt by others to

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<sup>24</sup>There is perhaps something in this. The world as it is (as opposed to how it appears to us) surely is as it is, and no other way, and each thing is what it is, and not something else. There is no doubleness in it. The doubleness is an artifact of vision, it emerges only when we abandon how things *are*, and ask how they appear to be. The fellow is tall or short, depending on how one looks at these things. With reference to one group, the turtle is fast, with reference to another slow. But in himself the fellow is as tall as he is, that is all, and the turtle moves as fast as it moves. If one points out that the turtle moves at different speeds at different times, we might ask how it is that we suppose that something persisting over time remains one and the same thing. Surely what is now is not what is later, unless we choose to see it that way—"oh, here it comes again!" we say. But, of course it is another thing. Universals are not in reality, but shape the way we perceive reality, and a thing persisting over time is one kind of universal, just as a concept such as unity or dogginess is another. The thing itself, in itself, is not a universal, and it does not persist to present itself anew, differently, only on different occasions, and it is not what it is in relation to other things. But if we take this view of the matter, we cannot speak of reality at all. One cannot step into the same river twice, as the Heracliteans would have it. What then? Is what we speak of only as it is relative to other things, in a given respect, at a certain time, but never in itself? But that seems to mean that it is scarcely there at all, but only a passing appearance that exists only as it is related to other appearances, like the events in fictional novel. So Plato attempts a compromise, things are what they are, essentially, but they enjoy passing accidental qualities, they persist and change, they can appear to us, and appear to different people, from different viewpoints, differently (they *really* do). The solution is perhaps unstable. Plotinus would fall into making everything a matter of viewpoint, only the viewpoints being ultimately real. Nominalists, self-consciously simple-minded about it, would insist that there are no universals of any sort. The compromise keeps breaking down. Some, Anti-realists, even imagine a philosophical paradise where it never had to be constructed in the first place. This anticipates somewhat Plato's later dialogues, but we need to see that this Sophistic paradox is not mere absurdity, but somehow rooted deep in our conception of reality, else we will never see any point in getting to Plato's later dialogues in the first place.

show that he is only opens those others up to charges of equivocation—*your* Socrates is not *my* Socrates, what appears to *you* does not appear to *me*.

Plato suggests that in asserting the two sentences we do not refer to *facts* at all, but instead to *things*. Indeed, we refer to a single thing, assigning contrary properties to it in different respects. This is the basis of his own defense of realism against the Sophists in later dialogues, but here in the *Euthydemus* he attributes the clearest formulation of the insight not to Socrates, but to his companion Ctessipus, who argues that one can speak falsely, for one who speaks falsely does not “speak” things that are not (for then their utterances would be meaningless), but “speaks” “*things that are*,” only in a certain way and not as really is the case.<sup>25</sup> Plato, perhaps, thought Socrates saw that contrary characteristics may be attributed to the same thing in different respects, and he thought Ctessipus’s point implicit in this practice. So Socrates, if he did not assert it clearly, at least presupposed that a sentence refers to things (its subject), not to facts, and predicates something (different things in different sentences) of its subject. This view can be used to make out how a false sentence is possible, for a sentence can refer to something that really is there, and predicate something which really is something of it, even though that something is not true of what is referred to—Socrates really is there to be “spoken” (that is, referred to), and to be tall really is to be something, and so that can be “spoken” too (that is, predicated of something), so one can say that Socrates is tall, even if he is not.

Plato has Socrates himself attack the Sophists using the “table-turning” argument, as it has been called. After the duo proposes that no one can ever be mistaken about anything, Socrates gets them to say that he has actually made a mistake, and so has been refuted by their argument, and then goes on: “So, Dionysodorus and Euthydemus... it looks as if this argument has made no progress and still has the old trouble of falling down itself in the process of knocking down others.”<sup>26</sup> Plato thought Socrates held that there was truth out there to be known, truth which can be gotten right, or wrong, and that it was a truth independent of the shape of our experience of it, which for the most part forms the subject of our discourse. Moreover, he tries to make it clear that the two Sophists believe this too, but they are interested in victory alone, and so, except for one or two revealing lapses, shamelessly confess to the greatest absurdities to avoid defeat. The trick is to get them to be honest enough, and enough in touch with their own beliefs, rather than the needs of the argument, to say what

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<sup>25</sup>*Euthydemus* 284c, translated by R.K. Sprague.

<sup>26</sup>*Euthydemus* 288a. Also see 286c. Translation by R.K. Sprague. Perhaps this is to be compared to Democritus’s remark attributed to the senses, that the wretched mind overthrows itself if it overthrows them in its arguments, for they are the only source of its knowledge of the world (Fragment 125, from Galen).

they really think.

### 5. SOCRATIC SKEPTICISM

...one thing I am ready to fight for as long as I can, in word and act—that is, that we shall be better, braver, and more active men if we believe it right to look for what we don't know than if we believe there is no point in looking because what we don't know we can never discover.

Plato, *Meno* 86 bc.

It is right that a person who correctly claims to know about matters should maintain his account victorious always, if he knows what *is* and he presents it correctly.

Ps.-Hippocrates, *The Nature of Man* 1<sup>27</sup>

Socrates's realism seems to mark him as an apostle of common sense, but this impression may be undermined when we learn of his skepticism. It scarcely helps to admit that there is a reality if we then insist that no one can know anything about it. But his skepticism is in fact another sign of common sense, for it is not what philosophers have called "radical skepticism," but the skepticism of the common man faced with the self-styled experts of the new enlightenment. Socrates argues that no one can truly know anything with certainty about the underlying real causes why things are the way they are. He rejects the possibility of the expert's knowledge, then, but he does not reject what we might call everyday knowledge, that is, reliable, true opinion concerning both particulars and general truths, disconnected from theory and gained from experience and the senses. By "knowledge" he means to cover what the expert claims to have, and does not take mere true belief, even if reliable and well justified, to count as knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>27</sup>This is a mid-5<sup>th</sup>-century work. Translated in Moline (1981) 12.

<sup>28</sup>A dispute has gone on for some time whether Socrates in Plato's dialogues uses "know" in two senses, or only one, and whether he is sincere in his claims not to know. Gulley (1968) held that Socrates's disavowal of knowledge was insincere, and had the goal of drawing his interlocutor into the investigation. Gareth Matthews (2008) criticizes Vlastos effectively for his view that a distinction between degrees of justification in holding a belief is at issue here (Vlastos (1983) and (1985), Leshner (1985), Brickhouse and Smith (1994)). He points out that Socrates never concerns himself with degrees of justification in the dialogues, but rather with the discovery of theoretical definitions, when he undertakes to seek knowledge. But he does speak of knowing fine and noble things, and knowing small things, and the two knowings do not seem to amount to the same thing. Perhaps he takes knowing small things (*Euthydemus* 293b) to be justified, reliable true belief, and "knowing fine things" to be justified, reliable true belief concerning the expert's theoretical understanding. In that case he would use "know" in one sense, and that sense presumably the common meaning

We sometimes say casually that we know something, confident that we are right, but withdraw the claim when challenged. Reflecting on our justification, even if we remain quite confident, we recognize that we can't *show* that we are right, removing every possible reason to object, through an explanation *why* things are as we believe they are. Our experience makes us certain that they are, perhaps, but we do not know why things should be that way, and so cannot show them to be so in the way one might have done even in Socrates's time in mathematics, using the expert's powerful techniques of proof. The expert demands more in the way of proof, and a different sort of proof, than we laymen are prepared to give. Socrates questions whether the expert can meet his own higher expectations for justification in any important matter, even if we assume that he is, perhaps like the rest of us, often strongly justified in believing what does.<sup>29</sup>

Now one might object already that we don't need to know why something is the case to know that it is the case, and we may be quite certain that our daughter is climbing a tree (we can see from here that she is doing it) without knowing why she is doing so. If that is right, then the sort of knowledge involved here is not this tree-climbing sort of knowledge, but rather, perhaps, the sort of knowledge that one can only be certain of once one sees why it is so. What sort of knowledge is that? Well, it fits most mathematical knowledge, for we should only be certain of a mathematical statement if we can prove it, though there do seem to be simple, self-evident statements in mathematics, perhaps that two and two are four, or that three lines in a plane, no two of them parallel to one another, either meet at a point or enclose a triangular area. Perhaps in other fields

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of the Greek word. His skepticism would, as Matthews (2008) develops it, be a matter of holding that no one knows fine things, and would be quite sincere, even though he assumed himself justified in his confidence in his beliefs, and thought he knew, when introducing premisses for his refutations of proposed definitions. In *Apology* 29b6–7, Socrates professes that he knows that he knows nothing of importance, nothing noble or good, but he also claims to know one ought not disobey or harm a superior. So the many general points of morality introduced in the *Crito* should be regarded as things Socrates thinks he knows as well. Presumably he does not profess to know the real reasons *why* these things are so. On a different view, that of Irwin (1977) ch. 3, (1995) ch. 2, and Fine (1992), (1999) Introduction, Socrates thinks he is reasonable to be sure of his views, but does not think he knows them. Irwin and Fine are impressed, in particular, by *Meno* 71a, where Socrates states that one does not know anything without an appropriate real definition, and he is skeptical that we can ever be sure of such a definition, and rarely even hit on one. In other dialogues he thinks his interlocutors often believe themselves to have such definitions, and he presses them for them they claim to know. Socrates would be justified in working from beliefs he has reason to be sure of, and he may well have believed himself to have had such justified true beliefs without having knowledge. They are also impressed by Aristotle's testimony. At *Sophistical Refutations* 34, 183b6–8 Aristotle testifies to Socratic skepticism, telling us that Socrates raised questions but did not answer them, since he claimed not to know. He never says that Plato made such a claim. Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 1, 981a28–30, makes the same distinction between knowledge that it is so and knowledge why it is so, and he defines scientific knowledge as the latter in the *Posterior Analytics* I 2. So I take it that Fine and Irwin have the right of it here. For Socratic epistemology in general, see Robinson (1953), and Guthrie's *History* III (1969). For the view that knowledge involves knowledge why it is as it is, see Brickhouse and Smith (1994) 38 ff. For the view that Socrates thought knowledge involves real definitions, see Dancy (2004).

<sup>29</sup>Unlike Plato, he never talked about mathematics. Perhaps he granted that there was expert knowledge in that area, but did not think what it taught us of any importance, since it did not bear on how we ought to live.

of enquiry we emulate mathematics, hoping to prove things from self-evident, or observationally confirmed first principles, so that we could say we know why these things are true, by deducing them from something more basic. This suggests that the expert is thought by Socrates to model himself on the mathematician.

The expert's claim to certainty, in any case, is rooted in a claim to know not only that things are the case, but *why* they are the case. Socrates's skepticism concerns what we should now call *scientific* knowledge, involving a theoretical understanding of what is known, related to the realities lying behind and accounting for the phenomena. Such knowledge is not of particular objects, of Laches's most recent courageous action, say, except accidentally, that is, insofar as the particular happens to fall under the universal. To have expert knowledge of Laches's courageous action we must rely on general principles about the courageous that we know to be true, rooted in knowledge what courage in an action *really* is. Of course, we might know, in some everyday, non-expert sense, a great deal about Laches's courageous action without this knowledge of general principles, and identify many acts of courage quite reliably without any knowledge what courage really is. In the same way, we might know a great deal about various instances of alcohol, and reliably identify instances of alcohol in many situations, without knowing what alcohol really is, that is, without knowing its chemical formula or how to use that formula to work out its behavior, or why it makes us drunk. And in similar ways, we might let ourselves be bullied into admitting we do *not really* know this is a sample of alcohol, and that this causes drunkenness, unless we know the chemical definition of alcohol, or to be bullied into admitting that we do not know that this is an instance of courage, or that courage is a good thing, unless we have a real definition of courage at hand. After all, shouldn't the honorific term, "know," be reserved for the *expert's* knowledge?

We might also, Socrates thinks, have a correct and presumably justified belief about courage itself, not just about Laches's courageous action, which enables us to test whether a given act is courageous. So, Socrates professes that courage is always a good thing. This is not known inductively, by arguing from specific instances of courage, and it does not rest on an understanding what courage really is, for he uses the principle to rule out some putative cases of courage, and he is sure of it in advance of knowing what courage is, and uses the principle as a way to that understanding. Perhaps we know it is true because we know that by 'courage' we *mean* that characteristic that is always a good thing and is found in the actions that we are certain, after due consideration, are courageous. We know what we mean, of course, that is, what concept we mean to convey when we talk about courage, and so we might call this conceptual knowledge. If we are to talk about anything at all, we must know what we mean to talk about, and so we must possess such principles of identification. In any case, the only way to test proposals about what courage is, Socrates thought, was to see if they can account

for our true beliefs about both the general characteristics of the courageous and its particular instances, and so we can only obtain theoretical knowledge if we have such true beliefs first.

This general belief about courage apparently enables us to identify it, much as beliefs about particular things, such as Josie, enable us to identify them. We ordinarily suppose that if I have identified Josie so that I can talk about her, I must have a reliable way to do this, and presumably, to do it again at other times, so that I can talk about her history, observe her over a period of time, and the like. Some of these beliefs about Josie may be doubtful, for it may be that she has recently got her hair dyed without my knowing it, lost weight, or taken Japanese lessons. But they must be by and large correct, correct enough, all taken together, anyway, to enable me to identify her, or else I lose track of Josie and can no longer tell if what I want to say about her is right or not, since I can't find or identify her to check on it. Perhaps some of these beliefs, those about what sort of thing Josie is (she is a human being, say), cannot turn out to be false at all. If it's Josie, it's a human being, necessarily. In the same way there may be many things true of courage more or less accidentally, due to its history. Perhaps it resides in the breasts of patriots, but, of course, it might not. But what it is, that I have to get right in order to talk about it at all, just as someone has to be right about what Josie is to talk about her at all. They can talk about her under the misapprehension that she is a blonde, but not under the misapprehension that she is a flower bed. That sort of mistake is too big. If they think she's a flower bed, they never managed to identify her at all. Similarly, if it turns out that sometimes it's a bad thing to have the quality, then it can't be virtue, and if I think it can, I'm not talking about what competent speakers of English mean by virtue—I just don't know what the word means, that is, what concept it is supposed to convey.<sup>30</sup>

Some of our pre-existing true beliefs may define what it is we are talking about, then, and be necessary truths, but most are acquired from the senses and from experience on those occasions when they do not

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<sup>30</sup>In my assumptions about meaning I try to follow Paul Horwich. In particular, I don't think that all concepts are *scientific* concepts, and I don't think that being familiar with a concept means knowing a real, scientific definition of the thing it is a concept of. To know a concept is simply to know how to identify that sort of thing, as reliably as it can be identified by people using the concept in question, that is, people in our linguistic community. Sometimes, as in the case of alcohol, the community perhaps relies on access to specialists, the chemists who know the chemical formula, when identification gets dicey, but it must take it that there are pretty reliable everyday ways of telling when we have the thing before us, which can ground the search for the real nature of alcohol. Of course, the linguistic community might consist of experts, and the expert's word might be borrowed by us ordinary folks, so that we rely on the expert's entirely and would have to give up using the concept if they weren't available to specify its application. When one speaks of quadratic equations, oxygen, members of the order lepidoptera, and so on, this will be the case. But not all terms are, or even can be, terms of art. "Alcohol" is, in one use, a term of art belonging to the chemist, but perhaps it is not such a term of art in a more commonplace use, that was, or might have been, around before chemistry was. So it has two uses, and so two concepts associated with it, or else it has only one use, and is a sort of borderline case. Behind terms of art lies the common everyday concepts the expert has before he gains his expertise.

mislead us, and even those that define what we are talking about refer to experienced things that we suppose to be instances of what we are talking about. But only particulars are experienced, and so these beliefs concern particulars, or are at least rooted in beliefs about particulars, based on our experience of them, and attainable only when our experiences do not mislead. Such beliefs often turn out to be true only in a certain respect. We experience Laches's courage,<sup>31</sup> but, of course, we do not see that he is perfectly courageous, always courageous, courageous in every respect, but only that he is courageous in certain circumstances and situations. Our view of Laches's courage is not a view of courage as it is in itself, of courage as such, but only of courage as it reveals itself in our acquaintance with Laches. This would be true even if Laches were in fact perfectly courageous, and so always acted courageously, but, as a matter of fact, the courage in Laches is not perfect courage—Laches does not *always* act courageously. Our knowledge of courage is like our knowledge of a person when we know her only in some of her moods and roles, and, moreover, she is not always her own truest self. If we gain a well-confirmed, true belief concerning courage itself, it must be, it seems, from a number of particular experiences of impure courage, not from an acquaintance with real, perfect courage that always produces courageous actions.

Socrates assumes in his arguments, then, that reliably true beliefs about particulars, and sometimes about general features of particulars such as courage, are commonplace, and generally identifiable as reliable. But we can never be *quite* sure we are dealing with such a reliable belief, even when we are. What he seeks in his investigations is something better, scientific knowledge which will provide both an understanding why his beliefs are true, and justified certainty that they are. This is why the examination in Plato's dialogues always begins with Socrates's insistence that his interlocutor argue from theoretical generalizations rather than examining particular cases to decide whatever question is at issue. So in the *Laches* it is asked whether practice in the art of fighting in armor is likely to make a young man courageous. To answer the question, Socrates does not undertake a statistical review of our experience with those trained and untrained in the art, even though such a review might well give us reliable true belief concerning the matter.<sup>32</sup> Rather, he insists that someone

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<sup>31</sup>A virtue, Socrates says, is a power (*dynamis*), so here his courage is his power to do courageous actions. It is assumed that one will in fact do what is courageous as long as one has the power to do it, so any failure to do a courageous action reveals one's lack of power in this regard.

<sup>32</sup>This should be considered a bit odd. My wife, a practicing psychologist, would think of such a review straight off as the only way to proceed. She would start talking about the necessity of longitudinal studies, hoping to establish that the same person before training was something of a coward and afterwards quite brave, but, if that can't easily be done, she would at least want to see if those with this training were more often courageous than the usual run of the population, and guard against identifying as the cause of this training something which actually resulted from something else associated with the training (say, service in the armed forces),

tell him what courage is, so that he can then deduce from the definition whether fighting in armor will produce courage or not. We cannot have knowledge, that is, expert knowledge that it will produce courage or not, unless we know what courage is in the first place.<sup>33</sup> It would be easy to avoid Socratic refutation if one advanced no view of theoretical consequence, but Socrates insists on seeking out professions of expert knowledge. And he makes things difficult by tying this knowledge to the everyday world observed by the senses, to make it practical and useful.<sup>34</sup> He was not satisfied with taking refuge in the pragmatic relativism of Protagoras, making the real world essentially irrelevant to our lives. He wanted *general theoretical knowledge* about *particular sensibles*. He demanded accounts of the underlying reality, which he then tested against particular cases. If we want to know if virtue is teachable, we must know first what virtue is. If we want to know how one becomes a friend of another person, we must find the definition of friendship. If we want to know how courage is to be acquired, we must first find out what courage is.<sup>35</sup>

One Socratic test of expert knowledge is the ability to account for the particular cases. Another is the ability to instruct others—an expert must be able to *express* the knowledge he has.<sup>36</sup> Expert knowledge what something is, for instance, is not an inarticulate ability, however reliable, to pick out instances of it under favorable circumstances. To bring others to a knowledge of a general truth explaining the facts about

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and so on.

<sup>33</sup>*Laches* 190b. At 190c he follows up on Laches's concession that we must have exact knowledge what it is to know how courage is to be acquired with the remark that if we know what it is, we will be able to state this. If courage is, say, confidence in battle, then fighting in armor might produce it, if it makes one used to taking blows and confident that it is difficult to really hurt him, and produces confidence in his weapon skills. But if courage is not confidence in battle, but something else, as Socrates thinks, then fighting in armor might not produce this other thing, say, the wisdom to know what is genuinely to be feared. It is worth noting with Dancy (2004) 37 (referring to Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (1999) 44), that Socratic emphasis on real definition is a bit overdone. One might have a perfectly good scientific theory without real definitions underlying it. Moreover, the definitions, if they are present, may not be explicit, but "contextual," as a mathematician would say, that is, implicit in the axioms or assumptions involving the term. Plato came to agree, and held that knowledge of the good is possible through dialectic, even though there is no definition of the good.

<sup>34</sup>Woodruff (1990).

<sup>35</sup>For a source other than Plato on Socrates's interest in real definitions, Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XIII 3, 1078b17 ff. and I 6, 987a29-b6. For the examples, *Meno* 70a, *Lysis* 212a, *Laches* 189e-190. Dancy (2004) notes that the *Meno* seems to be the last dialogue in which the "Socratic fallacy," the assumption that one can only know if something is F if one knows the definition of F, is advanced. *Meno* objects to it, and after the resulting discussion Socrates, grumbling just a little, abandons the assumption. In the Middle and Late dialogues the assumption is that one can know if something is F quite independently of the definition, and for precisely that reason is able to test a definition against examples.

<sup>36</sup>For instance, at *Meno* 93c-95a, where it is not allowed that those who cannot instruct others in what is good might have virtue, virtue being a general, expert knowledge of the good. This is a characteristic of expert, but not typically of everyday knowledge, of course. The expert is expected to have book-learning. The skilled craftsman, if he is not an expert professional, can get along with mere know-how.

particulars, we must be able to provide an explicit explanation for others why it is true. This means we must be able to state clearly what it really is about which we hold the belief, and then argue from this to the truth of our belief. So, only if we can say what courage really is, and then argue that such a thing is to be acquired from fighting in armor, can we be said to *know* it can be acquired from fighting in armor. Thus someone with expert knowledge, on Socrates's conception, should be able to reply to every possible objection to his belief, whether coming from another person, or from experience of the world itself. His knowledge would not be a matter of luck, so that, as it happens, his reason for belief is good enough in these circumstances. His knowledge that courage had whatever characteristic he believed it to have would be derived from knowledge of what courage itself is, and so it would be guaranteed to apply to every instance of real courage, in every circumstance.<sup>37</sup> His knowledge what courage is, moreover, would be unmodifiable by further testing, and so he would presumably be able to come up with a reply to any putative counter-example or refutation that might arise.

Socrates was convinced that this sort of expert, scientific knowledge was unattainable through any natural process. It is like ideal justice in Anaximander, or a pure, unmixed, sensible stuff in Anaxagoras. Mere confidence in a belief, even in one that is in fact true, clearly is not enough to establish scientific knowledge, whether it is confidence in one's own opinion, or in the declaration of an expert, or in the opinion of the majority of sensible people.<sup>38</sup> In particular, Socrates refuses to allow that the mere fact of belief is enough to guarantee the belief is right, and so rejects the views of Protagoras. He insists that we sort out our beliefs by testing them, and rely only on those that have passed many severe tests, in the belief that reliance on such beliefs will move us toward a true understanding of things. But there are problems. For one thing, even if a belief has passed many severe tests, it may not pass the next one, and so it may not be true, though it is much more likely to be true than an untested belief. For another, we might always have to reassess whether a belief

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<sup>37</sup>So the expert is expected, above all, to be able to settle hard cases. She can step in where ordinary folks get it wrong or don't know what to say, and get it right, and convince the ordinary folks who are smart enough to follow here that she is right. So we are inclined to say the expert has *real* knowledge, since she must be called in to cover the failures of us ordinary folks, and can prove to us that we are wrong (or right) when we are. Philosophers often seem to take the best form of a thing to be the only *real* form of it, though it seems they should surely know better.

<sup>38</sup>*Apology* 21bd. *Gorgias* 472bc. *Laches* 184e-185a. *Protagoras* 348c-349a. Aristotle, *Sophistical Refutations* 34, 183b8.

has in fact been severely tested or not.<sup>39</sup> Our theoretical beliefs must stand up to our correct judgments about particulars, but we may find that some particular things we had thought to be of the relevant kind were not of that kind after all. In the one case our theoretical belief fails a new test and must be rejected, no matter how well it has done in the past, in the other, we may think it has failed a test when in fact what we faced was no test at all, and it turns out we have no reason to reject it and it may be true, or it may turn out that what we thought were severe tests were no tests at all so that our belief has not proved itself as we had thought it had. (So courage is taken to be knowledge of the good, but lions have courage, and lack such knowledge of the good, and that refutes the view. But, Socrates argues, lions are not in fact courageous, but only act like they are, appearing to be courageous when they are merely fearless for some other reason.<sup>40</sup>) So no matter how many tests it seems to us have been passed, or failed, by a theoretical belief, our judgment of that belief as a consequence of those tests might conceivably be reversed in the future. In the end Socrates seems to have thought that the only way we could have the sort of assurance sought here is if we had a magical sort of knowledge of an underlying reality not depending on the senses or any other natural process, so that we knew which actions were courageous, say, not through what we take as signs of courage, certainly not through our conviction that it was courage with no other sign to indicate it is, but through... well, nothing at all, for no explanation can be given how we know. Such knowledge could not arise through any naturally occurring, causally explicable, experience of things, and Socrates, reasonably enough, did not think such a thing possible. It is only through experience of things, that is, their reliable appearances, that we gain any evidence of the truth of theoretical beliefs, and we can never be absolutely sure of the reliability of any particular experience, even if it seems reasonable to say that many or most of our experiences of things are reliable guides to what they are, or at least what they are like. It is always logically possible that what an experience suggests should be overruled by future experience, so that it has to be reinterpreted. Reality is not some subset of our experiences, rather it is what *explains* our experiences, and that is not written on the face of, or constituted from, experience, however suggestive it may be about the matter. We have to make our best guess, and then try to confirm it. Given this, theoretical beliefs always remain at the mercy of further experience.

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<sup>39</sup>This happens, for instance, at the end of the *Laches*, when Nicias ends up rejecting a definition of courage that Socrates affirms in the *Protagoras*, making courage knowledge of the good, in the face of the unpleasant consequence of his view that courage would be all of virtue instead of a mere part of it. Moreover, this happens after he has rejected another false refutation which might have been found rather compelling, affirming that lions are not courageous, since they are not rational and so cannot have knowledge.

<sup>40</sup>*Laches* 196e-197c.

Despite this argument, one might wonder about the sincerity of Socratic skepticism, for Socrates's own theoretical beliefs, as Plato presents them in his dialogues, seem quite stable in the face of attempted refutations.<sup>41</sup> But the reason for this, Socrates claims, is not that he has expert knowledge, but rather that he has spent a great deal of time trying to find refutations of his beliefs, employing the eristic combat of the Sophists for this purpose. As a result, he has rejected many theories that turned out inconsistent with, or failed to explain, particular experiences he was certain he knew how to interpret, and he had some reason to think those theories he finally retained did fit all his experience to date. The objections actually raised against his views in a given discussion are generally objections he has already thought through. Moreover, there was a logical structure to his views, that is, many could be supported by or derived from others, and he was fairly sure that they did not contradict one another. But Socrates did not think this meant he now had expert knowledge, even if he had moved closer to that ideal than most people. There was still no *guarantee* against a future attempt at refutation uncovering a latent contradiction between experience and theory, or experience someday introducing new beliefs contradictory to the old.<sup>42</sup> So expert knowledge, for Socrates, is not merely knowledge rooted in a scientific understanding why the thing is so, nor is it knowledge that is also reliable, and reliable precisely because it has the scientific account right. Expert knowledge involves a subjective, internal guarantee of absolute reliability, akin (at least) to direct acquaintance with what is known. (It is, in the term introduced in Plato's *Theaetetus*, later, *perception*.) No such thing is possible, at least to natural beings such as humans.

Thus Socrates's custom was to say that he would agree with a stated view only after he had inquired into it and seen it survive attempts at refutation, but he never suggested that such inquiry would in fact lead him to knowledge. What is the point of inquiry, then? One point is negative. It is the best way to prevent

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<sup>41</sup>*Gorgias* 508e-509a.

<sup>42</sup>Plato, we shall see, did not introduce new capacities for knowing that Socrates had not thought of, despite his introduction of Separated Forms. But he did perhaps, reject Socratic skepticism, and if he did so it was by rejecting the notion what knowledge is that underlay it. He argued that knowledge is possible if we simply get enough in the way of coherent testing and explanation under our belt so that we come to be reasonably confident that we are in a position where we can, by deploying our theoretical resources and empirical knowledge, always answer any objection that might be raised. Perhaps we are in such a position today regarding the basic theories of physics and chemistry, for instance. Further observation might lead to subtle changes, but the periodic table is settled, and not because we have some intuitive insight into or direct acquaintance with reality that guarantees its correctness, but because of its evident power of explanation, which we know from experience.

ourselves from fancying we have knowledge when in fact we are ignorant.<sup>43</sup> But Socrates also seems to have thought that by testing our views we winnow out the false, so that the more testing we do, the more likely it is that our current beliefs are free of falsehood. The *only* way to seek the truth is to frame possibly true opinions and then subject them to tests, seeking others' aid in refuting them when we can see no problems ourselves.<sup>44</sup> He thought commitment to a theoretical belief reasonable if it had been well tested, though he insisted that we should always be willing to reopen the examination of a belief when we have the opportunity, *especially* if it is one that is important to us.<sup>45</sup> Human beings cannot ever have expert knowledge, but, if they are assiduous enough about testing their views, they may be able to form a set of theoretical opinions that are by and large correct, and which will therefore serve their lives nearly as well as knowledge could.<sup>46</sup>

Socrates thought well tested true beliefs had an advantage over true beliefs that had not yet been tested because they could be counted on to stay with us even when bad arguments threatened their refutation. He had especially in mind the sort of belief that helps constitute our moral character, such as the belief that one could never benefit oneself through injustice.<sup>47</sup> Without much experience in testing beliefs, one might be expected to abandon this view the first time it faced real difficulty, that is, the first time one experienced apparently successful injustice. Only someone accustomed to testing beliefs, and in particular someone who had tested this particular belief, could be expected to have the resources available to see through the fallacy and retain this truth. One learns how to answer objections well, accumulating a fund of strategies and skill in their use, only through practice. Moreover, one learns that apparently fearsome objections often withdraw in the face of careful analysis or further observation. A certain number of successes, and an accumulation of resources, help

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<sup>43</sup>*Charmides* 165b-d, 166cd. Cf. *Apology* 21a ff., 23ab. For the benefits of learning that one is wrong, see *Apology* 28e, 29de, 30e, *Meno* 84ac, *Sophist* 229e-230e. For one thing, it improves one's moral character by introducing a proper modesty. Thus at *Apology* 39c Socrates says that his refutations are of people's lives as well as their views, and they shame people for living wrongly.

<sup>44</sup>*Euthydemus* 307ac; *Protagoras* 348c.

<sup>45</sup>*Crito* 49de, *Gorgias* 457c ff. For instance, Socrates carefully avoided claiming that he *knew* it was never right to harm an enemy, or that the fate of a good person's soul after death is a good one, though he was passionately committed to both views. (*Phaedo* 84c ff., *Apology* 29a.)

<sup>46</sup>*Meno* 97b-98e, *Euthyphro* 11be.

<sup>47</sup>Note that it is presupposed in this argument that the beliefs are in fact true and beneficial, and should be maintained. This faith that true beliefs must be honorable and beneficial, leading to optimism and ethical behavior, not only recommends the pursuit of truth, but also restricts and softens the impact of Socratic skepticism. Socrates does not really question if the world is a place friendly to virtue and interested in the good, nor does he question that what progress can be made toward truth benefits a person and makes him virtuous.

steady even a congenitally panicky temperament. Genuine scientific knowledge of the good would produce an absolute steadiness in virtue. Since such knowledge would be irrefutable, it would steel us against any possible defection from the truth. But such knowledge is unattainable, and so we must make do with well tested true belief.<sup>48</sup>

Socrates seems to have searched for true theoretical beliefs without explicitly working out the logic of his method of search, but at a certain point Plato began to question whether his methods would give even the modest results he expected of it. In particular, he notes in the *Meno*, if one is to be led to the truth by a series of refutations, then: (1) One must be able to, perhaps one must even be prone to, make a correct guess as to the relevant truth in the theoretical realm, else there will never be a correct conjecture to test. Socrates seems to have assumed that often a careful enough review of the appearances to be explained would suggest the correct explanation, even if we can never absolutely prove it correct. (2) Socrates also assumed that, whoever he was speaking to, he could rely on that person's beliefs in his investigations. If he made a false conjecture, among his beliefs would be some that would provide the basis to prove it false. If, as it turned out, he ended up rejecting one of the assumptions in this proof when faced with it, rather than the false theoretical belief targeted by the proof, then Socrates thought, one could find further beliefs that he held which would enable one to establish that assumption as true after all. Eventually, working within his interlocutor's own beliefs, he expected to be able to refute any false theoretical assumption. So we might say that he assumed that everyone finds their true opinions about particular cases rather more certain than their false opinions, so that the true opinions, and not the false, are eliminated when facing a refuting argument.<sup>49</sup> We can break (2) out

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<sup>48</sup>Another issue worth remarking on here is the question whether the technique of refutation employed by Socrates is itself a craft or art. Brickhouse and Smith (1994), 7 ff., argue that it is not, but only a kind of skill, since no knowledge lies behind it, and it does not proceed by any regular method rooted in this knowledge. But although no moral knowledge perhaps lies behind his refutations, might not Socrates rely on a knowledge (or at least true opinion?) about what knowledge is? Then the respondent's conviction that he does not know might be the expected result of the application of this knowledge within a craft of refutation, which is compared, it appears, to the craft of Daedalus in *Euthyphro* 11d-e. Since he knows what knowledge is, in particular, that it gets at the real essence of a thing and derives its characteristics from that essence, Socrates knows some of the characteristics of knowledge, and can demonstrate to people that they do not know by pointing out that their beliefs lack these characteristics. Sophists, who do not know what knowledge is, and have false opinions about its characteristics, may appear shamefully immune to his refutations.

<sup>49</sup>This is one point to be drawn from the central section of the *Meno*, 80d-86c, in which Socrates quizzes a slave boy, leading him to some geometrical propositions, and then suggests that his leading questions could lead only if the slave boy were, as it were, in such a state of mind that he would be reminded of general theoretical truths by the examples proposed. The boy sometimes draws the wrong conclusion from the examples, and corrects himself once he has tested out those conclusions in further cases. The theory that one recollects the Forms because one viewed them while free of the body before one's birth is Plato's, it seems, not Socrates', but it is contrived to provide a theoretical explanation of these unexplained Socratic presuppositions. Socrates himself may have accepted them, if he had a reason, because he was convinced the gods intended him to practice his elenctic techniques, and so thought that they must be effective, since the gods were well-intentioned and would know. If so, the Cartesian strategy is very old indeed.

into two assumptions. (2a) One's belief-forming mechanisms, the senses and whatever enables us to form general beliefs from experience, or in whatever other way, are generally reliable, and our reliably formed true beliefs, in the end, trump false beliefs. (2b) We have, or can acquire through experience, enough reliable true beliefs so that theoretical knowledge concerning every question we might ask can be developed from them.

Once these assumptions are stated, of course, it is anything but obvious that they are true. Indeed, Plato seems to have had a crisis of confidence in Socrates's methods, and we shall see how one strand of his metaphysics evolved from the resolution of that crisis. In practice, Socrates tested proposed theories against those beliefs which he thought were universally held, or would be universally held if all men had the requisite experience. So, as we have seen, he subjects the Sophistic relativism to the criticism that we *all* in fact believe ourselves to be in contact with reality, not merely appearances, and in the *Gorgias* he makes his fellow discussants ashamed of what they are saying, and gets them to see that they are ashamed because in fact they had thought all along that justice is always a good and noble thing. But in the *Gorgias*, at least, Plato makes sure that we note how unclear it is that this agreement is due to recollection or knowledge, rather than mere training in societal norms.<sup>50</sup> Socrates does not have an account why we all agree (at least after sufficient experience) on certain truths, at least, no account beyond saying that we all agree on them because we can all see that they are true, without specifying how we do so. Thus, he cannot explain, either, how the fact we always agree establishes the truth of what we agree on.

Plato, finding this a serious problem if we are to establish the claims of virtue, demands of Socrates that he give an expert's account what everyday knowledge really is, so that we can argue from this understanding of it to the conclusion that it is trustworthy enough for his theoretical purposes. He does not think Socrates has the theoretical resources to do this.

## 6. SOCRATIC DEFINITIONS

Socrates, however, was busying himself about ethical matters and neglecting the world of nature as a whole but seeking the universal in these ethical

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<sup>50</sup>Nietzsche in particular admired Callicles in this dialogue for his insight into what Socrates was really up to, and, persuasive as Socrates is (in a *rhetorical* way), calm reflection makes it hard to be sure whether the moral conviction underlying Callicles's shame is a result of insight into the truth, or of a certain universal *training* to which we are all subjected, or even of a certain *native error* bred into us that makes society possible. This is, of course, only one side of the criticism of Socrates implicit in the *Gorgias*—in particular, one must also note that Socrates, when he does try to give an account of virtue that makes it plausible that it is to our advantage to be virtuous, has to resort to unargued assumptions about the afterlife and the gods. I follow here the analysis of McKim (1988).

matters, and fixed thought for the first time on definitions.

Aristotle, *Metaphysics* I 6, 987b1-3.

...to let no day pass without discussing goodness and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing that a man can do, and... life without this sort of examination is not worth living...

Plato, *Apology* 38a.

What Socrates wanted when he sought out a definition was a *real definition*, that is, not an account how the word is used, the sort of thing that is found out when we learn the meaning of a word, but rather an account of the reality, of the underlying structure of that to which the word refers. Of course, a real definition may provide an account how a word is used, if the word is used to refer to a kind of thing with a common underlying structure, possibly unknown to us, but many words are used for quite other purposes, and their definitions are an entirely different matter.<sup>51</sup> A real definition does not offer a phrase synonymous with the word to be defined, nor does it provide an analysis of what is linguistically implicit in the word, nor does it provide some property by which things falling under the word might easily be, or usually are, recognized, nor examples, nor even a complete list, of things the word names. Consider water—Socrates speaks of defining *things*,<sup>52</sup> not words. Socrates would not accept as his definition our pointing to some example of water to get across our meaning, nor a description such as “that wet stuff we drink, that comes out of a faucet,” but only “H<sub>2</sub>O,” which reveals the underlying chemical structure of water, from which its wetness, the fact that it is good to drink, and so on, can all presumably be deduced and explained.<sup>53</sup> Of course, “H<sub>2</sub>O” is not synonymous

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<sup>51</sup>The most extensive discussion of real definition in Socrates’s thought occurs at *Meno* 71-77. A very careful analysis of Socrates’s treatment of definition is provided in Dancy (2004).

<sup>52</sup>*Pragmata*, “things” in Greek. This is rather like the word *res* (also translated in philosophical contexts as thing or reality) in Latin. A *res* or *pragma* is often a matter or affair, as in, “in this matter what I would like you to do is . . .” and so has a “pragmatic” feel to it, but it can also be used exactly as the English “thing” can. Dancy (2004) Ch. 3 argues convincingly that we ought not to take this manner of speaking in the Socratic dialogues to imply Platonic realism. Just as I can say, “well, courage must be *something*,” without making any metaphysical commitments to Platonic Forms or mind/body dualism, meaning only that there must be some coherent account what courage is, and just as most people do in fact say such things without intending metaphysical commitments, so Socrates says that courage is something without undertaking such commitments. That he does so is indicated by the fact that such metaphysical commitments are not pursued by him in any way in the remainder of his argument.

<sup>53</sup>To know (*noein, gignoskein*) a thing is connected by Socrates with knowing its definition. This usage goes back to Homer, for instance, who uses the term when one recognizes what really is going on after an initial misapprehension, and is akin to our use of “recognize.” So to come to know a thing comes to a matter of recognizing its true nature, what it really is, or its real definition.

with “water”—that would make the investigation of chemistry much easier than in fact it is. But it is the case that each portion of water is also a quantity of H<sub>2</sub>O molecules, and vice versa, so that being H<sub>2</sub>O and being water are necessary and sufficient for one another. The explanatory power of the chemical hypothesis is such that we are willing to alter our way of speaking, and say that water is present only and whenever H<sub>2</sub>O is, even if we were not willing to say that before we discovered what water really is. Socrates is sometimes willing to revise our everyday notions what falls under a term when he thinks he has gotten at the underlying reality in his definition, for a term might mistakenly be supposed to cover a number of items with the same underlying reality<sup>54</sup> when in fact some of them lack the reality the others have, bearing only a misleading resemblance to them. So, as we have observed already, once he establishes to his satisfaction that courage is knowledge of what is genuinely to be feared, he is willing to argue that lions are not really courageous, despite popular opinion, for they are incapable of such knowledge.<sup>55</sup> A single word might also turn out to refer ambiguously to a number of different realities, each with its own real definition, or several words might refer to one reality, as Socrates thought the names of the virtues did. Our use of a single term for a number of things typically expresses the opinion that a single real structure lies behind the properties of all its instances, but, in the absence of knowledge what that structure is, we can expect sometimes to get this wrong, and in such cases we usually take the term to refer to the structure of the largest number of cases or the most prominent or important.

A sophisticated discussion of Socratic definition occurs in Plato’s *Meno*, and it will be useful to look at the fortunes of Meno in defining virtue there. Meno suggests, with some prompting from Socrates, that virtue is the capacity to govern, and then Socrates raises a series of objections. (1) He points out that a slave or child

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Von Fritz (1943), (1945-46).

<sup>54</sup>I do not mean to use “reality” here with metaphysical clout, any more than Dancy (2004) thinks Socrates uses “thing” with metaphysical clout. Whatever we can say truly, that’s reality as far as I’m concerned, and the same reality is present in two instances if we can say the same thing truly of the two instances. Both samples of water are H<sub>2</sub>O. The Socratic dialogues make reference themselves to examples of scientific real definitions of the sort I introduce with the definition of water to clarify what they want in a definition, when Socrates is dealing with someone who has encountered and is likely to respect such definitions, so at *Meno* 74-76 he offers definitions of shape and color with reference to Anaxagoras’s theories. But one might suggest that this association with scientific definitions is Plato’s work, not Socrates’s, for it seems to appear first in the transitional dialogues, not those that are ‘strictly’ Socratic, and however the account of the matter in *Meno* may be intended to do Plato’s best by Socrates, it is likely that it recasts his thinking to some extent in drawing out the implications of it. Plato, when he encountered these scientific definitions, perhaps thought, “Ah! That is what Socrates meant!” Or perhaps, as Plato hints in the *Phaedo*, Socrates was quite sophisticated enough to have had such scientific definitions in mind all along, even if he had little interest in science, and only brought the matter up if dealing with someone who liked that sort of thing.

<sup>55</sup>An example often given in contemporary philosophy is “fish,” for we are no longer willing to call whales fish (though one narrator of *Moby Dick* is obstinate that they *are* fish), in our effort to line up our common names for animals with proper biological classifications.

might be virtuous, but surely the virtue of such a person would not lie in the capacity to govern others, but in obedience. So the definition is too narrow. Socrates is probably testing Meno's insight here, and does not think his definition has yet been refuted. The virtue of a slave or child may consist in the capacity for *self*-governance, expressed in the recognition that they would do best to follow the orders of those who know better than themselves. (2) He argues that some have the capacity to govern men, that is, to get them to obey, but do it badly, that is, they act unjustly in the exercise of their power. So the definition is too broad. (3) Perhaps it can be responded that virtue is the capacity to govern *justly*, so that in governing we get each person to do what he *ought* to be doing, or we govern when it is our business to do so, but not otherwise. This revision of the definition introduces a problem with circularity. Justice is understood to be a certain virtue, and is presumably defined by specifying that it is a virtue, and then going on to say what sort of virtue it is. So if virtue is the capacity to govern justly, that can only be taken as the capacity to govern *virtuously*, with some further characterization of the virtue in question in the offing, and the term to be defined is now seen to have been smuggled into the definition. (4) Even if we set aside these objections, the proposed definition falls short because it does not get at the underlying reality that we experience when we encounter virtue, but only at how it is revealed to us, that is, it is revealed through a certain evident characteristic that always and only accompanies virtue. The ability to rule is presumably present because of what virtue is, but one cannot say that the ability to rule *is* what virtue is.<sup>56</sup>

This last provides the deepest objection to Meno's definition. It may be that the virtuous can rule, and only the virtuous can rule, but why is this? What is virtue that it enables men to rule? Socrates wants to know what virtue is *in itself*, and expects this to explain why virtue relates to things outside itself in the way it does. He wants an account of the underlying essence that unifies, explains, and corrects our various opinions about what virtue does. Socrates in fact thinks that virtue is knowledge of the good, and if we once took this as the true definition, we could see that the one who knows what is good in any given situation is the one who should be put in charge, and can govern wisely if he should receive the opportunity to govern at all. We can also see

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<sup>56</sup>A similar point is made in the *Euthyphro* concerning one of the proposed definitions of piety. It is suggested that piety is what the gods love, and Socrates asks whether it is pious because the gods love it, or do the gods love it because it is pious? If the former, it seems that whatever the Gods love, however arbitrarily and irrationally, would be pious. It is the God's loving it that makes an act pious. (William of Ockham took a related view in ethics, holding that whatever God arbitrarily commanded was ethically required, while Thomas Aquinas held that God commanded what he did because it was ethically required, and demanded by reason quite aside from His arbitrary will.) If the latter, then what makes the act loved by the gods is its piety, but then we need to identify what this piety is that the gods so love, so that we can see why they love it. He presumably thinks the Gods love piety because it is a form of justice, and they love justice not just arbitrarily, but because it is reasonable to love it, given what justice is (presumably something good).

now why one who has the *power* to force his government on others (perhaps through a mastery of rhetoric, or military resources) is not necessarily “able to govern others” in the required sense. Virtue is the ability to govern others well, to their and others’ benefit, if they recognize your authority, not the ability simply to get them to do what you want.<sup>57</sup>

How is it that one arrives at a real definition? Aristotle suggests that Socrates used ‘induction,’ the examination of well chosen examples that produce an insight into the essence concerned. That is, one simply looks at the examples of the thing that one is most sure of and hopes eventually to hit on something they have in common that might do. But Socrates also tests every purported definition for its explanatory ability, attempting to find refutations of the sorts we have just seen. Thus awareness of the tasks a definition must perform will help us look for the right sort of thing, but there is no technique for the looking, it seems. All the technique is to be found in the procedures for testing a candidate. As for hitting on a good candidate, one either has a knack for that sort of thing, or one does not. This is one point of Socrates’s claim that, like his mother, he is a midwife. He does not give birth to the idea, but he does have the expertise to examine the newborn and detect any deficiencies in it.<sup>58</sup>

#### 7. THE *ION*—EXPERT KNOWLEDGE, POETRY AND TRADITIONAL RELIGION

. . . that’s not a subject you’ve mastered, speaking well about Homer, it’s a divine power that moves you, as a magnetic stone moves iron rings. . . This stone not only pulls those rings, if they’re iron, it also puts power *in* the rings, so that they in turn can . . . pull other rings . . . the Muse makes some people inspired herself, and then through those who are inspired a chain of other enthusiasts is suspended. You know, none of the epic poets, if they’re good, are masters of their subject; they are inspired, possessed, and that is how they utter all those beautiful poems.

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<sup>57</sup>Thucydides observed that the Corcyreans in the course of their civil war resorted to actions of terrible cruelty in clear violation of traditional morality, and “in their justifications they reversed the customary evaluations conveyed by names. For unreasoning daring was counted as bravery in support of one’s allies; provident delay was counted as fair-seeming cowardice; temperance was regarded as a pretext for cowardice; and understanding everything was regarded as being good for nothing in action.” *Peloponnesian War* III 82.4. A concern for justice would be seen as nothing but cowardice. The work of definition Socrates undertook, it seems, was needed to stabilize ethical convictions in times of stress and uncertainty.

<sup>58</sup>Plato, *Theaetetus* 149 ff. Greek parents would leave a defective child exposed on a mountain side to die. This was considered legally and ethically correct as long as the child had not been formally accepted into the family by the father. After such formal acceptance such exposure would be murder. A midwife would be expected to have expertise in spotting birth defects such as Down’s syndrome in the newborn, so that she could advise the father to expose the child.

Plato, *Ion* 533de<sup>59</sup>

I will show you the measures of the loud-resounding sea,  
 Although I am skilled in neither ships nor sea-faring;  
 For never yet have I sailed by ship over a broad sea . . .  
 So much is my experience of many-pegged ships.  
 Nevertheless, I will tell you the mind of Zeus who holds the aegis,  
 For the Muses have taught me to sing in marvelous song.

Hesiod, *Works and Days* 648–50, 660–62)<sup>60</sup>

In the *Ion* Plato considers Socrates's response to certain religious opponents of the Greek Enlightenment he represented.<sup>61</sup> In the dialogue, *Ion*, a prize-winning rhapsode who specialized in reciting Homer, claims not only that he recites well, but that he can speak well about Homer, interpreting the poetry he recites and explaining its virtues. In particular, perhaps, he can explain the wisdom Homer wishes to impart. Socrates argues that even if Homer is a poet inspired by the god, neither he nor *Ion* can lay claim to knowledge of the sort sought by the wise man. After all, the rhapsode does not provide an explanatory account of what he says, and so cannot defend it against attempts at refutation, and so does not know it.<sup>62</sup>

Socrates suggests that Homer wrote the fine things he did through the god's inspiration, but without any knowledge why they were so fine. In effect, the god had planted correct beliefs in him, and imparted to him a certain persuasive ability. *Ion* is inspired at one remove when he recites Homer, and these correct beliefs spread from Homer to himself to his audience, for *Ion* also gains Homer's persuasiveness, the other element of his inspiration. But *Ion* has no art rooted in knowledge here, and cannot explain why Homer is right. With inspiration comes a kind of madness. Inspired people stand outside themselves, holding the opinions, and so gaining the virtues, they do, not through their own rational natures, but through the external influence of the

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<sup>59</sup>Translated by Paul Woodruff, Plato (1997) 941.

<sup>60</sup>Translated in Leshner (2008).

<sup>61</sup>The dialogue takes it that poetry imparts wisdom, if it does, by imparting knowledge, a Socratic assumption, as we shall see. So one needs to understand Homer's thought to be a good rhapsode (530bd). One can contrast this with the Platonic rehabilitation of poetry in *Republic* II and III, where it is held to impart virtue by training the emotions, rather than imparting knowledge.

<sup>62</sup>*Ion* 533d-534e.

god.<sup>63</sup>

Ion can accept this account when it comes to his ability to recite, for it seems to him that he is employing no technical knowledge here, and stands outside himself in a kind of ecstasy when he recites. But he is hesitant whether it can be applied to his interpretation of Homer. Socrates points out that Ion's skill extends only to Homer, and he is not much good as an interpreter of other poets. If his skill resided in the subject matter the poets talk about, he ought to be quite good whenever the others touch on the same subject matter as Homer does. Of course, it would seem a plausible claim that he has a skill or craft of discovering the poet's intent, both his linguistic meaning and his artistic intentions, and finding effective ways to convey it to the audience, and since Homer writes somewhat differently from other poets, his skill might be limited to Homer. But to say this would undermine any claim Ion makes to impart wisdom to his audience, a wisdom gained from Homer, whom he understands better than other people. If Homer's poetry contained such wisdom Ion should, in his interpretation, be able to expound it, and so would have it himself, just as one who can expound geometry (complete with the proofs) knows geometry. That means he should be able to comment on any other poet who imparted wisdom, just as someone who has mastered Euclid can comment on other writers who deal with geometry.

In the desire to claim real knowledge gained through his poetic inspiration, Ion goes along with the suggestion that he learns from Homer the military art, chariot driving, and any number of other matters Homer alludes to. After all, it is only a charioteer who can claim with knowledge that a chariot should be driven as Homer says it should, and only an expert on military matters who can say with authority that Agamemnon speaks appropriately to his troops. So Homer must have these arts if he is an authority, and he conveys them to his interpreter, who can demonstrate himself how well Homer speaks. Perhaps Ion thinks, like Prodicus, that wisdom is not an independent subject, since there is no such thing as the good itself, but only a portfolio of skills at acquiring various sorts of good, such as medicine (good for the body), cooking (good for gustatory

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<sup>63</sup>In Pauline Christianity, supernatural faith, of the sort that underlies salvation, is a gift of God, so that a person believes because it is given of God for her to do so, not because she has discovered the truth by reason. What is being proposed here anticipates the notion of Christian faith quite nicely, if the poetry of Homer is taken as Sacred Scripture. A Fundamentalist might, like Ion, take it that his sacred text provides information on a variety of matters—the history of the world, biology, astronomy, as well as ethics, metaphysical information about God, and the saving truth that God loves us and so on. If the Socratic account of Ion's position seems somehow silly, then Pauline Christianity, perhaps, ought to seem silly too. In any case, if we accept the philosophical lesson from the dialogue, we will have to conclude that faith is not a sort of knowledge, is not science, and does not involve a rational justification for its constitutive beliefs. Whether that recommends faith to us or not all depends, of course.

pleasure), carpentry (good for making things) and the like. In the end, Ion has to give up such claims,<sup>64</sup> and accept that even in his interpretation of Homer he is proceeding as it were by inspiration, that is, in reliance on Homer as someone inspired whose inspiration he catches, not as someone who knows whose knowledge he gains.

Socrates's own view of the matter is the traditional one, and that, and the honor in it for the rhapsode perhaps leads Ion to reverse himself and accept it at the end of the dialogue. He has been laying claim to something fine, wisdom or knowledge, that is not really his at all, but the property, if of anyone, of the expert, scientific thinker, and he has something quite fine of his own that he can lay claim to. Ion's resistance, right to the end of the discussion, is perhaps due to the fact that he may not be able to claim *anything* as his own if he is inspired as Socrates claims he is. He is only a vehicle for what belongs to another, and he could, in his own person, be a great fool, despite the wisdom he imparts from the god. Indeed, Socrates even emphasizes that he is robbed of what wits he has when he is reciting, for one's native wit would interfere with the action of the god's inspiration.

At the end of the dialogue Ion claims to be the best general in Greece, which leaves an air of silliness about him which is somewhat misleading. Why does he claim this? Because when he is asked what passages in Homer relate to the art peculiar to the rhapsode (wisdom?), he insists that they all do. But some also relate to generalship, and the same passage cannot deal with two arts at once. So a rhapsode must be a general, and Ion thinks he is the best rhapsode in Greece. Ion should have said that the passage deals with generalship, and can be judged that way, by the accuracy of its information about being a general and the correctness of its reasons for what it says, but it can also be judged, not on these matters, but on the beauty with which it says it, or how persuasively it says it. These latter matters are for the rhapsode to judge. Thus the rhapsode becomes, not a wise man, but an art critic. So Homer does not *discuss* the art of the rhapsode, as a treatise on poetry might, but rather *falls under* that art and can be judged by its standards. But that, of course, means the rhapsode's

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<sup>64</sup>At one point he tries to do so, claiming that Homer only *imitates* the expert charioteer, but Socrates asks him if the imitation is the best and most exact possible, and Ion says it is, and Socrates then draws the conclusion that he must *be* a perfect charioteer to pull off such an impersonation. Ion should, perhaps, insist that it is only the superficial accidents of charioteers that are imitated, not the essence, but he would suffer a loss of honor, then. And there is something else. Is Homer a mere imitator of someone who knows the good? It is Homer's *wisdom* that is imparted to the audience through his inspired poetry, or so Ion thinks. So he does not want to grant that he only imitates a wise man in his poetry. Still, perhaps he could grant this without losing too much, by granting that Homer has correct opinions about the good without knowing why they are correct. That is mere imitation, but it would mean that Homer remains a fine instructor, up to a point, at least, if he is very persuasive, for he brings people to hold true opinions on the most important matters.

peculiar art is not wisdom, but a relatively minor matter of artistic judgment.<sup>65</sup>

A great issue is implicit in the dialogue, not whether Homer teaches generalship, but whether Homer teaches wisdom, knowledge of the good life. The point is that he no more teaches that, assuming he addresses the issue (and any Greek would have taken it he does), than he teaches generalship. The issue is this, then: is it best to rely on the inspiration of a God, giving over one's own autonomy, to gain wisdom, or to lead our own lives as best we can by our own wits and through our own resources? Going by the *Apology*, Socrates trusted that the gods intend that we rely on ourselves, and the best life, that intended for us by the gods, is that of autonomous reason. The *Euthyphro* suggests that the stories about the gods in the poets cannot be trusted, and makes it out that any purportedly divine revelation or inspiration would have to be tested against what we *know* about the good life, justice, and the like, to see if it could indeed have been from a god. If the supposedly inspired message is consistent with what we know, makes points going beyond what we know that survive investigation into their truth, and makes yet further points that are plausible, useful, and consistent with what we know, then even an expert can benefit from it. But this is just like relying on a human expert whom we have tested and found wise. The view opposed to Socrates's, that we should rely utterly on God, abandoning a prideful and overweening reliance on our own resources, including reliance on reason to test the authenticity of traditional revelation, has been one of the most powerful opponents of this Enlightenment humanism from Socrates's day to our own.

Before we pass on to another topic, we would do well to note that Socratic views provide resources for Ion here that he does not exploit. If we cannot ever actually gain the knowledge of the good which is wisdom, wouldn't correct beliefs about it come as close as human beings can come? Now Socrates thinks that our beliefs are most likely to be correct when they have survived much testing, but wouldn't their source in the inspiration of a god also provide good reason to think they were correct? Moreover, though it would be traditional to wonder if the God might mislead us, Socrates would surely argue that the Gods would never mislead us on such an important matter. So it may be that the imitation of wisdom in Homer is as close to wisdom as we are likely to get. Such reflections, it is perhaps needless to say, might throw support to Christian reliance on Faith, and Ion has his somewhat cannier successors among Christian Apologists.

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<sup>65</sup>Not to claim he is the best general in Greece would be to abandon Fundamentalism, if we transfer it to the preacher's relation to Sacred Scripture. The faith imparted by Scripture would be restricted to matters of religious import (including ethics? Political thought? Cosmogony?).

## 8. PARADOXES IN ETHICS: THERE IS ONLY ONE VIRTUE

If then virtue is an attribute of the spirit, and one which cannot fail to be beneficial, it must be wisdom, for all spiritual qualities in and by themselves are neither advantageous nor harmful, but become advantageous or harmful by the presence with them of wisdom or folly.

Plato, *Meno* 88cd<sup>66</sup>

The man who acts rightly through understanding and knowledge becomes at the same time brave and upright.

Democritus Fr. DK B181<sup>67</sup>

The Greek word usually translated as ‘virtue’, *arete*, generally refers to an excellence in a particular role or function. The *arete* of a knife might be sharpness and balance. As we shall be using it, and our philosophers intended it, it will be restricted to human excellence in general, not human excellence in a specific function such as carpentry or soldiering.<sup>68</sup> Because of virtue, Socrates thought, one does well and lives well. This virtue, he insisted, is a form of scientific knowledge, knowledge of what is good. This led him to some surprising claims usually referred to as the Socratic Paradoxes: (1) Virtue can be taught in the way other forms of knowledge are taught. (2) No one who knows what is good can act badly, so that incontinence or weakness of will is impossible. (3) There is only *one* virtue, knowledge of the good, and not, as is commonly supposed, many virtues. (4) Possession of virtue, and so of knowledge of the good, is necessary, and sufficient for happiness.<sup>69</sup>

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<sup>66</sup>Translated Vlastos (1991) 95–96.

<sup>67</sup>Translated Moline (1981) 20.

<sup>68</sup>Of course, there may be no such thing, but only excellence in different specifically human functions, if there are any of those, including excellence in cooperation with others, say. But most Greeks assumed without analyzing it too closely that there was such a thing.

<sup>69</sup> Plato, in his middle dialogues, modified the Socratic theory, redefining the virtues in light of a new account of the structure of the soul, rejecting the third paradox, and modifying the defense of the others to match his new views, but the earlier dialogues all seem to defend them in the way I shall describe here. Socratic definitions of courage, self-restraint, wisdom, and piety are developed in the *Laches*, *Charmides*, *Euthydemus*, and *Euthyphro*, and the central theory of virtue itself is developed in the *Protagoras*, and discussed in the *Meno*. Friendship is discussed in Socratic terms in the *Lysis*. The paradoxes are defended in the *Protagoras* and *Lesser Hippias*, and discussed in the *Meno*. These dialogues are anything but straightforward. They all profess to arrive at no conclusion concerning the nature of the virtue approached, although a conclusion is in fact hinted at in each case. Fallacious arguments are left

What drove Socrates to his theory was his conviction that perfect virtue must be both good and noble under every possible circumstance. Since virtue is always good, that is, useful to its possessor, virtuous people never suffer due to their virtue, at least in the long run, but always do well because of it.<sup>70</sup> Socrates also insisted that virtue, once it is gained, cannot be lost again, for it is an internal state of the soul not to be gained or lost due to the blows or seductions of fortune, though one's response to such a change may reveal the absence of a virtue that had seemed to be there. The truly virtuous person cannot be tempted or driven away from virtue. Moreover, true virtues never conflict with one another. They always recommend the same action in the same situation. What is courageous is equally wise and temperate. Fundamentally, virtue makes one a perfect master of fate, and a virtuous person can neither be harmed in the long run, nor lose the virtue that makes him invulnerable, whether because of the mere presence of, or the effects of external circumstances on himself, or because of contradictory demands condemning one to an act contrary to one virtue to meet the requirements of another. "When wisdom is present, whoever has it needs no more good fortune than that."<sup>71</sup>

In his arguments for all this, Socrates depends on an optimistic view of the world.<sup>72</sup> He argues that good fortune is not needed to supplement wisdom, since on each occasion wisdom will maximize a person's welfare. It would seem this shows only that one will do as well as one can, given the resources at one's disposal, surely not that a wise man will necessarily have the resources to attain happiness. Moreover, one might object that wisdom, at least of the human sort, only maximizes the probability of a favorable outcome, and the very best strategy might fail due to bad luck. Indeed, foolishness might succeed given good luck, and sometimes foolishness might do better for us than wisdom. Surely it is too much to require that virtue always

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standing for the reader to refute for herself, and much of import for the argument is to be found in the dramatic situation and the characters involved. For good analyses see, for instance, S. Mark Cohen on the *Euthyphro* and G. Santas on the *Laches* in Vlastos (ed.) 1971, O'Brien on the *Laches* in Anton and Kustas (1971) and the summaries and discussions of each dialogue in Guthrie's *History* III (1969) and IV (1975). My account of Socratic ethics draws a great deal from Irwin (1977) and (1995), and Penner (1992). It is noteworthy that the rhetorician Isocrates denied that virtue could be taught in his *Against the Sophists*, and denied the identity of courage, justice and wisdom, and the proposition that there is one science of them all, as well as the distinction between knowledge and belief, in his *Helen*. Probably, he is reacting to Socrates.

<sup>70</sup>So temperance is not orderliness and quietness, since these qualities are not good in all circumstances (*Charmides* 159a-160e), and courage is not endurance since endurance is harmful when it is not wise (*Laches* 192b-d), and see *Meno* 88cd. If the reader hesitates whether perfect virtue exists at all, he shares Socrates's doubts about the matter, at least in the human world. But Socrates thought that perfect knowledge of the good, if it occurred, would meet the requirements for perfect virtue, and he knew of no other trait of the soul that would. So he thought the nature of virtue can be specified, whether it exists or not.

<sup>71</sup>*Euthydemus* 280b. This point is developed very nicely in Nussbaum (1986).

<sup>72</sup>See *Euthydemus* 279a-281e.

succeed—the most we can demand is that virtuous action always be the best strategy, and that is quite a different thing. But Socrates is convinced that, in the long run, at least, wisdom will always lead to happiness, and no unwise strategy will, in the long run, do so. In keeping with this view of the power of wisdom, Socrates argues that it is the only thing that is always good, on the ground that anything else is good only if it is used appropriately by a wise person. Resources and opportunities are good only because their wise use is good.

Socrates very much wanted to believe that a virtuous person had control over his fate, but he did not think we could be virtuous simply by wanting the right things, since desire, that is, an opinion about what is good, unsupported by a theoretical understanding of the good, is unsteady, and a person without understanding is easily frightened or seduced away from the right desire. (That is, their correct belief about the good is easily changed by weak evidence to the contrary.) Steadiness and self-control, the marks of real virtue, if rooted in beliefs responsive to evidence,<sup>73</sup> can come only from knowledge, from a technical art, and so virtue must involve a theoretical knowledge of the good. Of course, only the gods can have such knowledge perfectly, so we remain always somewhat at the mercy of events, but only because we can never have knowledge, but have to settle for well-confirmed opinion, falling short of perfect virtue. The world remains a good place, since it offers us a fair, if difficult, game. If there were no master art to be learned here, no technique by which we could assure ourselves of the good life, if our good fortune were not in the end up to us, that could only mean that good does not rule in the world, and this was a notion that Socrates never could accept.

In addition to his faith in the rulership of the good, Socrates's views reflect his faith in the notions of the Greek Enlightenment, most particularly, that scientific knowledge provides the key to a good life, both by providing us with techniques to control nature, and by guiding us in practical and political affairs. In as exaggerated a form of the Enlightenment view as can be imagined, Socrates refuses to allow that any part of virtue or personal worth can possibly be anything other than scientific knowledge of the good. He argues this by pointing out that the mere ability to get what we desire, provided by particular crafts such as shoe-making and archery, and respected personal qualities such as physical strength, honor, good reputation, and persuasiveness, though they may seem to be virtues or components of personal worth, will only benefit us if we in fact set ourselves tasks that are worth performing and not personally damaging. True virtue can never harm us, but only benefit us, and so nothing that provides us merely with the ability to get what we desire can

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<sup>73</sup>Of course, if it is rooted in desires, and these are not beliefs about the good, but depend on them only partially in some complex way, other sources of steadiness become possible. This is the path to Plato's revision of Socratic ethics.

be regarded as true virtue. Mere ability needs the guidance of wisdom, knowledge of what it is in fact good to do, if it is to benefit us, and so it is a mere adjunct to virtue, an external circumstance needed so that virtue can produce its characteristic good effects. Virtue is knowledge of the good. One might have thought that certain character traits, a tendency to fearless action in time of danger, independence of mind, and the like, were virtues, but Socrates objects that such character traits are only virtues if they always lead to good actions, and they cannot do this if not guided by knowledge. Fearlessness must be rooted in a sound conception what truly ought to be feared, and independence of mind must be rooted in a correct notion whose opinions are to be respected. In the end, Socrates insists, if the character trait is really virtuous, it must result from an understanding of the good.<sup>74</sup>

This means that there is only one virtue,<sup>75</sup> even though we speak of a number of different virtues because this one trait, knowledge of the good, reveals itself in different ways in different situations. There is one reality, but many and various appearances. Let us examine the virtues—Socrates identifies five of them. Clearly, the first, **wisdom** is knowledge of the best way to conduct one's life, and so is rooted in knowledge of the good. The second, **Courage**, a more difficult case, is knowledge of the good as it appears when the question faced is what is truly to be feared. Only what is truly an evil is to be feared, of course, and knowledge concerning what is truly an evil is gained only through knowledge of the good. The third, **Self-restraint** is knowledge of the good as it appears when the question is whether to pursue something commonly, but mistakenly, thought to be good. The person with knowledge of the good will, of course, refuse to seek what she knows to be an evil, or at least not to be worth the trouble, and so display temperance in her desires. At least, this is the account implied in the discussion of weakness of will in the *Protagoras*. Probably, Socrates thought that one who fell short of knowledge, having only a correct opinion about the good, might, against his

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<sup>74</sup>So *Euthydemus* 280e-282a, *Meno* 88cd, quoted at the head of this section, and *Gorgias* 465e ff., in which Socrates argues that those with great power cannot do what they will, that is, obtain the good for themselves (which is what people *always* will, and the only thing they will for its own sake), unless they also have knowledge of the good.

<sup>75</sup>So it is argued in the *Laches* that courage should be knowledge of future goods (and evils) if it is a part of virtue. But anyone with this knowledge has it only in virtue of knowledge of goods and evils in general, so no one has this part unless he has the whole. So it seems reasonable to say that courage is the whole, and is simply knowledge of the good, applied to the case of future goods. Of course, it does not strictly follow that courage is the whole just because the whole must be present whenever courage is. The identity of the virtues with one another is argued most carefully in the *Protagoras*. *Meno* 78–79 has Socrates suggest that a definition of virtue as the ability to acquire good things is a bad one because it is only the one who acquires goods justly who is virtuous, but justice is a part of virtue, and so virtue is defined in terms of a part of virtue here, which is surely the wrong way to go about definition. The implied resolution of the difficulty seems to be that what really is good cannot be acquired unjustly, and so to acquire goods at all is just the same thing as to acquire goods justly. Justice turns out not to be a part of virtue, but the whole of virtue, for to be just is to be able to acquire the good, and this, of course, is simply to know what is good.

will, follow out some impulse he thought to be bad. But knowledge should not allow such behavior.<sup>76</sup> This virtue will bear a somewhat longer discussion.

The *Charmides*, which addresses self-restraint explicitly, suggests that self-knowledge is what lies behind self-restraint. This seemed possible because it was a common view that self-restraint is rooted in people's knowledge of their own limitations and their place in the scheme of things, which debars overreaching oneself. Socrates cannot, of course, allow that self-restraint is somehow the restraint of certain desires in us by or on behalf of other, more rational desires with which we identify our true selves—he does not allow that anyone, in the end, desires anything except the good, tracing all desires to that one desire in conjunction with different beliefs about what is good—for Socrates, *all* desires are rational, and there is no irrational part of the soul. Barred from the natural understanding of self-restraint best adapted to the task, Socrates has to find reasons to identify self-knowledge with knowledge of the good to defend his views. Now, in response to Socrates's questioning in the *Charmides*, Critias is driven to say that self-knowledge is instead that science which deals with knowledge, including the knowledge that constitutes the science in question. It is apparently the philosophical field of epistemology, or perhaps philosophy of science. Of course, it is much more natural to identify self-knowledge as knowledge of the *knower*, not knowledge of *knowledge*. So why does Critias make this move?

First, self-knowledge, he thinks, must be knowledge of some general thing, since it is an expert knowledge of some kind, not mere everyday knowledge of particular observed facts concerning oneself. But how can self-knowledge be such a craft, expert knowledge productive of some good, given that all crafts concern *particular* goods? No craft aims at the good itself, it seems, but they are all like medicine, which aims at health, but cannot of itself judge whether that health is good or not in any given situation. Now the temperate or self-restrained person, the one with self-knowledge, knows that he is temperate, and that temperance is the doing of *good* things, but it is hard to identify any *particular* subject approached by self-restraint. Self-restraint appears useful in relation to every craft, but is proper to none. So self-restraint is identifiable with no particular craft. Perhaps it is theoretical knowledge, then, knowledge of some subject matter not aimed at any practical result, but generally useful to any craftsman. What subject matter? It seems that temperance *rules* the other sciences, since temperance must be joined to medicine, for instance, to guarantee that the physician will always produce good things. So Critias suggests temperance is the theoretical

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<sup>76</sup>*Protagoras* 345d–e. Aristotle says in *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 2, 1145b23–26, that Socrates thought that knowledge could not be dragged around like a slave by the passions, but that leaves room that maybe mere opinion could be (1145b31–1146a9). For this matter, see Donald Morrison, “Socrates,” Ch. 6 in Gil and Pellegrin, eds. (2006).

science bearing on *knowledge in general*, so that its subject matter includes medicine. Thus, he makes self-knowledge knowledge of *itself*, of knowledge, rather than knowledge of ourselves, of knowers.<sup>77</sup> Perhaps, in support of this move, one can plead that the knower's knowledge of himself most relevant to virtue involves knowledge of his state of virtue, and so of his limitations and possible need to follow someone else's advice when they know what is good and he does not. But knowledge of his virtue requires knowledge of knowledge, for virtue is a sort of knowledge. So knowing when one does not know becomes the essence of a person's self-knowledge and lies behind his self-restraint.<sup>78</sup> Thus Socrates is able to say that temperance, the Temperate Itself, makes one temperate, that is, the ideal in one causes one to live up to the ideal (as fire, the hot itself, makes something hot). Self-knowledge (knowledge directed toward itself), makes one knowledgeable about himself.

Two problems are now identified with the definition. First, it seems that the senses are not reflexive in this way, so that one can hear hearing or see sight, and one might wonder whether knowledge of itself is even possible—can a faculty have itself as an object? Second, if the science of science is just that, the science of science, it will not also be the science of health, say, and so it will not provide us with medical knowledge, but only, once medical knowledge is obtained by the usual, medical, means, knowledge that this is indeed knowledge. It will not provide us with knowledge *what* one knows, but only *that* one knows. So, in parallel to this account of temperance, the best account of the master art makes it rule other arts, though no other art rules it, and so it must rule itself, that is, it must decide for itself concerning the validity of its own aim. It is like epistemology, the knowledge about science as such. But it is only of use to the extent that it is coupled with the other arts.<sup>79</sup>

Socrates had earlier identified some uses for epistemology in the *Charmides*, suggesting that the epistemologist will learn whatever he learns more easily and see it in a clearer light, since he knows what science is, and he will examine others about the science he knows more effectively. But, of course, these uses presuppose knowledge of another science. The knowledge of knowledge, of course, would also have the tools

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<sup>77</sup>To suggest that self-knowledge is knowledge of knowers *considered as such*, does a lot to narrow the gap between the two views. If we suggest that knowledge of myself is a knowledge of *my* purposes and ends, which informs my use of the crafts, we seem to drift towards that subjectivity about the good to which Plato and Socrates are so hostile. Are we to allow that what is temperate for one person may not be so for another with other aims?

<sup>78</sup>And so to be virtuous, for a human being, means knowing one does not know, a familiar enough Socratic paradox.

<sup>79</sup>Within the dialogue, temperance is being proposed as part of a cure for headaches, and temperance will be of use if it accompanies the technological cure for headache, the application of a certain poultice, but not by itself.

necessary to decide if it itself had knowledge of what knowledge is, and so it would judge itself and all other sciences, and no higher science would be needed to judge it.<sup>80</sup> In the same way, virtue, knowledge of the good, judges itself whether it is good, and rules the other arts in their pursuit of the good.<sup>81</sup>

A paradox is introduced here, for it seems that only a virtuous person would know whether he was virtuous or not, and so no one could know himself not to be virtuous. So Socrates insists that Charmides, since he is temperate (by Critias's account), must have some sense of the presence of this temperance within him by which he might form an opinion what it is, or what its effects are. Someone without virtue might have a correct opinion about the matter, perhaps even an opinion backed by irrefutable evidence, but he could not be said to know this scientifically unless he possessed scientific knowledge what virtue is, and if he knew that, he would *be* virtuous.

Socrates's account of self-restraint does not quite account for the traditional view of the thing, of course, but rather provides a rational reconstruction of it. Socrates takes "knowing one's place" not to be a recognition of one's social subordination in the scheme of things, but rather a matter of recognizing what one's true good is, and exceeding our place to be reaching beyond what is truly good for us. Of course, Socrates's account does suggest that we should subordinate ourselves to the gods, because of their wisdom, for it is wise to listen to the expert. But this means that the social order to be observed in traditional views, which simply recognizes that some are entitled to more than others due to birth or conquest, is replaced with an order based on knowledge, presupposing that the higher take care for the lower, seeking everyone's good.

To move on to the fourth virtue, Socrates's account of **piety** reflects his religious liberalism. Piety was usually taken in Greece as respect for one's parents and the gods, based simply on their superior position in the social order. But Socrates argues in the *Euthyphro* that it is a respect based on knowledge of the gods' expertise in this matter of the good, so that we respect their commands because we recognize their superior wisdom.<sup>82</sup> The same would apply to our respect for our parents. If piety is to be a virtue, then the gods must

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<sup>80</sup>This science is described in exactly such terms in Aristotle's attempt to construct it in his *Posterior Analytics*.

<sup>81</sup>The problem how something can have itself as an object is raised explicitly at *Charmides* 167c–169c. There it is suggested sight does not see itself, nor does any sense sense the senses; desire desires pleasure, not desire; wishes wish for some good, not for wishing; and love loves fine things, not other loves; and there is no opinion concerning only itself and other opinions. So how can there be knowledge that knows itself and other knowledge? But it seems in every case that the impossible thing *does* occur, however paradoxical it looks. Aristotle even postulates a common sense to sense the other senses.

<sup>82</sup>So Immanuel Kant remarks in the *Foundations of the Metaphysics of Morals* that "even the Holy One of the Gospels must be compared to our ideal of moral perfection before he can be recognized as such."

always agree on what we ought to do, else we are forced into impiety by their conflicting demands. So Socrates rejects the old stories about the conflicting demands of the gods, which, in Athenian tragedy, are often used to posit conflicting ethical demands, something Socrates thinks impossible. He argues in the *Protagoras* that piety is simply justice, for that is all the gods demand of us, that we be just and give them what they deserve in our relation with them.<sup>83</sup> What they deserve, of course, is not sacrifices or any other personal service, for the gods are blessed and have no need of anything at all, and certainly not anything we might provide. What they deserve is our respect for their wisdom and our willingness to follow their direction. Socrates's liberal view was accepted among philosophers, and after Plato, piety drops out of the canonical list of virtues, absorbed into justice.

The last of the canonical virtues for Socrates, **justice**, was the most difficult case, for it covered the other-regarding virtues, and it was hard to see how sacrificing oneself to others' needs provided one with power and happiness in the way a virtue should. Socrates, accepting the egoistic bent of most Greek ethical speculation, at least for the sake of argument, treats justice in those Socratic dialogues addressed directly to it as behavior arising from knowledge that one will always suffer, in the end, for any deliberate harm done to others, and always be rewarded for benefitting others. At least, this is the definition one might draw from the *Gorgias*, though that dialogue does not so much present as criticize that definition from the point of view of Plato's own, later ethics. It may be that Socrates thought this did not define justice, but only expressed a truth about it relevant to the egoist, a truth rooted in the real nature of justice. Perhaps that real nature is knowledge of the truth that one's own good is only possible as part of the good of the whole. If that was Socrates's view, and justice is the knowledge of that part of the good that involves the good of others, and is perhaps something like friendship, as discussed in the *Lysis*. Punishment of others is just if it is imposed to teach, correcting injustice in the soul and benefitting the one punished. Justice would, if this is right, be due to possession of the science of the good. We shall see that the implausibility of the claim that the just never suffer because of their justice is part of what drove Plato to revise Socratic views, or perhaps to state them more forthrightly.

## 9. SOCRATIC INTELLECTUALISM

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<sup>83</sup>*Protagoras* 331ab. The identity of piety and justice is suggested by Penner (1973), but Vlastos (1981), "The unity of virtues in the *Protagoras*," suggests that Socrates only held that one cannot possess any one of the virtues unless one possesses all the others. In Penner (1992) it is suggested that the Socratic view is that the meaning, say, of "justice" is different from that of "piety," but that both terms refer to the same reality.

If indeed they understood their diseases they would never have fallen into them.

Ps.-Hippocrates, *On the Art* 11.

Wisdom is to speak the truth and act it, listening to the voice of nature.

Heraclitus Fr. 107 (Bywater)

Coming afterwards, Socrates spoke better and more fully... But neither did *he* speak correctly. For he made the virtues forms of knowledge, and this is impossible. For all forms of knowledge are activities of reason, and reason arises in the intellectual part of the soul... by making the virtues forms of knowledge, he does away with the irrational part of the soul. And in doing this he does away both with passion and moral character... But afterwards Plato divided the soul correctly into its rational and non-rational parts and assigned to each its appropriate virtues.

Aristotle, *Magna Moralia* I 1, 1182a15-26.

The accounts Socrates gives of the particular virtues lead to a number of paradoxical claims. For one thing, courage and temperance might be supposed, following ordinary opinion, to be a matter of rationality overcoming irrational passions of fear and desire. But then mere knowledge of what is good would be insufficient for virtue, without the self-control needed to overcome ignorant and irrational passions in light of that knowledge. Without such self-control knowledge of the good could not actually affect one's actions.<sup>84</sup> Thus virtue is comprised not only of knowledge of the good, but also of whatever is responsible for such self-control. Plato had no difficulty with this, and we shall see that he constructed a modification of Socratic ethics along these lines, but to Socrates's mind these common suppositions were unacceptable. He thought that no one ever desires anything except what seems good, or fears anything except what seems bad.<sup>85</sup> If that is so, then real knowledge of what is in fact good or bad should automatically rule out irrational fears and desires,

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<sup>84</sup>For this view, see Euripides, *Hippolytus* 380-383, *Medea* 1078-1080.

<sup>85</sup>Perhaps the most sophisticated discussion of this point occurs in *Meno* 77b-78b. See also *Protagoras* 352bc, 358bc. Devereux (2008) notes that in the *Gorgias*, Socrates uses the Greek *boulesthai*, "want" (the word has the implication of planning and deliberation in it), for one's desire for the good, and *epithumein*, "desire" (in an impulsive, heedless way), for the desire one might have for water when thirsty, or a child's desire for sweets. He is able to say, then that sometimes one *desires* something that is bad for him, but even at that time one *wants* the good, but is mistaken what the good is. But it still seems that when one becomes aware of what the good is, the desire for the bad thing dissipates. So these two sorts of desire do not explain psychological conflict, in the way the desires of the different parts of the soul do in Plato's thought. The difference between them seems to be that the one is considered, the other impulsive, and in the presence of consideration impulse is always restrained.

since only what truly was good or bad would seem so to one with such knowledge. If there were mere opinion that something is good, that could perhaps coexist with opinion to the contrary, and the correct opinion might stand in need of some assistance, but no self-control is necessary to make *knowledge* of the good effective, since no one ever acts incontinently, that is, out of weakness of will, on a desire for what they *know* to be bad. Rather, one who acts on a desire always believes, when he acts and as long as he has the desire, that the desire is reasonable and its object good.<sup>86</sup>

In a central passage in the *Apology* Socrates proposes, as he examines his accusers, that no one would ever knowingly corrupt his fellow citizens, since he would then be harmed by them, and that if one does such a thing unknowingly, then instructing him is preferable to punishing him.<sup>87</sup> The Sophist Gorgias, in his *Defense of Palamedes*, advances very similar arguments, and it has been suggested that Gorgias also held that no one willingly does wrong, and that Socrates may have been imitating his *Palamedes* in this portion of his defense.<sup>88</sup> Gorgias seems to have used the doctrine in question to establish the power of rhetoric, arguing that our opinions about the good determine our behavior, so that the power to change people's opinions gives power over their actions.<sup>89</sup> So it looks as if Socrates may have agreed with Gorgias not only in his skepticism, but also in his intellectualism.

In the *Lesser Hippias* Socrates deduces from his definition of virtue the conclusion that no one except a virtuous person knowingly does evil. After all, the craftsman who knows how to do a certain good action, for instance, the doctor who knows how to cure, also knows best how to do the corresponding bad action, so that the doctor knows best how to kill. Thus, only one who knows what is truly good or bad can deliberately

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<sup>86</sup>Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* VII 2, 1145b23-7.

<sup>87</sup>*Apology* 25 de. Perhaps it is worth noting a suppressed premise in the argument, namely that one is only justly punished only for what one does deliberately and not from ignorance. In fact, there are some acts reasonably punished by the law whether one has done it deliberately and knowingly or not. Sometimes this stance is taken to put people on their guard against doing the thing even inadvertently (inflicting harm by selling a defective product), and sometimes, perhaps, because we are unwilling to listen to implausible excuses (drug possession). Here, perhaps, it could be argued that a truly vicious person will corrupt the young without believing he is doing so, since he does not recognize his own corruption, but he must be punished for doing it, anyway. We take that attitude, for instance, toward those who lead children to corrupt behavior that may be legally tolerated in an adult.

<sup>88</sup>See Calagero, G. (1957), and, opposed to Calagero's view, J.A. Coulter (1964). The examination of the accusers is at *Apology* 24-28. At *Apology* 41b (Xenophon's *Apology* 26) Socrates mentions Palamedes as another fellow who was unjustly condemned to death. Guthrie in his *History* IV, 76 ff, refuses to think that Socrates could have adopted anything from a Sophist.

<sup>89</sup>In the *Gorgias*, Plato represents Gorgias as chiefly interested in demonstrating the power of rhetoric in order to show it a good, and withdrawing from the discussion when that turns out to be insufficient. He did not presume to philosophical wisdom, it seems.

do evil with full knowledge what he is up to, and that, of course, is the virtuous man. Socrates is comfortable with this conclusion, but only because virtue is the one craft which we can be sure is never misused, since no one ever does what they know to be bad for them. It turns out that *no one* ever knowingly does evil.<sup>90</sup> The virtuous don't because they know what is good, and so do it, and the vicious don't, because they don't know that what they do is bad.<sup>91</sup> This may not be mere paradox mongering. Aristotle suggests that virtue cannot be misused, not for Socrates's reason, but because it is not a craft or science at all, but rather a character state.<sup>92</sup> Socrates perhaps faced some such argument against his intellectualism, and disposed of it by showing that virtue could not be misused even if it is a craft, as long as it is genuinely the master craft.

Socrates's paradox here may not have seemed as odd to many Greeks of his time as it does to us. Homer, large stretches of whose poems any educated Greek would have committed to memory, uses such idioms as "they knew fierce things toward one another" to mean "they regarded one another with fierce intent", and one could "know friendly things" as well. The idea behind the idiom, and many like it, seems to be that one *experiences* such things, and, as a few of our own expressions in English would indicate, one only really knows emotional and motivational states when one has experienced them in oneself. So one might say, for instance, that he learned what fear was during the war. So, to know wisdom, really know it, one must have it. Or again, to really know the future pains that make justice advisable would be something beyond merely knowing about them propositionally, so that one could describe them. One would have to experience them imaginatively in prospect. They would have to be *real* for the person. Socrates's notion of theoretical understanding of the good may well have involved this sort of vivid presentation of the pains and pleasures predicted by it. We do not really understand an art, after all, until experience (frequent attempts at refutation) has so set it in our minds that the art lives in us, and its aims are our aims, and its predictions and conclusions are as real for us as what is set before our eyes. If indeed this motivational absorption of the art is part of knowing it in Socrates's mind, we might say that he is not so much an intellectualist in his psychology as someone who has yet to separate out the intellectual and conative strands in our deliberations.<sup>93</sup>

Aristotle is exceptionally instructive here. In his discussion of Socrates's paradox, he remarks that

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<sup>90</sup>The thesis is stated outright by Socrates at *Apology* 25d-26a.

<sup>91</sup>This is the reading given to the dialogue, for instance, in Penner (1992) 131–133.

<sup>92</sup>*Nicomachean Ethics* VI 12, 1144a22-b1.

<sup>93</sup>Moline (1981) 12-30.

knowledge in the fullest sense should be something more than a display of the right verbal habits when one is questioned. It should “become part of ourselves, and that takes time.”<sup>94</sup> If, he thinks, we mean *real* knowledge of that kind, then Socrates is right to say that one cannot act against one’s knowledge, and the wise cannot act incontinently. But, of course, we say that someone acts incontinently precisely when their knowledge is *not* of that sort, but consists in little more than the ability to make the right answers when quizzed, so that they talk a good game. Indeed, people very often say things about the good they don’t actually believe, for the sake of appearances, and frequently claim to have been overcome by temptation so they might appear to hold values they don’t hold at all. This may not be entirely a matter of deceiving others, for many of us like to think better of ourselves than we deserve. This all supports the sympathetic view of Socrates’s paradox we have just presented. But Aristotle also says that Socrates made a mistake, which Plato then corrected, since Socrates does not allow the passions, but only the intellect, a role in our decisions. How does this square with his position on the paradox of incontinence? Well, what Socrates failed to recognize is not that a desire as well as knowledge is needed to bring about action, but rather that a person consists of several parts, each with its own desires and beliefs, and that the intellect is only one of these parts, others, for instance, being the part that seeks pleasure and the part that loves honor. A wise person has not only formed an intellect that knows the good. He has also trained the other parts of his soul to obedience to the intellect, and has instilled correct opinions about the good in them (they are incapable of *knowledge*). The incontinent man may have a complete intellectual grasp of the good, then, but it takes a long time to train the other parts of the soul, and so, when the other parts overpower the intellect, he will act incontinently, and, since it is an ignorant part of the soul that acts, he acts ignorantly. Where the mature Plato differs from Socrates is in his opinion about the unity of our personality. He sees many partially independent agents, each with its own desires, where Socrates see only one. For that reason, he rejects Socrates’s hedonism, and his view that virtue is simply mastery of a technical discipline by the intellect.<sup>95</sup>

#### **10. SOCRATIC HEDONISM AND VIRTUE AS THE HEALTH OF THE SOUL**

He is best of all who understands all things  
having considered them himself,  
the things which will be afterwards and at the end.

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<sup>94</sup>*Nicomachean Ethics* VII 3, 1147a21-22.

<sup>95</sup>For all of this, see the excellent analysis of Moline (1981) Ch. 2.

Hesiod, *Works and Days* 293-4<sup>96</sup>

Haven't we seen that the power of appearance leads us astray and throws us into confusion, so that in our actions and our choices between things both great and small we are constantly accepting and then rejecting the same things, whereas the art of measurement would have canceled the effect of the appearance, and by revealing the truth would have caused the soul to live in peace and quiet abiding in the truth, thus saving our life?

Socrates in Plato, *Protagoras* 356d-e

What exactly is the good? What is the content of this knowledge which is virtue? From the *Protagoras*, it seems that Socrates thought the well-lived, happy life was that which had the most, the longest lasting, and most intense pleasures, and the least pain.<sup>97</sup> Perhaps the chief motivation for this view is that it seems to make the art of the good one that participates in calculation, and so an exact art.<sup>98</sup> This is rooted in the requirements that Socratic ethics places on human psychology. Socrates could not treat people as though they were subject to sets of conflicting and irreconcilable desires, since he had reduced desire to the belief that something is good, and he did not think that people could hold contradictory beliefs while aware they were contradictory.<sup>99</sup> That

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<sup>96</sup>Translated in Moline (1981) 19.

<sup>97</sup>Plato, *Protagoras* 356a-c. The "greatest" or largest pleasure, I take to be the longest lasting. The word in the Greek indicates the greatest in *extent*. There is a long-standing dispute whether Plato intends Socratic hedonism in this dialogue to be merely a way of gaining Protagoras's agreement by arguing on his own principles. But Protagoras has to be persuaded that hedonism is true, so if it follows from his own principles, he is not aware of this. Moreover, Socrates's student Aristippus (see below in this chapter) derives hedonism from the notion that we only know appearances, but, like Gorgias, he takes it that we *do* know appearances and the contents of our own mind, which are realities. It looks as if he may have picked up his doctrines from Gorgias, then, or from Socrates, whom we know to have been influenced by Gorgias, and who may even himself have derived hedonism from Gorgias's principles, not from the more radical views of Protagoras. Of course, Plato is subtle enough so that he might have intended that Socrates show Protagoras first that he *ought* to be a hedonist, given his views, perhaps because appearances decide the matter, and for something to appear good is simply for it to be pleasant. The view taken here, that Socrates was indeed a hedonist, goes back at least to Grote (1850) 518 note. It is defended in Irwin (1977), and Nussbaum (1986).

<sup>98</sup>It is interesting that Aristotle opens the *Nicomachean Ethics* denying that ethics is an exact science, and insisting that it is uncultured to seek more exactness in the field than is reasonable and possible. Perhaps he had something like Socrates's views, or some form of utilitarianism, in mind. It should be noted here that Socratic hedonism has an intellectualist cast—so in the *Protagoras* Socrates argues that weakness of will is inconsistent with hedonism, and rejects weakness of will. Hedonism, in his mind, implies that rational calculation of pleasures and pains determines our choices. The *only* desire is the desire for pleasure in general. If one acts from weakness of will then one acts from specific desires, perhaps for one sort of pleasure, which overwhelm other specific desires for other sorts. So the desire for the pleasure in eating ice cream overwhelms the desire for the pleasure involved in having a good opinion of one's body. If both of these sorts are viewed simply as desires for pleasure, then it all becomes a matter of our opinions which pleasure is greater, and one desire does not overcome another at all.

<sup>99</sup>*Protagoras* 352 a-c.

does not mean there could not be conflicting beliefs. Aside from the possibility that one might not recognize a contradiction in one's beliefs, which would result, as it were, in an unconscious conflict one would have to discover through rational investigation of one's beliefs, one might find oneself unable to settle firmly on one belief, one belief being held for a bit and then supplanted by its contradictory, which would itself be rejected again shortly after as one's attention turned to the reasons producing the first belief. One might well be aware of this situation, and so experience conflict in one's beliefs, with its consequent unpleasantness and unease at one's inability to decide. He suggests that the cure for this wavering belief, which amounts to unsteadiness of character (for one's beliefs about the good *are* one's character), is the mastery of that science which is virtue, so that one will not find her beliefs "refuted" by experiences at every turn.<sup>100</sup> Where conflicting beliefs about the good both seem plausible, then, one needs from the science of the good some way of deciding which belief is correct. That means we need to be able to measure one good against another to decide which is greater, and for that purpose we need some common measure for apparently disparate goods. That common measure, Socrates suggests, is most plausibly taken as the total pleasure (less total pain) arising from the disparate goods. Moreover, Socrates held that we pursue pleasure alone for its own sake, and seek whatever else we value for the sake of the pleasure it gives us.<sup>101</sup> Thus he could argue that it is rational to be virtuous, since virtue will lead to the most effective pursuit of the one underlying aim of life that we all share.

Looking at the same matter from a different angle, it is problematic, if virtue is the master art, how such an art can rule the arts it commands. The true cook will surely cook what gives the greatest gustatory pleasure, and will know what to do when the question is what food is to be prepared, and surely the virtuous person does not know anything about this from that purely abstract knowledge of pleasure production that constitutes her virtue. We might say that cookery is a part of the knowledge of the good, but if we take that position, it seems that *every* art will be a part of virtue, and we will end up rather like Hippias, whom Socrates ridicules for his efforts to learn every possible art, including such things as needlework, so that he can be

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<sup>100</sup>Protagoras 357 a-e.

<sup>101</sup>The argument lying behind this is perhaps this: We always aim to satisfy our desires, so we always aim at satisfaction, therefore (here is the misstep) we always aim at a *feeling* of satisfaction (after all, it is only through this feeling that we can know we have been satisfied), and so, since a feeling of satisfaction just is pleasure, we always aim at pleasure. The difficulty in the argument here is revealed in the fact that we often do feel pleasure in satisfaction of a desire, but sometimes do not, even though the desire was genuine and we are *satisfied*. So one might take no pleasure in some victory because he was aware how much the whole affair pained his wife. Again, one might ask whether there is any pleasure that is not a feeling of satisfaction of a desire. Surely we desire pleasures in some cases (the pleasurable feelings associated with a good meal and good companionship, say), and it seems odd to say that the pleasure we desire is the sense that our desire for this pleasure has been satisfied. Somehow the pleasure has more *content* than that.

self-sufficient and virtuous. What does the master art do, then, that the arts subject to it do not do?

The same issue, as we have seen, is raised in the *Charmides*, which makes self-restraint the science that has science itself for a subject. This might help one know when one knows and when one does not, but surely the best person to consult about whether one knows something about ship-building or not is the ship-builder, not an epistemologist. It is not clear what the use of this knowledge about knowledge could be. It threatens to be empty of all practical content. Similarly, knowledge of the good as such, that is, virtue, might seem a useless sort of knowledge, compared to knowledge of health or some other particular good. What can one say about how to get the good without first specifying what sort of good thing one is after? Different good things are obtained in different ways, often very different ways. Is there any such thing at all as general instructions how to get the good?

Knowledge of the good as such, however, does seem suited to administer the other arts, balancing the various goods they severally seek against one another, even if it cannot either take their place or add new techniques to what they provide. So the pastry chef aims at a short term pleasure in connection with eating, the doctor at a longer term pleasure rooted in health, and the master art will have to decide whose advice to listen to when the two come into conflict. The chef cannot decide, for he will simply choose good pastry, that being the only aim of his art, while the doctor will choose health, the only aim of her art, neither even considering the aims of the other.<sup>102</sup> Only the art that deals with the good as such can treat of pastry and health at the same time, by considering each insofar as it is a good. One clear effect of virtue is to enable long term considerations to play their proper role, for most of us tend to value short-term goods (pastry) over long-term goods (health).<sup>103</sup> Now Socrates thought that balancing one good against another, and long term against short term considerations, requires common coin, so that later and earlier goods can be measured against one another. The point of his hedonism, reducing all goods to pleasure and the avoidance of pain, is to provide that common coin, so that one need never be at a loss when comparing one thing to another. We need only look

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<sup>102</sup>The problem of identifying that art which is wisdom is also developed, but not resolved, at *Euthydemus* 289d-292e, which suggest that it is perhaps the “art of kings,” an art that might seem to rule other arts, though Socrates confesses to be unsure what it does. If it makes the people good, for instance, surely it does not make them good at any particular endeavor, such as pastry making or medicine, for that is the function of more particular arts. See Plato, *Republic* IX, 580 ff., where he tries to resolve this sort of problem in a very different way than Socrates does, without relying on any common measure for the good. See also Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* I, where the question of the exact nature of the science of the good receives a yet different treatment.

<sup>103</sup>*Protagoras* 356cd. Here it seems reasonable to object that the true cook would understand the long term effects of pastry as well as the short term effects. That would subordinate a branch of medicine to cooking, of course. To make the comparison where several sciences are involved, the ethicist would presumably have to draw on the particular sciences for detailed information on how much pleasure and pain is produced by various actions or the various policies one could adopt.

at the total pleasure produced and the pain avoided in each case to judge which course of action is best. Otherwise we end up trying to compare apparently incommensurate values, such as the value of the artist's or her associate's happiness and her artistic works, a friendship and one's honor, and so on. Whatever other values may seem to be involved, they reduce to pleasure and the absence of pain, and so can be compared. (In a similar way, the expert in business management reduces all considerations to the common measure of money, aiming to maximize profits. We might end up assigning a monetary value to a human life in order to calculate whether it is worth the near certainty of several workmen dying in the process to build a new bridge.)

To apply this measure we must avoid the common error of supposing pleasures that are nearby to be greater than those that are more distant, so that we act for the moment without attention to the longer-term effects of what we do. Indeed, though every pleasure is a good *in itself* for Socrates, that is, a good not for the sake of any further good, he is willing to speak of some pleasures as bad because they invariably involve us in more pain than pleasure.<sup>104</sup> Many pleasures are said to be bad because they lead to ill health or retribution from others. Virtue, on the other hand, is to the soul as health is to the body, that disposition of the soul which makes one most capable of attaining pleasure and avoiding pain in a general way, just as good health makes us most capable of performing physical activities in a general kind of way. Even a skillful athlete in poor health cannot play well, and even an expert cook lacking virtue is unlikely to profit from his art. Virtue is good, not *in itself*, since it is good only because it leads to maximal pleasure, but is always choice worthy, always helpful, no matter what external circumstances hold, since knowledge of the good always leads one to the best available action, even in the least favorable situation. Pleasure, on the other hand, is not always worth choosing, for there are many circumstances in which particular pleasures carry with them, or inevitably lead to, pains or loss of pleasure that exceed them in worth, so that it is better to pass these pleasures by.

Perhaps we should modify these conclusions somewhat. Socrates may have thought that virtue was good in itself because it is by its nature pleasurable, a view we know to have been held by his student, Aristippus. So, it may be that possession of knowledge of the good is a pleasurable state, and that activities associated with it are intrinsically pleasurable as well. (Something similar seems true of the health of the body.) A virtuous person takes pleasure in the exercise of virtue, as Aristotle notes. There may be some point to refusing to distinguish a pleasurable activity from the pleasure it provides, as though the pleasure could have been had without the activity. So perhaps Socrates thought virtue a good in itself because it is intrinsically

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<sup>104</sup>For instance, *Protagoras* 351c suggests that the pleasant is always good *if we leave aside any consequence following from it*.

pleasurable. But this still does not mark out virtue as the highest good, for pleasurable eating is a good in itself as well, for the same reason, but is not always worth choosing. What makes virtue special is that it is the only thing good in every situation in which it might occur, taking into account all its consequences as well as its own character.

This last point comes out especially in the discussion of justice in the *Gorgias*. There Socrates insists that only virtue, and not pleasure, can be counted on always to be good, and insists that justice, the virtue under discussion, is preferable to successful injustice that leads, it seems, to an increase of pleasures. But this apparent rejection of Hedonism is reversed by Socrates in his attempt at the end of the dialogue to make his praise of justice plausible—he insists (without argument!) that the gods always punish the unjust and always reward the just in the afterlife. Socrates's only positive attempt to argue that justice is of value in *this* life resides in his claim that friendship is not possible without justice. Even so, it might be objected that the world is a nasty enough place so that we'd best not aim at so lofty an ideal as just friendship with others. Even if friendship is good in itself, we all have an intense desire for our own welfare, and it may be best to aim at that rather than take the risks involved in being just. Indeed, it is somewhat more plausible that life is not worth living if one is herself, personally, miserable, than it is that it is not worth living if one's friends are miserable. Aware of this objection, Socrates brings in the gods in a last ditch effort to preserve his belief that just actions are always better than unjust, on egoistic grounds alone. He would have adopted an entirely different strategy, and had no need of the gods, had he been concerned to argue that justice is valuable enough *in itself* to outweigh any pleasures that might be obtained, or pains that might be avoided, through injustice.<sup>105</sup>

That virtue is health in the soul suggests that Socratic discourse is a kind of psychotherapy, and in the *Gorgias* Socrates says that just punishment is psychotherapy as well, calculated to improve the soul and make it healthy.<sup>106</sup> Health in the body is always a good thing for the body, for only health enables the body to respond in the best possible way to whatever circumstances it faces, even the most adverse, and the same thing goes for health in the soul. Since health is absolutely necessary if we are to maximize those things in life that are good in themselves, health is something we should always seek above all else (even things good in themselves), not

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<sup>105</sup>Some notable scholars deny that Socrates accepted hedonism, arguing that his presentation of hedonism in the *Protagoras* is insincere and *ad hominem*, and that the resort to the gods in the *Gorgias* is unnecessary and *ad hominem*. I follow Irwin and Nussbaum here. On the other side, see Zeyl (1980), Santas (1979), and Vlastos (1991).

<sup>106</sup>On this point and the background to Socrates's view in the *Sophists* and elsewhere, see Preuss (1982). Democritus, too, seems to have held that virtue assures the stability of the atoms of the soul, producing a kind of health, and a steadiness in it in the same way that Socrates thought wisdom did (Fragments 9, 191, 31, 264). One could find parallels in Pythagoreanism as well.

because it is good in itself, but because what is good in itself cannot be obtained without health.

Socrates's hedonism represents a departure from traditional views. The Greeks tended to conceive virtue as a personal quality that leads to success, and so to power and victory over others. More or less without reflection, Callias in the *Gorgias* assumes that a life in which one's desires are without limit, but are always achieved, the life of endless *victory*, is the best life. In response, Socrates plays the Hedonist. He questions whether such a life is a pleasant one to live, and his focus in the dialogue on the pleasures to be gained in such a life subtly distorts its point, which is not the maximization of pleasure, but the display of power. Socrates's values are much more those of the peaceable middle class citizen, of Hesiod, than those of the Homeric hero. He prefers pleasures that don't involve pain and trouble, and so victory in a real struggle is not his game. (It is for this reason that Nietzsche had such contempt for utilitarianism. He did not think a worthwhile life could be made from peace and pleasure alone.) Why should one be just? Classically, the answer is that if one overreaches himself, one fails, and probably loses some of the power he had before he overestimated his worth. It is the shame of failure, and the disastrous reduction of power that might follow on failure, that are to be avoided, and can be avoided only by the just. Socrates is concerned instead with the unpleasantness one must undergo if he overreaches himself, with the punishment, not the humiliation of failure or the diminution of power. The Greeks always had trouble viewing self-restraint and justice as admirable, since both seemed to be rooted in weakness rather than strength, so that they seem to evidence a failure to dominate and rule.

That Socrates is himself committed himself to egoism, then, is not at all clear. It is clear that he thinks everyone always intensely desires his own well-being, and so he is unsatisfied if he cannot show that virtue is consistent with this desire, and seems to regard it as unconvincing, at least, to many people, to argue that one ought to do something despite the fact that it is harmful to oneself, because it is good for others.<sup>107</sup> So he does not resort to a denial of egoism to support the value of virtue, but it is not clear that he thinks that all our desires are self-regarding. Similarly, it might be argued that it is not entirely clear that he is a hedonist. He is tempted by the view, it seems, because it enables him to make his calculations, and argue along egoistic lines that virtue is always good. But he only advances hedonism explicitly in the *Protagoras*, and if that means that Plato knew he resorted to the view now and again, it does not seem to mean that the view was one he made use of all the time. This is a resource, when dealing with an egoist in particular, but not, it seems, a set of

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<sup>107</sup>My views here depend a good deal on Donald Morrison, "Socrates," Ch. 6 in Gill and Pellegrin, eds. (2006). He points out that *Euthydemas* 278e, *Meno* 77–78, *Gorgias* 468, 486, and 507, usually cited in support of Socratic egoism all support this weaker thesis of universal self-interest much better.

foundational principles from which he means to deduce ethics. Indeed, Socrates is very little interested, it seems, in systematic thought. He does not seem to trust theory, and commits himself to a definite theory only when it seems clear that it will be useful to solve some problem, or make something clear to his interlocutor. This seems apparent in the Socratic treatment of friendship in Plato's *Lysis*, where the problem is that one would seem, sometimes, to sacrifice one's own satisfaction, acting virtuously, to help his friend, and Hippothales, the target audience in the dialogue, even if he is not the discussant, seems unable to see that. Indeed, the view of Plato on the matter, expressed later in the *Philebus*, may reflect Socratic views, and that would mean he thought pleasure a matter of the appearance that one was experiencing something good. In that case, the pleasure of the wise might measure goodness, but something other than pleasure must *define* the good.

### 11. SOCRATES'S CONCEPTION OF FRIENDSHIP

From this we may infer that those who are already wise no longer love wisdom, whether they are gods or men. Nor do those love it who are so ignorant that they are bad, for no bad and stupid man loves wisdom. There remain only those who have this bad thing, ignorance, but have not yet been made ignorant and stupid by it. They are conscious of not knowing what they don't know. . .

Plato, *Lysis* 218a.

If one person desires another, my boys, or loves him passionately, he would not desire him or love him passionately or as a friend unless he somehow belonged to his beloved either in his soul or in some characteristic, habit, or aspect of his soul. . . then the genuine and not the pretended lover must be befriended by his boy.

Plato, *Lysis* 222ab.<sup>108</sup>

In the *Lysis*,<sup>109</sup> concerning friendship,<sup>110</sup> Socrates begins the discussion with the young man Lysis, whom

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<sup>108</sup>Translated by Stanley Lombardo in Plato (1997).

<sup>109</sup>A good discussion of the dialogue, though one unsympathetic to Socratic hedonism, is found in Guthrie (1975) 134–154.

<sup>110</sup>*Philia*, which is somewhat broader than either “love” or “friendship,” covering any sort of association or alliance. “Friend” in its broadest use comes close to a good translation. Anyone of one's own *oikos* (household) or *polis* (city-state), would be one's *philos*. So a political community is viewed as a group of *philo*i, held together by *philia*.

Hippothales loves.<sup>111</sup> Hippothales has been trying to get the boy's cooperation, trying to make himself the boy's friend, by praising him elaborately, as lovers do, and Socrates thinks this is entirely the wrong approach. Flattery only gives him a swelled head, and makes him harder to catch, he says.<sup>112</sup> So he tries to show Hippothales how to deal with the boy in a way that will make him more tractable. Is Socrates acting as a procurer here? If so, this dialogue represents a dark side to his ethics we perhaps ought not to approve. But perhaps we are missing the irony in the discussion. Talking to the boy Socrates points out that his parents love him, and so want him to be happy. Yet they do not let him do whatever he wishes, but only allow him his head in those affairs in which he is beneficial or useful, that is, knowledgeable and skilled. Now it seems that they would let him do what he wishes to the extent that they love him, so apparently they love him only insofar as he is wise and competent. So a person is a friend of another (loves him, wishes to benefit him and does so) insofar as he is wise (that is, virtuous). The advice seems to be that Lysis, who accepts the love of his parents, might have reason to accept someone else's love if, like that of his parents, it was based on his goodness and wisdom, and if that person, like his parents, aimed to benefit him, making him as wise as possible. Of course, Hippothales's praise seems calculated to make the boy foolish, and it is to be doubted that Hippothales takes the point—he simply wants to get the boy to do what he wants.

But this point is never developed, for Menexenus, a friend of Lysis his own age,<sup>113</sup> with his lover and teacher, Ctesippus, appears on the scene, and the discussion runs off another way. Socrates, egged on by Lysis to show up his opinionated friend, who has been "benefitted" by Ctessipus's Sophistic instruction,<sup>114</sup> asks whether it is sufficient for two people to be friends, as he and Lysis are, if one loves the other, or if, given that the love is not returned, this would mean that only the lover, or only the beloved, or neither, were friends of the other. Thus we have three options, (1) one is friend to the one that loves him, or the one whom he benefits (medicine is a friend to the sick), (2) one is the friend of the one he loves, or is benefitted by, or (3) one is a friend of another only if (1) and (2) are both true, so that friendship is always mutual. Menexenus immediately recognizes this as a test, and becomes very hesitant in his answers because of his older lover's presence. Socrates

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<sup>111</sup>That is, in one sense, he is *dear* or *philos* to Hippothales—in this case, Hippothales finds him sexually attractive.

<sup>112</sup>Compare the flattery that ruins the character of young men of high ability, suited to become philosophers, in *Republic VI* 494b-495a.

<sup>113</sup>Friend in a third sense, for they find one another's company pleasant. They are not allies, useful to one another, and neither is in a position to educate the other, nor is there sexual attraction.

<sup>114</sup>Here one might compare *Republic VI* 492–494 on the evil effects of sophistic education on the talented young man.

argues that an impossibility follows from the assumption that to be a friend is to be loved or beneficial, since in that case some things will be friends to others that are enemies to them, since some people, for instance, are loved by people they dislike. This drives him to suggest that the second option is better, but, of course, it has the same drawback. On the other hand, we speak of lovers of wine, and we don't imagine that the wine loves them back, and so (3) seems ruled out by a solid counterexample as well. Menexenus is apparently too afraid of being caught out in a contradiction to seize on any of the three alternatives and defend it from the counterexample, nor does it occur to him that "friend" might have several senses. Given his paralysis, Socrates decides to turn back to Lysis.

So he seeks the advice of the poets rather than Sophistic discussion, quoting scripture, as it were, and raises a different question. Is it the case that like is friend to like, or are friends unlike one another? The wicked, it seems, can't abide one another, and wicked and good look unlikely to be friends, so he suggests that maybe when Homer says that "God always draws the like to the like"<sup>115</sup> he means that the good are friends of the good. He argues further that a friend must be prized by the one to whom he is a friend, and whoever does not love another is not his friend, and so takes friendship to be mutual. However, there is a problem with this view, for insofar as one is good, he is like a god, admirable and powerful as well as virtuous, and so self-sufficient. But one who is self-sufficient is not in need, and such a one could have nothing that is a friend to him, since nothing would benefit him.<sup>116</sup> Then he asks about the motivation of human friendship. It appears that human beings seek friends *because* they need them, that is, because the friends are or provide good things which they would otherwise lack. Not that human friends are wicked or bad, but they are not really perfectly good either. But only insofar as a human being is good, that is, virtuous, will he be wise enough to understand this, and take the steps necessary to gain true friends. So the one who has someone truly dear to him, a true friend, insofar as he manages this, is good, in a human way, that is, committed to the good, but not really good as a god is, and so neither good nor bad absolutely. He loves his friend because of something bad, that is, insofar as he lacks something that the friend, who is good, provides. So it seems that what is neither good nor bad loves the good (insofar as it is good), but because of the bad.<sup>117</sup> The friendship relation is mutual, though, so a human being, insofar as he is good, is loved by the friend he loves, a friend whose nature is such as to fill his need, because

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<sup>115</sup>*Odyssey* XVII 218.

<sup>116</sup>*Lysis* 214e–215b.

<sup>117</sup>*Lysis* 217b.

he fills his friend's need. Good human beings are friends because they benefit one another. It is because human beings can only realize the good life incompletely on their own, perhaps even needing others to benefit if they are to lead the best life (one that includes the pleasures associated with benefitting others?), that they must band together in friendship, and for this reason, one might remark, justice is a virtue for them, since it makes mutual friendship possible.

This seems like a defensible view, but suddenly Socrates is seized with a doubt. If a person's friend (who is dear to him)<sup>118</sup> is always a friend because he is useful to him, then we seem to have an infinite regress on our hands. If a friend is one's friend because he is useful, it is because he provides some good, which is itself a friend (that is, dear to one), and so this will then be a friend because it is useful, that is, produces some further good, and so on. This seems intolerable, so we might say that there is something or someone good in itself, who will be a friend<sup>119</sup> to those who recognize its goodness even if it is not useful to any further good end. The good will be a friend to one (dear to one) on its own account, and we love the good itself for its own sake. Perhaps Socrates think pleasure is such a good, which is felt when some lack in us is remedied. What is remedied is a genuine, not just a seeming, lack, if the pleasure does not lead to pain and loss of pleasure such that it is not, on the whole, worth the trouble. Such a pleasure is a true good.<sup>120</sup> What this means, though, is that a real friend is not a friend for the sake of a friend (something else dear to us). Moreover, a real friend need not be a friend on the account of something bad. Indeed, a real friend will be a friend on its own account, not because it removes something bad. Sticking by Socratic hedonism (which is not explicit in this dialogue), we might say that a good life (defined in terms of overall pleasure and pain) is not sought in order to avoid some bad thing, but for its own sake.<sup>121</sup> Nonetheless, the good life is desired only by one who is lacking it, not by one who has it, and so friendship, which does not occur among the perfectly good who are deficient in nothing,

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<sup>118</sup>The word *philos* in Greek can mean both 'friend' and 'what is dear to one', which means it cannot uniformly be translated into the English 'friend', but the argument plays on this ambiguity in a number of places, which makes the a uniform translation unavoidable, and the whole business a little hard for an English-speaker to follow.

<sup>119</sup>I am reminded of an episode of *Sesame Street* in which it is proclaimed that "blueberries are our friends." Presumably it was meant that they are beneficial to us, but not because they are pleasant companions in a discussion or reliable allies, or have noble personal characteristics.

<sup>120</sup>This seems problematic, of course. Surely a pleasure is good if it is a wise pleasure, rooted in a wise identification of a real lack or need, which it is genuinely good to remedy. So some way to judge whether something is genuinely good other than its mere pleasure potential, must be assumed.

<sup>121</sup>*Lysis* 221b.

no part of the good life, is connected with desire. Desire of a real good is not on account of something bad that is being avoided, but has a positive aim, and it aims at something the desiring person is deficient in, which naturally completes that person. Thus it is what belongs to oneself that friendship, desire, and passion are directed towards. From here Socrates, once more opening himself to the charge of pandering, argues that a genuine lover ought to be befriended by his boy. Hippothales is delighted and the boys are somewhat abashed by this conclusion. But Hippothales is the victim of irony again, even if the boys don't see it, for if Lysis ought to befriend him, he must be a *true* friend. That means he must seek the good life for its own sake with the boy, not the satisfaction of some sensory desire that one pursues for the sake of removing an evil.<sup>122</sup> If he is sexually frustrated, and hopes to remove that frustration, that has nothing to do with being a true friend. It is his attitude to the boy's good that is relevant.

Socrates tries one more time to make his point clear. So he suggests that either the good belongs to everyone, while the bad is alien to everyone, or else the bad belongs to the bad, the good to the good, and what is neither to what is neither. So which is it? The boys go for the verbally obvious, as one might expect them to, and claim that the good belongs to the good, and then Socrates points out that in that case the unjust will, by the definition now standing, be friends of the unjust, whereas we had supposed reasonably that the unjust are entirely incapable of friendship insofar as they are unjust. At this point it is getting late, and the boys are herded on home by their pedagogues,<sup>123</sup> so the issue cannot be resolved, but it is clear that they should have held that the good "belongs to" everyone. That is, our natures are only completed, so that we lead a good life, by the good, never by the bad. If the point is observed carefully, then we can conclude that a true lover seeks to make his boy as wise as possible and to share the best possible life with him. Such a lover surely ought to be befriended by his boy, and such befriending would only require sexual favors if such favors were genuinely part of the good life. It has been strongly suggested already that such desires on account of the bad, rather than for the sake of the good, are not.

All this, including the necessary notion that there is an objectively valid good, is consistent with hedonism, and indeed, even with egoism construed as the strictly formal requirement that we seek only our

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<sup>122</sup>Perhaps this could be clearer. He must seek the good life with the boy, that is, the life maximally pleasurable and least painful—for Hippothales? Or for both him and the boy? If the latter, then the egoistic assumption has been abandoned, and we are headed for something like Mill's utilitarianism. If the former, then the pleasures of the boy would count only insofar as they produced pleasure in Hippothales, say, whenever Hippothales was aware of them. But that too compromises egoism, for there is something self-defeating in an egoism that holds I am only to seek my own pleasures, but allows me to take pleasure directly in the welfare of others.

<sup>123</sup>Slaves assigned to watch over them and make sure they attend their lessons and stay out of trouble.

own pleasures. Pleasures might arise sympathetically from satisfying a friend's needs, say, or by making the friend virtuous or giving her pleasure, and such pleasures might be especially free from associated pain, if one is virtuous and knows the friend to be virtuous. (Something on this line is argued later by Epicurus.) Then there is no need to fear for the friend, knowing he will come out well in the end, just as there is no need to fear for oneself. If such sympathetic pleasures promised to be numerous and long-lasting, even if not especially intense, one might befriend a virtuous person 'for her own sake', i.e. because one foresaw that she would have many pleasures, and because she was virtuous. Of course, one would also receive pleasure arising from awareness of the concern and respect a friend has for oneself. As long as we give the right account of the production of pleasure within the human psyche, not restricting it to physical pleasures or the willful pleasures of dominance and victory, Socrates's hedonism need not condemn him to a selfish isolationist's approach to life, nor to a crass focus on maximizing sensory thrills. It should be noted, though, that Socrates does *not* defend his hedonism here, much less does he defend egoism. The whole issue of the nature of the good, and the possibility that another's good is our good, or might be desired by us for its own sake, is left open and undiscussed. It would seem, then, that Socrates can give an account of friendship that allows for mutual regard for one another's welfare, without resorting to what we shall see is Plato's stratagem, explicit opposition to egoism—Plato argues that we seek the good, insofar as we are *rational* beings, for its own sake, and so seek our friend's good even if it does not benefit us. For Socrates, our friend's good *does* benefit us, for it gives us pleasure, inasmuch as our friend *is* a friend, that is, dear to us, and so he can deal with a determined egoist on his own ground. Or perhaps the point to be drawn is more subtle—it seems that hedonism, coupled with the view that we seek only our own pleasure for its own sake, is only formally egoistic in its outcome. If we take pleasure directly in the welfare of others, that is, in their pleasures, then we might well find altruistic motivation in egoism, just as we can find motivation to satisfy our perceived needs, if satisfying our perceived needs produces pleasure directly in us.

Moreover, it does not seem necessary to introduce the separation of Forms to make the theory work. Socrates need only suppose that there is such a thing as the good, as opposed to the absence of evil, positive pleasure or a good life, as opposed to a life merely free of pain. The good must *be* something, but then Socrates thought it was something, but it does not need to be Plato's separated Form. We shall find that the *Symposium* takes on the same topic, saying many of the same things, but argues that a separated Form of the Good not found in sensibles must be presupposed to make the theory work. That marks the *Symposium* as a Platonic

dialogue, then, and we can take the *Lysis* to be a Socratic one.<sup>124</sup>

## 12. SOCRATES'S CONCEPTION OF HIS DUTY TO THE STATE—THE *CRITO*

Tell me, Socrates, are we to consider you serious now or jesting? For if you are serious and what you say is true, then surely the life of us mortals must be turned upside down and apparently we are doing the opposite of what we should.

Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* 481bc.

Some scholars find it odd that Socrates should have refused to stop teaching philosophy in the *Apology*, even if the judges required it of him, and then, in the *Crito*, declared that he had no right to disobey the law imposing the death penalty.<sup>125</sup> Surely, if one is morally required to obey the law even when it demands one's death, one is required to stop teaching if the law demands it! How could Socrates justify this apparent inconsistency?

In the *Crito*, Socrates argues that it is not the *suffering* of injustice that is most to be avoided, for that does not corrupt the soul and destroy its health. Rather, one must avoid the *doing* of injustice at all costs. Socrates argues that he would *do* an unjust action if he fled the death penalty legally imposed upon him, and it is preferable to suffer the death penalty even if he thereby *suffers* injustice. After all, the penalty may be unjustly imposed, but one must accept imperfect laws, and imperfect but procedurally valid decisions in accord with the laws, to live with other human beings in a polity. We cannot permit people to obey the laws only when they think the laws beneficial. Moreover, one's acceptance of the laws must extend to a willingness to risk death at their hands. No state can survive if its citizens do not undertake to be soldiers when this is needed, and to risk their lives on the orders of their commanders. There are some crimes for which a death penalty is reasonable, and if one agrees to follow the laws, one agrees to accept the death penalty in one's own case, as

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<sup>124</sup>A word is in order on the treatment of Socrates on friendship in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Socrates is agreeable to the proposition that a virtuous person helps his friends, and harms his enemies (2.3.14, 2.6.35, 3.1.6, 4.2.14–16), but it turns out only good men can be anyone's friend (2.6.1–7, 14–16), all good men are friends of one another, and although good men are enemies of the bad, they cannot harm them, since they are already as badly off as they can be through being bad. For a story of Socrates's own befriending of a young man, see *Memorabilia* 4.2, and Euthydemus.

<sup>125</sup>*Apology* 28b–29e, *Crito* 47e–54d. For Socrates on the obligation to obey the law, see Allen (1980), Kraut (1984), Santas (1979) 11–29, 43–56, and Woozley (1971).

long as the decision of the court is procedurally just. This is a risk, like the risk of death in war, that one is obliged to take. Moreover, one dare not undermine the authority of the law by disobeying it. The laws' authority must be maintained, or the polity will dissolve, and great harm will be done everyone concerned, for the warfare and ill will between the erstwhile fellow citizens will be reflected as disorder in their souls, which will be dominated by anger and impossible desires. And since the law must require us to risk our lives, its authority must be absolute. One can enjoy a healthy soul only within a healthy community, and so one must agree to and support the laws. Crito argues that Socrates has various obligations to his family and friends that he cannot discharge if he goes to his death, but, of course, all these obligations take second place to the obligation to obey the law and accept the decisions of the courts, else the law becomes a dead letter as people pursue the interests of their families above justice and the welfare of the community.<sup>126</sup>

So is not Socrates obligated to stop teaching philosophy if ordered to do so by the jurors? No, he says, because he was assigned the tasks of philosophy by the god of Delphi, a higher authority than the Athenian laws. It would be an unjust action to disobey the god, and Socrates did not think it morally permitted to perform an unjust action, even if the laws prescribed it. If we do not take Apollo's role here too seriously, his view seems to be that he is required to teach philosophy by some principle higher than Athenian law, presumably that principle that lies behind and grounds obedience to Athenian law in the first place. He thinks we must obey the law because we have implicitly contracted to do so, and this is a reasonable contract since a good life with a healthy soul is not possible outside a just community. Socrates might have thought free discussion essential to the validity of that contract. Perhaps it was his view that the laws were only valid as long as they were open to discussion, so that people could understand why they had been imposed, and change them or withdraw from the state, if it seemed reasonable to do so. Without open discussion, the laws would be unjustly imposed on the ignorant or the unwilling. Or possibly Socrates thought that a community in which such discussion was not permitted would injure the soul, since it would undermine its rational autonomy, and so one would have no good reason to agree to abide by its laws.

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<sup>126</sup>The battery of arguments presented by Crito at 45a-46a is obviously carefully prepared with Socrates in mind. Crito relies on arguments from moral duty, knowing his audience. So he says that Socrates will harm his friends by removing his company, harm their reputation since people will think they did nothing to help him, allow his enemies to triumph, and abandon his children to be educated by others. Socrates very courteously and seriously replies, without his customary irony. He leaves the completion of his case that he is doing no harm to his children and friends to after he has completed his argument concerning his duty to the laws, and bases it on the fact that education, which is what is at issue in both cases, is best accomplished by the laws, and that if he harms the laws he becomes worthless as an example, and therefore as an educator. As for his friends' reputation, he thinks public opinion very fickle, and not to be attended to in any case, since only the opinion of the wise counts, and they will understand. His enemies, of course, will not triumph, but only harm themselves by doing injustice.

Socrates argues that wrong is done on several counts if one disobeys the laws when they do not prescribe an unjust action. In the first place, the laws have contributed to our formation, they have educated us in the good, and they establish the community in which we lead our lives. Without laws, we could not be ourselves—we could not live the lives of human beings. So we owe the laws more even than we owe our parents, who are only the authors of our being, not of our character and humanity. Is it mere gratitude we owe them? No, more is at stake, for if we destroy respect for the law, we undermine the polity, and render it incapable of educating our own children or their children, and so we do those children harm. When our parents educated us we sometimes had to suffer injustice without retaliation, for our parents are imperfect, but they were nonetheless our best and proper teachers and guardians. As long as they thought they were acting justly, it was our duty to suffer the punishment. Now we are grown, and no longer under parental tutelage, but we never outgrow the authority and tutelage of the laws, whose function is continually to educate us to justice.

In the second place, we have undertaken, reasonably, to obey the laws, if in no other way, by the silent consent implicit in our not renouncing citizenship. If we would not obey the laws, it can only be just not to do so if we get their consent for the exception, or if we see clearly that it is unjust to obey them in the case at hand. But if the fault of the laws is that they would do us an injustice, not that they require us to do an injustice, then it is our obligation to persuade the city that this is indeed an injustice. Again, it is very like the situation children are in with parents. They may attempt to persuade them that they are unjust, but if they impose a punishment and cannot be persuaded to retract it, then it would be unjust simply to refuse to undergo it *on one's own authority*. The parents' authority must be maintained because they generally know better than their children, and it is their task to educate their children. The authority of the laws must be maintained for a further reason. If it is undermined, it may be that we can find our way to justice without them, but what about those who are not as wise as we, and need the guidance of the laws? If they see us, with our reputation for wisdom, disobeying, they would conceive that they need not obey either, and that would spell the ruin of the city.<sup>127</sup>

A word may be in place here about Socrates's political conservatism, as reported in the highly

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<sup>127</sup>The point is perhaps more Platonic than Socratic. Not many people are capable of wisdom, but most are capable of imitation of the wise, if they are sufficiently impressed with them to imitate them. So the good of the state as the whole depends on there being wise men in it who are influential. The spread of cynicism is to be avoided. Socrates, perhaps, would more simply have said that one ought not to do what is unjust, and leave it at that, without worrying about the effects of his actions on the unwise, but Plato holds that the wise have a duty to lead the unwise and give their lives to benefitting the community. It is this point, rather than any version of "it would be unfair to expect the others to do it if I don't," that is central for Plato.

conservative Xenophon. Xenophon repeatedly attributes to Socrates the view that one is obligated to obey the laws of his state, whatever they might be, and repeatedly urges that whoever has political authority ought to know his business, which, in Xenophon's view, implies that he should know the technical details involved in financing and administration, the law and constitution, and so on, more than that we should know the real nature of the good. Xenophon's Socrates is quite interested in technical competence, and argues that there is a kind of general knowledge of administration that is a master art governing all other enterprises, commercial, political or military.<sup>128</sup> All of this is taken as ammunition against democratic institutions, which foster the appointment of incompetents, but his Socrates is careful to say that when such institutions are in place, they must be followed. Indeed, he has Socrates hold, when questioned by Hippias, that justice is simply obedience to the existing laws of the state, modeling his view on the supposed view of the Spartan Lycurgus, although he does go on to argue that there are certain unwritten laws agreed on everywhere by everyone, which must not have arisen due to agreement, but come from the gods.<sup>129</sup> He advocates reform, perhaps, but not revolution. This talk about the science of administration is perhaps taken as something of a reply to Hippias's view that one must learn all the arts to live well—one needs to learn the master art, but not necessarily any one of the others. On the other hand, Xenophon's Socrates repeatedly argues that one must make oneself useful to others to be loved by others (a point also made in Plato's *Lysis*), and this involves mastering some productive trade, at least for most people, who are not professional administrators.<sup>130</sup> It seems clear that Xenophon's Socrates is a spokesman for Xenophon's views, just as Plato's Socrates in his later dialogues is a spokesman for Plato's.<sup>131</sup>

Returning to the *Crito*, the fundamental principle lying behind Socrates's argument is this, that no one is ever permitted to do injustice to another. He states this before beginning his argument, insisting that, unless Crito accepts it, then they cannot deliberate together over what to do, for they will disagree too fundamentally

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<sup>128</sup>*Memorabilia* III 4. Thus economics, we might say, business management, became a standard topic for treatment by philosophers, inasmuch as it is a candidate for being at least a part of the master art, how to obtain the good.

<sup>129</sup>*Memorabilia* IV 4.

<sup>130</sup>*Memorabilia* II 17-19.

<sup>131</sup>It seems unlikely, given the details of his travels and his general absence from Athens (he never returned after leaving in 401 on the Persian expedition), that he knew Socrates well, and it is plausibly suggested that his collection of stories is taken for the most part from the reports of others, who viewed Socrates as an oligarchic hero who had been executed by the democracy. Modern investigations taking advantage of computer resources, strongly suggest that the accounts in Xenophon's memoirs were invented.

on what it is permitted to do.<sup>132</sup> On the popular view it was permissible to retaliate for unjust harm, and to do unjust harm in return. This is the thinking behind the common opinion that the enemy in time of war (who will, of course, have brought about the war unjustly) simply deserve what they get, since they started it, even if we ignore all the demands of morality and decency in our treatment of them. The dilemma posed by this view occurs most poignantly in such tragedies as Aeschylus's *Libation Bearers*, where, in service of *justice*, as he takes it, Orestes tells his mother, who has murdered his father, "since you killed whom you ought not, now suffer what you ought not."<sup>133</sup> Socrates allowed punishment intended to bring about reform of the person, and so benefitting him, as well as reparations and the doing of *just* harm to another in self-defense, but he rejected the notion that we are permitted, or even required, by justice to reject the standards of justice ourselves in dealing with an unjust enemy. Probably Socrates had seen enough of this sort of behavior in the interminable and internecine conflict of the Peloponnesian Wars. He refused to divide the world into those who are our friends, to whom we give and from whom we expect justice, and those who are our enemies, whom we seek to harm by any means available. We owe all men justice, in his view, and, of course, he owed the laws and men of Athens justice. Even if they condemned him to death, he was not permitted to wrong them in return. With that as his premise, he then proceeded to argue that he would indeed be wronging them if he evaded the death penalty they imposed.

Under what conditions may Socrates teach philosophy? He may do so even if the laws forbid it, since the welfare of the state, for the sake of which the laws exist, depends on the pursuit of philosophy, but if the laws choose to punish him for disobeying them in this instance, he is not permitted to avoid the punishment by illegal means. This is a restricted form of what is nowadays called civil disobedience. It is restricted to disobedience of laws that require from us unjust *actions*, so such acts as Rosa Parks's refusing to give up her seat on the bus to a white man would not be countenanced by it. She must *suffer* whatever injustice the laws impose on her without resistance. Socrates allows us to leave the state if we see that we are suffering injustice, so long as we do so at a suitable time (not when it would allow us to illegally escape a punishment imposed on us), but he does not allow revolutionary activity, or even civil disobedience, which, fighting shy of revolution, intends to dramatize injustice and call on the conscience of the community. On the other hand, he firmly advocates the freedom to criticize the laws publicly, and holds that one has a duty to such criticism even if the laws forbid

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<sup>132</sup>Vlastos (1991) Chapter 7.

<sup>133</sup>*Choephoroi* 930. On the other hand, at Herodotus 7.130, Xerxes will not do himself what he blames in the Spartans.

it. He took this duty seriously enough so that he died rather than neglect it.

At this point we can ask if the reasoning of the *Crito* is consistent with Socratic ethical theory. The arguments seem, at first blush, to proceed on the basis of duties and obligations, not the ultimate advantage of the agent, or even pleasure taken in other's welfare. But Socrates argued that we ought to be just because it is ultimately to our advantage. How can we square that with the *Crito*?<sup>134</sup>

For one thing, we might argue that the Gods will reward us for justice and punish us for injustice, as Socrates does at the end of the *Gorgias*. This seems like the cheap way out, but Socrates's faith in the gods might have been real enough. He might also argue that the health of the soul is at issue, and unjust actions destroy the health of the soul. But is it reasonable to suppose, on this ground, that we ought never, under any circumstance, to behave unjustly? Surely more harm might be done in some circumstances by sticking with justice than would be done by a single unjust action, just as an occasional action that might harm the health of the body might turn out to be reasonable. Of course, it might be objected that one has to stick with the policy of justice no matter what, or slip into unhealthy practices, but a single breaking of an agreement under circumstances such as these surely might work out without the corruption of one's character, just as a single omelet, eaten for good reasons, need not lead to habits that would raise one's cholesterol levels. It is hard to see how an *absolutely exceptionless* obedience to a rule could ever be argued from the usual consequences of following or breaking the rule. To argue that a single bad action spoils one's whole life seems out of step with the calculus of benefits and losses. It may be, of course, that one *can* argue from the consequences to the rationality of following a rule of justice without exception, even when following it will result in one's unjust execution, but it is not obvious how, and in the *Crito* no attempt is made to show us how.

A different line of argument suggests that it is not life, but a good life, that is to be sought. Death is less of a misfortune than leading an unjust, bad life. Indeed, death may of itself be no misfortune at all. Both in the *Crito* and in the *Apology* Socrates suggests as much. Presumably, he thought that a person's life would go badly enough if he behaved unjustly so that it would be preferable not to continue it. The Ancients never had much trouble envisioning the situation in which it would be better to die, through suicide if necessary, than to continue a bad life. Would injustice, even if it went unpunished, always make one's life

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<sup>134</sup>At 44d it is stated that the many cannot make us wise or foolish, and so they cannot help or harm us. Strictly, this sort of thing suggests that it is not pleasure that is good in itself, since the many presumably can produce pleasure or pain. But Socrates might intend that we cannot be made better or worse, that is, more or less efficient at obtaining a pleasurable life. Or he might intend that the many, even if they do give us pleasure, do so accidentally and unreliably, and only wisdom can be depended on for the long haul. So such remarks can be made consistent with Socratic hedonistic intellectualism.

bad enough so that it would be better to die than continue unjustly? It seems very difficult to argue this. Plato became convinced that it can only be argued by abandoning Socratic hedonism, and holding that the good order in the soul that is justice is worthwhile in itself, and he seems to have taken religious beliefs centered on the afterlife as a metaphorical expression of this point.

### 13. SOCRATIC FORMS

Is the pious not the same and alike in every action, and the impious the opposite of all that is pious, and like itself, so that everything that is impious presents us with one form (*idea*) or appearance in so far as it is impious?...

I did not bid you tell me one or two of the many pious actions but that form (*eidos*) itself of piety that makes all pious actions pious... tell me what, precisely, this form (*idea*) is so that I may look upon it, and using it as a model (*paradeigma*), can say that any action done by you or anybody else is pious if it is such as this, or if it is not, can say it is not.

Socrates in Plato's *Euthyphro* 5cd, 6de

The real definitions that provide the basis for the knowledge that interests Socrates seem to be discovered from the consideration of a perfect example, an ideal case, of the thing defined, with an eye on what it is that makes it a perfect example. Moreover, he insists that what make the thing to be of that sort is *itself* of that sort. So it is the resemblance of a thing to the ideal case that makes it of that sort. We might call this the "paradigm" theory of forms. The paradigm theory seems to assume that the form of F is itself perfectly F, and that things that are F are F because they match up with it, and this leads Socrates to say that the F itself, the Form of F, is responsible for things being F that are F. But Socrates also thought, it seems, that the F itself will be *in* things that are F. So this paradigm is not like a perfect example of something a meter long, say, a meter stick, for a meter stick is not *in* a thing that is meter long. It is only the same length.

Formalizing this a bit, a definition of the red, say, would identify whatever it is (1) that is responsible for things being red, and (2) is found in whatever is red, and (3) is itself red. One might think redness would do for (1) and (2), for it is (in some sense) in red things, and its being in them is not unreasonably viewed as being responsible for their being red. But redness, surely is not itself red. Socrates's "the F", then, is best not translated as "F-ness." Perhaps he has in mind something more like red dye, which is in red things, some of

them, at least, and responsible for those things being red, and is itself red. Of course, redness is not red dye, and Socrates is imagining that the red dye here is present in *all* red things, so that nothing red can occur without it, so he is not talking about any ordinary observable dye here.

So the *Euthyphro* deals with pious actions, and Socrates asks his respondent to teach him what the single form (*eidos*) is that is pious and found in every pious action. This form, the pious, is always the same, considered in itself—it is pious and in no way impious, and it causes piety to belong to any action in which it is found, but is not responsible for any impiety that might also be found there.<sup>135</sup>

The Greek word *eidos*, which we translate “form,” means at its root “what is seen,” and the past tenses of “to see” are commonly used to mean “know,” for one knows what he *has seen*, so the form we are dealing here with something objectively real that presents itself as knowable. *Eidos* can also mean a form, the shape of a thing, or even a plan of action, so it is a visible or knowable structure. Socrates asks Euthyphro to teach him what the Form is *precisely*, so that he can use it as a *paradeigma*. This would mean it is suitable to serve as a standard, like the meter-bar which establishes the measure of a meter in length, in Paris. With his eye upon it, he could identify an action as pious by its resemblance to the form of piety, and assess how far it lives up to or falls short of it. But if this is how we read him, surely the Form of F is not typically *in* things that are F. It is all the more puzzling what he means because Socrates does not seem to think he is presenting any sophisticated theory here. This is just common sense. The theory of Forms assumed here (if the talk of Forms is not merely a manner of speaking<sup>136</sup>) is to be attributed to Socrates himself, not to Plato.<sup>137</sup>

The most puzzling thing is the notion that piousness, piety or the pious<sup>138</sup> is itself pious. Surely, one might have thought that piety is not itself pious, but only that by which an action is pious. Piety is not an action, so how can it be pious? We are used to the notion that a quality, be it piety or an orange color, is not itself to

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<sup>135</sup>In the *Euthyphro* he only refers to the form of piety found in the action. The virtue, piety, found in *Euthyphro* himself is not under discussion, it seems.

<sup>136</sup>For a strong defense of that view of the matter see Dancy (2004).

<sup>137</sup>*Euthyphro* 5cd, 6de. “Form” here is *eidos* or *idea*, paradigm or standard is *paradeigma*, the same terms used by Plato in stating his own doctrine. The impious is said to have a form of its own here, and to cause impiety. Presumably the impious can be defined, though, strictly in terms of its opposition to the pious. The impious is the result of ignorance of the good, the absence of the knowledge that produces the pious. Plato’s more complicated psychology holds out greater hope for defining vices in ‘positive’ terms. For the topic of this section, see especially R.E. Allen (1970), Moline (1981) Ch. 4, and Gail Fine (1984).

<sup>138</sup>In discussing Socrates I will equate piety and the Pious, oneness and the One, and so on, since Socrates thinks the piety found in a pious act is the form. For Plato, who separates the Form from what shares in it, I will be more careful, and reserve ‘piety’ and such for the universal, found in the pious thing, and The Pious for the Form, existing in separation from the pious thing.

be characterized by that quality. Certainly the color orange is not an orange thing.

But the quality is sometimes referred to as “an orange” (leaving out the substantive that would ordinarily be what is orange), as in “that is a very brownish orange.” And we sometimes say “the orange of that fruit,” that is, its orange color, or “the orangutan,” who is an intelligent beast, just as the armadillo is a well-armored one, even if neither *the* orangutan nor the armadillo is any particular orangutan or armadillo, though they are animals, in the sense that they are *kinds* of animals. Again, we might speak of the “pious quality” of an action, presumably meaning the quality that makes it pious. Greek not only had all these usages, but employed them considerably more frequently than we do.

But this makes Socrates’s talk sound like a manner of speaking, which has gotten out of control, rather than the expression of a theory. More useful for understanding him is a parallel in the realm of scientific theory, literally intended, which can be extended at least figuratively to piety, namely the pure sorts of stuff that are mixed together to make up observable things in Empedocles and Anaxagoras. Fire or “the Hot” (what is hot in virtue of itself) is just hot, and in no way cold, and responsible for the heat in anything that is hot to any degree. It is indestructible, being driven out by the cold when something cools off, not destroyed by it, and resembles hot things by being itself hot, indeed, that hot things are hot is always due to the presence of fire, the primary bearer of heat, within them. The hot thus conceived is very like a Socratic Form.<sup>139</sup> In particular, piety might be thought to come in degrees just as heat does, so that a greater degree of piety may well be due to there being more piety in an act, just as more fire in the metal makes it hotter. Indeed, both Plato and Aristotle tend to think of causation as occurring through a passing on of a form, be it heat or motion or the substantial form of an animal or plant. What is causally responsible for being F is in general something that is F, and so the ultimate cause of F’s is something F in and of itself. In general, then, an understanding of the perfect case, be it perfect piety, perfect health in medicine, perfectly straight lines and the like in geometry, or the perfectly hot in physics, is necessary to understand how less than perfect cases occur, and what their causes are. The perfect case, the Form itself, is the primary subject of scientific understanding.

This should make us uneasy. The theory is that heat in a thing is caused by the presence of fire, “the hot,” which is as hot as it is possible to be, and this, after all, is a substantive scientific theory that could be

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<sup>139</sup>In the *Phaedo*, where Anaxagoras is always in the back of his mind, at 103b–105c Plato argues, using the example of fire and heat among others, that each quality has a bearer which has that quality entirely and essentially, so that it cannot fail to have it, and that whatever else has that quality has it because of the presence of this primary bearer of the quality. He has already argued for *separated* forms, and so does not equate forms with this sort of thing, but he does say that *soul* is the primary bearer of life and movement.

wrong. (It also dodges the question what heat is, since all we are told about it is that it belongs primarily to fire.) If we try to shape *all* our understandings why something is F after it, so that it is always F because of the F in it, which is perfectly F, then we surely are simply wrong in many cases. Things are not triangular because of the perfectly triangular which is found in them, for instance, or perfectly aldermen because of the one perfect aldermen found in them all. Perhaps, in an attempt to stay within intelligible bounds, we might say that qualities that admit of more or less can always be understood this way, but something can be more or less red, and surely this is not due to the presence of something perfectly red, as red as anything can be, in them. Or maybe it is, if we imagine that everything that is red is red because of the red dye in it, but now we have a theory we know to be false, since the red band of a rainbow is not red for this reason.<sup>140</sup>

Aristotle tells us that Socrates “gave the impulse to this theory,” that is, the theory of Forms in Plato, “. . . by means of his definitions, but he did not ‘separate’ them from the particulars, and in this he thought rightly, in not separating them.”<sup>141</sup> Socrates did not think a Form such as piety could exist independently of pious things. Piety could exist without a particular pious thing such as Euthyphro’s action, of course, but its existence depends on its presence in something, if not in Euthyphro’s action, then in someone else’s. Like Aristotle later, Socrates seems to assume that the fundamental realities are particulars, and that whatever else is, is because of how some particulars are. So on this point the pious is not like fire or the hot, which could perhaps exist entirely on its own (though it would of course be a hot thing, if it did, and so would not exist without hot things)—although it is worth noting that Anaxagoras thought it in fact existed only mixed with other, contrary things.

All this is suggestive, but for piety it may seem to provide at best an analogy, at worst an explication of a figure of speech. What precisely is the relation of a Socratic ethical Form such as piety to one of its particulars? It is associated neither with a kind of stuff, as heat is associated with fire, nor with a mathematically

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<sup>140</sup>Or we might say it is, and the red dye we have in mind is not some *physical* dye like Red #2, but something always present in red things. I want to say that redness is always present in red things, and when I say “redness is present in the thing” I mean to say no more than “the thing is red,” so that the first phrase is just a way of saying what is meant in the second, and not a way of saying anything else that would explain how things come to be red. That is why I say it is just a figure of speech to say redness is in the thing. When I say “red dye is present in a thing,” I do *not* mean to say that it is red, but to identify some kind of stuff, Red #2 perhaps, and to claim that some portion of this stuff is mixed in the thing. So I could say, “it isn’t red, because one cannot see the color of the dye because it is masked by all the black soot mixed in it, but there is Red #2 in it. I know because I put it in. Perhaps if we had not baked it quite so long at quite so high a temperature, it would not only be edible, but red, too.”

<sup>141</sup>*Metaphysics* XIII 9, 1086a37-b5; see also 987a32-b10, 1078b12-1079a4. So Gail Fine (1984). Allen (1970) argues that Socratic Forms were like Platonic Forms in most every respect, including separation from their instances, but Fine has the better of him here.

definable attunement, as health is associated with the balance of humors. (Note that the attunement present in a more or less healthy person is not a perfect attunement, it would seem, but only approaches being one closely enough to produce a degree of health. The same attunement is not in all healthy things in the way that the same stuff, the hot, is supposed to be present in all hot things.) But the Form of the pious is found in pious things. These are not typically physical things. They include actions, and perhaps also persons (in virtue of their actions?), and attitudes, policies, remarks, and the like, associated with pious actions in various ways. So whatever piety is, it must be capable of being in or associated causally with all these different things. Moreover, something can have piety in it, and yet in some ways be impious. The action of Euthyphro in prosecuting his father is just such an action, pious, since his father had indeed committed an injustice and deserved punishment, but falling short of piety, since it is impious to harm one's father.<sup>142</sup> Plato notes elsewhere that it is precisely such cases as these, cases that issue in contradictory perceptions, that give rise to puzzlement and prompt the search for the definition of the ideal case.<sup>143</sup> So, given all this, what could piety possibly be, and, assuming its presence in actions accounts for its "presence" in various ways in other things such as persons, how can it be *in* an action?

If Socrates really intends his talk about Forms to carry theoretical clout, so that it makes sense to ask what Forms might be and how they are "in" things,<sup>144</sup> then Euthyphro's *intention* to be pious, to perform a pious action, is likely the key here. If piety is in Euthyphro's action, it is because of his intention that it conform to an ideal, combined with a true belief concerning how that ideal would be met, so that his intention is at least partly effective, and the true belief should be a sort of knowledge of the thing, rooted in the (metaphorical) vision of something real, at least a real state of affairs of some kind, if it is not some sort of particular object.<sup>145</sup> Even with perfect intentions, absolutely pure, Euthyphro may not himself be perfectly pious (that is, a perfect

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<sup>142</sup>Perhaps the resolution of the difficulty here would be to point out that punishing one's father justly is *not* harming him, as Socrates argues in the *Gorgias*. Somewhat less subtly, Peter Geach (1966) has pointed out that Euthyphro seems to have been sure that his suit would be dismissed out of hand by the jury, and probably intended to remove the pollution brought by the killing from his family by prosecuting. It was *pro forma*, and his father was in no danger, but it was the pious thing to do. Someone had to initiate the procedure absolving him of guilt. In general, Geach defends the good sense of Euthyphro as a genuinely pious man in the dialogue.

<sup>143</sup>*Republic* VII 523b ff.

<sup>144</sup>He is actually, in his mind, referring to Forms, not just engaging in a manner of speech which is not to be taken seriously enough to ground ontology.

<sup>145</sup>Elsewhere in this chapter it is argued that Socrates believed that everyone always intends to seek the good. But it does not follow that everyone always intends to do pious actions, for one may not believe it is good to do so.

producer of pious actions), for it may be that he does not *know* what it is to be a pious action, and so is not reliably pious, even if he managed to be pious on one or another occasion when he happened (not entirely by accident, one assumes) to have the correct beliefs about the matter. That means we might conceive of something we never encounter, such as piety rooted in a correct belief that cannot be lost, or a state of knowledge that never fails its possessor. Socrates does not seem to think the fact that we can conceive the thing, or that its being a “thing” (*pragma*) means it must somehow, somewhere, actually exist, or that we must have encountered it at some time. It is enough that it be “objective,” let us say, as with objective values. It is to be noted that *pragma* is, in Greek, a thing in the most general sense in which we use the word. If it can be spoken of, made the subject of a sentence, it is a thing, and is something, a sort of thing. In particular, the word covers both things in the narrower sense and states of affairs, as long as they are real states of affairs, so that the sentences expressing them are true. The fact that Euthyphro is not perfectly pious does not mean a particular action of his is not pious. He may fall short only inasmuch as he does not always act piously, but sometimes impiously. As long as *this* action was intended to be pious, and the relevant beliefs Euthyphro has about what is pious are true, so that it does conform to the ideal because of that intention, it *is* pious.<sup>146</sup> The Form of the pious is the cause of piety in a pious action because it is the end or purpose that informs the action. This piety, this purpose present in the action, is itself thought of as pious, both by the Greeks and by ourselves—to commit oneself to the ideal of piety is pious, and piety contains within it, as part of the ideal it is, an awareness of and commitment to itself. One is committed to commitment of a particular sort. Piety is commitment to a certain ideal, and that commitment is itself pious. Piety is self-referential, then, as are justice, self-restraint,<sup>147</sup> and other virtues, and its presence requires a kind of knowledge what piety itself is to be present as well. It is also a force in the world, just as the ideal of knowledge pursued by a mind is, but it is a force only inasmuch as it is conceived and pursued. (Note that for an ideal such as piety to be present in a person, it seems it must both be conceived and pursued, and one might even think that it has not been conceived if it is not to some degree attractive to the person conceiving it. To be conceived at all it must be conceived *as a good*.)

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<sup>146</sup>And we do say that the piety is *in* the action, though perhaps we only mean it is expressed in the action, inasmuch as it is a part of the cause of the action. It does not seem to be in the action in the way that the fire is supposed to be in the iron.

<sup>147</sup>See the discussion of self-restraint in particular in the *Charmides* above (p. 41). Self-restraint is identified as self-knowledge, and this is identified as knowledge directed toward itself, knowledge about knowledge, epistemology. That this is the cause of (the same as) an individual’s knowledge of himself when it is in the individual turns out to be true, given that virtue is knowledge of the good, and a human being’s knowledge of his own goodness amounts to knowledge that he does not know the good, and so falls short of virtue. But one recognizes that one does not know the good if one understands what knowledge is, of course, and so if knows epistemology.

Now Socrates clearly did not think that piety is entirely conventional, a social invention, so that the mind or the social order makes up some goal, dubs it piety, and that is sufficient to make it piety. Piety is an objective reality that exists, with its own nature, and the mind or social order *recognizes* the goal, it does not make it up. This is clear because it does not matter to what it is how we conceive it—it can be misconceived and yet remain what it is. Nonetheless, piety would fail to exist if it were not capable of being conceived and intended by *somebody*. But Socrates insisted that what is good for a person is a matter of objective fact, and that people often misunderstand such facts. It is the sort of thing a person is, the nature of a human being, that determines what is in fact good for him. So human nature provides us with a set of objectively valid ideals to be discovered, among which is piety, which is essential to acquiring, or is part of, the natural good for a human being. Exactly how each of these ideals is rooted in the natural good for a human being would have to be worked out case by case, but if the ideal is an objectively valid one, this is a task that can be performed. Thus it would turn out that piety could simultaneously depend for its existence on someone's conceiving and intending it, for only so can it be caused in the actions in which it is found, *and* have an existence and nature established objectively on the nature of the person that conceives and intends it, quite independently of what that particular person may happen to think.<sup>148</sup>

The theory is also presented, it seems, in the discussion of the fine or beautiful or noble (*to kalos*, what is in itself good, not good merely because of its effects). In the *Greater Hippias* Socrates addresses the requirements that must be met by real definitions, and argues by implication that the Forms cannot be grasped by the senses precisely because they are ideals answerable to the Good. He does this, moreover, by looking at a Form which should be grasped by the senses alone if any is, since it is through the senses that things are seen to be fine, and it is very tempting to suggest that fine or beautiful things (or noble things, *kalon* can mean all three) are so because of their relation to our senses, because they somehow produce a certain refined pleasure

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<sup>148</sup>Note that this is *my* analysis of how piety is in a person, is objective, and so on. Socrates does not provide it, but I think it is the best way to develop his view if it is challenged. In particular, I wanted to show that it could make sense that piety is *this*, objectively, and that this is not a fact depending on human conventions (but rather on human nature), even though piety is only found in human beings that conceive it. Socrates thought it made sense, too, but we have no proposals from him *how* it does so. This is also the way in which Aristotle handled the issue, but he proceeded far more self-consciously than Socrates did. One might object here that it could occur, without any change in human nature, that even though we are all suited to conceive piety, and need to do so and pursue it in order to be fulfilled and happy, no one in actual fact does so. If it is claimed that there would be a natural tendency to conceive piety in such a case, we could agree, but still hold that it is possible that the tendency was never realized. Would piety exist under these circumstances? My own inclination is to say it would not, for there would be no pious deeds, and in some sense there would not even be the possibility of pious deeds until piety was conceived, but that human nature would provide a basis for it to come into existence naturally, by providing what was needed to ground the conception of it. Aristotle might say that the pious existed potentially inasmuch as human nature existed actually.

in us through the senses.

The dialogue begins with the observation that every fine thing in some respect fails to be fine, and so we cannot indicate what it is to be fine except through a definition of the Fine itself, which is other than any particular fine thing, or any collection of such. The Fine itself, which is in fine things, is fine, just as much as fine things are. The Fine is a Socratic Form. No attempt is made here to establish separation of the Form, so that the Fine can exist independently of the things in which it is found, but only its distinction from the things it is in. A fine thing is something that lives up to the ideal of the Fine, because of the fineness in it, and it is not imagined that the Fine can exist without being conceived by someone.<sup>149</sup> Nor is the question raised that Plato raises, what it is for a Form to be *in* a thing. Piety is in a person, and in his actions, fineness is in a statue, and in a musical composition, and given how different these things are from one another being-in in these different cases would no doubt have to receive different explanations, but Socrates seems content that he's talking about the same thing in all these cases, even though he would not know how to define the relation of being-in. Moreover, lest we put too much weight on what might appear the literal meaning of the phrase "being in," which is easy to do, given the apparent parallel with the fire in the poker, he also refers to the forms being present to or with a thing, and less frequently, of their partaking of it or participating in it, no doubt due to its presence to them or in them. Presumably he sees no profit in pursuing a closer understanding of this relationship. Perhaps he does not even think a real definition of "being-in" can be given. He may be content for it to be a primitive, undefined term. We need some of those, after all.<sup>150</sup>

Two Sophistic misconceptions about real definition are addressed here, taking the analysis of real definition a bit further than the *Euthyphro* did. First, there is the temptation to think we can define what is fine in terms of what appears to be fine. Hippias suggests that Socrates is looking for an account what will be seen

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<sup>149</sup>*Greater Hippias* 287c–289d. Is fineness a fine thing? I think so, though the logic here is not quite that we laid out for piety. Fineness is found in things that are made, and in things that should be preserved, protected and enjoyed, not just in things that are done, though there are fine actions, too. To be a fine thing is fine, for to be a fine thing is to be something that should be enjoyed and preserved, and it is a fine thing to be something that should be enjoyed and preserved. It seems to follow that fineness is a fine thing. Fineness includes within it not merely the facts that make a thing something that should be preserved and enjoyed, but also the fact that it should be. It should be enjoyed and preserved by human beings because of the contribution it makes to their lives, given, of course, the shape of human nature.

<sup>150</sup>Dancy (2004), Chapter 8, provides a good discussion of this point. Dancy hesitates to assign a theory of forms, that is a metaphysical position, at all to Socrates, arguing that he is committed only to certain manners of speaking, which, under Plato's hands later hardened into a theory of Forms. I'm taking these manners of speaking a little more seriously than he does, and I do think he had a theory of the presence of ideals in a person or action, but I don't mean to propose any particular view of what the presence of such ideals might be, not even a view on my own behalf.

to be fine to everyone, and never be seen to be foul to anyone, and Socrates, perhaps disingenuously, accepts the suggestion. But Hippias then suggests that a long life is a fine thing, since it is seen to be so (that is, *seems* to be so) to everyone. Socrates counters that this was not a fine thing for Achilles, who nobly chose a short life for the sake of great renown. Indeed, it seems there may be no thing that seems fine to everyone, that is, no particular thing detectable by the senses and so definable in terms of sensory appearances without reference to the Good. What is wanted is an account what will be seen to be fine by everyone who shows good judgment in the matter, upon due reflection and the like, that is, what will *truly* be seen to be fine to everyone competent to recognize the truth, so that the appearance becomes a reliable indicator of the true. Hippias was picking up on Socrates's insistence that the Fine be fine, and in no way not fine, to anyone who in fact perceived or understood it, but he refuses to interpret this in terms of an *objectively true* appearance.<sup>151</sup>

Next, it is suggested that the Fine is the Appropriate, for a short life is appropriate to Achilles, and a fine thing for him, even if it is not appropriate, and so not a fine thing, for most men.<sup>152</sup> Here the requirement that the one whose opinion correctly identifies the fine should be knowledgeable about the ideal is avoided by suggesting that everyone is right about what is fine, *from their point of view*. This definition too is abandoned by Hippias, for he is asked whether appropriateness makes a thing *seem* to be fine, or to *be* fine, and it is pointed out to him that what makes things seem to be fine must be different from what makes them be fine, or else no one would ever be mistaken about what is fine. Of course, Protagoras would have embraced that conclusion. The right response would be to note that the Fine in what is fine makes it seem fine to one who *knows* what the Fine is, who somehow, through non-sensory understanding, gets a grasp on the Fine, but not necessarily to others, who rely on less certain, sensory signs. Hippias does not want to grant that, but he is not willing to take the extreme position of Protagoras either, and so he decides the appropriate makes a thing *seem* fine. So he must grant that something else makes it *be* fine.<sup>153</sup> This is abetted, of course, by his awareness that appropriateness is in a way relative, that is, what is appropriate for a carpenter might not be appropriate for Achilles, though this sort of relativity differs from the relativity that would make whatever seemed appropriate to someone

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<sup>151</sup>*Greater Hippias* 291d. The ambiguity of "is seen to be" is nicely reflected in the translation of John Cooper, in Plato (1989). To get a balanced view of this dialogue the reader should look at how it is analyzed in the discussion of Hippias, above in Chapter III, Section 8. What appears to the Platonist as obtuseness, and is here treated as such, may be instead a refusal to be led down the garden path, and an insistence on taking Socrates's questions in a way in which they make the most sense. See the treatment of Hippias in the previous chapter.

<sup>152</sup>*Greater Hippias* 293e.

<sup>153</sup>*Greater Hippias* 294de.

appropriate to him. But what is fine is objectively so.

It is suggested next that the Fine is the Useful, that is, a fine thing is one that serves its function well. Hence ability is the Fine—not just any ability, the ability to produce some good (it must *be* useful, not merely seem to be so). So the cause of a thing being fine is that it can produce good things. It is proposed, and accepted as obvious within the discussion, that the essential cause of a sort of thing must be different from the thing it causes, and so, if fine things by the nature of fineness cause good things, then the Fine is not good. If it were, the good would already be present in the fine, and would not be caused or produced by it. That seems wrong enough so that the definition is abandoned.<sup>154</sup> Here the discussion of the Forms in Plato's later dialogues bear on the issue. It would have to be allowed that a Form can share in another Form without *being* that other Form. Every Form is a certain kind of the Good, and so is good, even if it is not *the* Good. That is, the Fine is *essentially* good, but it is more than this, a specific form of the Good, so it is not thereby to be identified with the Good. What it is over and above the good might be specified by indicating how it is good, that is, that it is what is good by causing certain sorts of good things. Throughout the *Greater Hippias* we find Hippias looking for some *one* thing to identify with the Fine, and he seems unaware that a complete definition will include a difference as well as a genus. Perhaps the conception of definition as a search for a *single thing*, as Socrates so often puts it, misleads him. Perhaps he is in fact, in Plato's view, taking the right approach, since Plato regards the good as indefinable, and so in a sense, at least, unknowable.

So the discussion returns to pleasure, and Socrates, avoiding the pitfall we have just noted, suggests that the fine is what produces pleasures (though, of course, the fine is not itself pleasure) through sight and hearing. So Socrates manages to hold on to the rejected suggestion, if we assume that pleasure is in itself good, but deny that the Fine is the Good, for it is in fact some part of the good (as one would have supposed the useful to be in any case), that part which enables us to acquire certain pleasures. It produces a certain sort of good through certain means. It is conceded by Socrates that the laws and fine activities might be perceived through sight and hearing, and things that are grasped through the other senses, such as pleasant food, are not usually called fine,<sup>155</sup> so the definition seems to extend to the right things,<sup>156</sup> but still, it seems that a definition

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<sup>154</sup>*Greater Hippias* 295c–297c.

<sup>155</sup>Is this true? Presumably it is a peculiarity of Greek language. It is the peculiarity which leads us sometimes to translate *to kalos* as *the beautiful*.

<sup>156</sup>*Greater Hippias* 298a–299c. The concession is not to be taken too seriously, for Socrates has introduced the new definition in order to make a certain point, and he is anxious to get to that point.

in disjunctive form such as this is not permissible. We were looking for one thing in all fine things, and the pleasant-by-sight and pleasant-by-hearing are two different things. It is surely nonsense to allow definitions by a simple aggregation of disjunctive options. That is not finding one thing in all the things defined. So there must be some one thing, say intelligibility, or harmony, or appeal to reason, which, as it happens, sight and hearing, but not the other senses, convey to us.<sup>157</sup> This one thing, of course, is understood by the mind, it is a form, and we perceive a thing to be fine not by the pleasure it gives us, but through our understanding it to resemble this form. (Presumably this understanding of the thing makes it pleasing to us.) Thus Socrates, in the course of the discussion, brings attention to the necessity of supposing that one somehow perceives the Forms in a way that transcends the use of the senses. Does this mean the Forms are separated? Surely not, since they still depend on particular things, persons who conceive them or things that live up to them, to find a place in the world. Socrates does not imagine that the world of particulars can be constructed somehow on preexistent Forms. The objectivity of the ideal depends on the fact that the nature of rational beings is such as to set up *these* (rational) standards, and not others. The standards need not be assumed to exist independently of rational natures.<sup>158</sup>

The objectivity of the ideal makes it possible for a person to intend pious actions, and yet perform impious actions. When this happens, of course, he is not pious, at least not perfectly so, but only has something in him resembling piety, though it resembles piety in its essence, as it were, in its capacity to produce pious actions (but not *only* pious actions, for it also enables him to produce some impious actions). His impiety might not be due to the imperfection of his desire to be pious, he may mean, without any holding back, to be as pious as possible, and he may have a grasp of the pious, that is, know what ideal he intends to live up to. This intention is the sort of thing to produce pious actions. But he might nonetheless, like Euthyphro, be confused sometimes about what is in fact pious and what is not, because, although he has identified the pious as his goal, he does not have a true, well-founded theoretical account what piety is, because he does not understand entirely its connection with what is good for human beings. It would be like someone who intended to drink wine, but got hold of something else that only appears to be wine but is not, because he does not know what wine really is. Such a person need not be defective in his goal—he knows what he wants, wine, and that is really what he wants. Had he known that this is not wine, he would not have drunk it. Nor is it required that

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<sup>157</sup>*Greater Hippias* 300b-303d.

<sup>158</sup>This is anticipating a little, for Socrates never puts a name to the rational, though the distinction between what is grasped by reason and what is grasped by the senses seems implicit in what he does, and anticipates a theme developed by Plato in his later dialogues.

he know what wine really is to intend to drink it. A deep knowledge of chemistry is not needed to enable us to intend to drink wine. So just as the honest intention to drink wine might be present even though, due to mistaken beliefs, one drinks something else in fact, so the intention to be pious may be present in Euthyphro, even though impiety is present in his action, not because of his intention, but because of his ignorance what piety really is.

This is not an inconsiderable point to make about ethics. Two things are required to be a good person, the right intentions, intending the good, and an understanding what is genuinely good. A morally virtuous person must have a certain kind of understanding what moral virtue is, and intend to be morally virtuous. If one is to be just, one must have a true conception of justice sufficient to guide his decisions to justice in most situations. If one is to be pious (not merely capable of pious actions on occasion), he must know what piety is as well as seeking to be pious.

This way of handling the question put Socrates at odds with the views Plato was to develop. It is not that Plato objected to the intellectual cast of the thing—virtuous behavior, he thought, required knowledge—rather, he had a different conception than Socrates did what was required to know what the good is. Plato did not see how the only basis for the truth of an objective statement that something is good could be that it is in our nature to find the thing good on due consideration. Even pointing out that we would find it good if we knew everything that was to be known about the natural order, so that all its consequences were clear to us, would not be enough for Plato to take it as a statement about what *is* good, as opposed to a statement about what merely *seems* good to beings like ourselves. For Plato, if it *is* good, then that is a fact reducible to no fact at all about the natural world, not even a fact about human or rational nature. (Perhaps we could say the good is not defined by Plato in terms of the rational, but rather the other way around—rational beings are those that can recognize the good.) Hence, for Plato, the Form of the Good stands outside the natural order, and becomes incomprehensible to us if we insist on a natural account of it. Our ability to make objective judgments about the good reflects, in Socrates, our ability to know our own nature and respond with desire and aversion in a way consonant with that nature. For Plato, it reflects a connection to a world of Forms outside the natural world, which shapes the natural world, and shapes our desires through reason in a way that they cannot be shaped through any natural process.

What is Socrates's conception of the Good? Socrates identifies the good itself as happiness, or living well. Happiness is obtained by obtaining good things, including wealth, health, beauty, good birth, power and

honor, but also the virtues, including wisdom, and good fortune.<sup>159</sup> Happiness is something found in some human lives, and in some human beings, and it is found in different degrees in different human beings. Perhaps no human being achieves living well perfectly, this being reserved to the gods, but clearly some live better than others, and some live very well while others live very badly. The Good is the most fundamental of the Forms, from which the others are derived, since every human rational ideal bears on some aspect of living well. Indeed, everyone without exception seeks the good, but some misconceive what the good is, and so live badly, and even, ignorant that they are doing so, do what would lead to their living badly. No one willingly seeks to live badly.

#### 14. SOCRATES AND THE PROBLEM OF EVIL

I do not believe that the law of God permits a better man to be harmed by a worse... fix your minds on this one belief, which is certain—nothing can harm a good man in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods.

Socrates in Plato's *Apology* 30d, 41cd.

Did Socrates think these Forms existed perfectly only as conceived goals toward which people strive? It seems that, though he did not envision a knowable realm of pure Forms separated from things in the way that Plato did, he may have thought the forms were realized perfectly among the gods. In the *Apology*, where we expect Plato to be most careful to give his master's opinions rather than his own, Socrates asserts that God does not permit a better man to be harmed by a worse, and that it is better to suffer injustice than do it, since, it appears, God will punish the evil-doer and protect or compensate his victim. He even argues that death cannot be an evil, since it happens to good men, and a good man is not permitted to come to harm.<sup>160</sup> Now Plato would explain such beliefs by reference to his view that injustice is a kind of sickness in the soul, and that the welfare of the soul is the most important thing a person can seek, and valuable in and of itself. But Socratic

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<sup>159</sup>*Euthydemus* 278 and following. If it is assumed that all these things are good only insofar as they obtain pleasure and prevent pain, then this is consistent with Socratic Hedonism. Living well is living a life in which pleasure, given one's character (opinions about the various sorts of good), will dominate and pain will be minimized.

<sup>160</sup>*Apology* 30d, 40a ff. Note that he says this even though, in the *Apology*, he confesses not to know if there is a continuation of life after death. In the *Gorgias* he professes to think that there is such a continuation, though he does not say he *knows* this is so. His myth might be taken to provide a stronger position, which he must take to support the general position of the *Apology* against Callicles's insistence that the just at least sometimes suffer for their justice in this life.

ethics, though it agreed that virtue was the one thing that was *always good in any situation* where there was a chance for pleasure and happiness, and should therefore always be sought,<sup>161</sup> did not hold that virtue was good *in itself*. The only good in itself for a human being is happiness (*eudaimonia*),<sup>162</sup> which is equated in the *Protagoras* with the presence of pleasure and absence of pain over a considerable period of time.

It might seem Socrates thought otherwise, given his well-attested view that the health of the soul is to be sought above all else. In the *Crito*, for instance,<sup>163</sup> Socrates states that the part of us, the soul, of course, which is improved by just actions and destroyed by unjust actions, must be healthy, else life is not worth living. This, however, reflects Plato's views, not Socrates's, for Socrates did not identify parts of the soul with different desires.<sup>164</sup> Given the Socratic doctrine that our desires are always at bottom for the good as such, for happiness, and for anything else only because we think it contributes to happiness, and that our actions are always directed toward what we believe to be best, and that virtue consists entirely in knowledge of the good, it is hard to see how unjust actions could corrupt the soul or just actions improve it, unless the performance of such actions have some effect on belief. Otherwise they could only shape the soul if they contributed to the formation of virtuous or vicious habits *not* rooted in the understanding, in the way Plato describes in the *Republic*. Indeed, Socrates could have observed that the performance of unjust actions might even teach one something about the consequences of such actions, and so might sometimes be assigned a *positive* effect on the development of the soul! Of course, apparent success in such unjust actions would tend to be corrupting, for it would seem to provide rational evidence that such actions are good.

The health of the soul is also discussed in the *Gorgias*, and there in such a way, apparently, as to allow

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<sup>161</sup>See *Apology* 30c and 41d, where Socrates says a good man cannot come to harm, because his affairs are not neglected by the gods, and the similar view expressed at the end of the *Gorgias*. A related view seems to be expressed at the end of the *Charmides*, where the argument assumes that a virtue is always beneficial, and at *Euthydemus* 281d–282a, namely the view that whatever is good is good only because it is associated with virtue, and that without virtue there is no good. It does not strictly follow from this that virtue is in itself sufficient for happiness, for it is always good only because it enables us to use whatever we have at hand to our best advantage. If we don't have the right things at hand, then, virtue won't help.

<sup>162</sup>For all this see the *Euthydemus* 277d–283b, where the virtue discussed is wisdom.

<sup>163</sup>At 47d–48b

<sup>164</sup>Moreover, at 49ab Socrates asserts that one must never do wrong willingly. But Socrates did not think it was possible to do wrong willingly. Again, this fits Plato in the *Gorgias* and the *Republic*, but makes no sense for Socrates. At 49bc Socrates claims in particular that one may never harm another, this recalls the notions about punishment in the *Apology*, but also a theme of the *Republic* and its theory of punishment. I take this dialogue to be written to express Platonic views, about the time of the *Republic*, and its intention to be, in particular, to explain why a wise person would show allegiance to an imperfect, earthly state that falls short of justice, though by and large Plato tries to work in it from views he shares with Socrates, even if he gives rather non-Socratic accounts why they are true.

a fit with other Socratic views. Here the parallel observed between health in the soul and in the body is that one cannot enjoy pleasure without such health in either case. Thus health is good, not in itself, but for the sake of long-term pleasure or happiness.<sup>165</sup> A strategy of seeking health above all is sensible, for it is always unwise to risk ill health, which renders pleasure impossible. So health of the soul, that is, virtue, is not a good in itself, as pleasure is, but it is the only thing that is always a good in every situation, and the *sine qua non* for every other good.

Why is it that one cannot enjoy pleasure if the soul is unhealthy? For Plato, the reason is clear, it is because the soul is in conflict with itself, as an unhealthy body with an imbalance of humors is in conflict with itself. But Socratic psychology would not seem to support such a view, for it holds that there is only one part of the soul, the believing, rational part. Ill health could be identified with an excessive number of significant false beliefs in the soul, rendering it unable to function well in making decisions, just as an unhealthy body is unable to function well in physical activities. But it is not at all clear why someone with a lot of false beliefs cannot enjoy pleasure, if he happens to be lucky enough to hit on pleasure-producing actions anyway.

One possible reply to all this might be that Socrates supposed beliefs could conflict with one another in the same way that Plato supposed rational and sensory desires might conflict, and if one believed that something was good, but also had beliefs that entailed it was bad, these inconsistent beliefs would make it impossible to be satisfied whether one had the item in question or not.<sup>166</sup> Perhaps such inconsistencies are in themselves unpleasant when one becomes aware of them. Indeed, one cannot consciously maintain conflicting beliefs, but is instead thrown into a state of uncertainty and puzzlement when one notes that one's beliefs

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<sup>165</sup>So, Penner (1992) 134-5, suggests that Socrates takes the soul to be an *instrument* by which a person lives, and so if the soul has its proper virtue, one lives well, and so is happy (*Republic* I, 353d-354a). *Gorgias* 464a-466a introduces the notion of health via an analogy between medicine and justice to pastry-cooking and rhetoric. The latter seek only what is pleasant, and so seems good, and only the former have a correct notion what is really good for the body and soul. At 479bc it is argued explicitly that health is good because of the benefits accruing from it, and the misery involved in the unhealthy and unjust life. On the other hand, at 506-507 and following, we find a view stated which seems irreconcilable with the Socratic approach, identifying health as a good in its own right. This represents, I take it, Plato's own view, advanced as a friendly, but significant revision of the Socratic view, or, perhaps better, Socrates thought a conflict of beliefs in the soul about the good to be intrinsically painful enough to render one unhappy. At the end of the *Gorgias*, in response to Callicles's persistent refusal to allow that a just person will get anything but trouble for his justice in this life, Socrates introduces a myth (522e ff.) involving the gods and an afterlife, to guarantee that the outcome of justice is always happiness. This would be unnecessary if health were regarded by Socrates as the greatest of goods, outweighing all others, *in itself*, but Socrates cannot convince Callicles even if he in fact takes that view, at least, not when working from Callicles's own presuppositions.

<sup>166</sup>A careful logician might note that one would be happy about the situation whether he had the item or not, too. But hedonists generally aim first of all at the removal of sources of pain, figuring that a small amount of unalloyed pleasure is better than a good deal of pleasure mixed with pain, and Socrates seems to fit this model of circumspection in his hedonism. So he would aim for consistency, allowing unalloyed pleasure, over inconsistency, which would guarantee a mixture.

heretofore have been in conflict. Such a state, if the matter in question is of any importance, would be intrinsically unpleasant. But this attempt to adapt Platonic argumentation to Socratic theory seems unsatisfying and implausible.

It is more likely that if there is a coincidence of virtue and happiness, it is an outcome of favorable external circumstances. If a just person cannot be harmed by injustice, and if justice is always a good, this presumably means that God, a perfectly blessed, all powerful, ideal god modeled in part on Xenophanes's conceptions, somehow intervenes to prevent the just person from losing pleasure and suffering pain as a result of the actions of the unjust. And this is precisely the picture we get at the end of the *Gorgias*.<sup>167</sup> Clearly the just suffer from the actions of the unjust in this life fairly often, but Socrates took the long view, and if the unjust were punished and the just rewarded in the afterlife, surely he would have taken that as sufficient to show that the unjust could not, in the end, harm the just, or benefit from unjust actions. Socrates thought the ideal ruled the world, for the world was ruled by a mind or minds which understood and perfectly realized all that was good. This Socratic divine world, giving ultimate power to Socratic forms, was the immediate predecessor of Plato's Separated Forms.

But perhaps Socrates did not need to believe in the gods. His agnosticism about what happens after death in the *Apology* suggests that he, unlike Plato's Socrates in the *Gorgias*, he did not admit that this earthly life was unsatisfactory or unfair for a just person. He could well have argued that it would never *improve* one's life to be unjust, even if it turned out that some just men lived unsatisfactory lives, and he might have thought that enough to justify an absolute commitment to justice. One's life might be unsatisfactory because of accidental misfortunes (though Socrates seems uninterested in the question of the source and justification of

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<sup>167</sup>The myth at *Gorgias* 522e ff. Moline (1981) Ch. 3, which does not think Socrates was a hedonist, argues that this myth, like the myths in the *Phaedo* and *Republic*, for instance, are intended to appeal to the irrational parts of the soul, quieting their fears of the consequences of being just, and are not literally true. Quite other arguments in favor of justice, appealing to the goals of the rational part of the soul, should be presented to reason, but they will not impress the irrational parts, which have other goals, and so, like children, require comforting stories to get them to do what is best for themselves and for the whole person. But, as attractive as this is as a reading of *Plato's* intention in his myths, I do not think it can apply to Socrates, since Socrates did not divide the soul into parts with different desires, but assumed that the most fundamental aim was always the same in all men, the attainment of the good, and that men's actions depended on their conception of the good. Moreover, the telling of false tales to foster virtue is a favorite trick of Plato, but not of Socrates, who had more respect for the rational autonomy of his students. A different view, defended in Penner (1992) 125, for instance, holds that the myth at the end of the *Gorgias* is Plato's, not Socrates's, representing what Plato takes to be necessary to save Socrates's position. The myth would then have Pythagorean inspiration, and the agnosticism about the fate of the soul in *Apology* 40-41 would represent Socrates's own views. It might be that Socrates believed that good ruled the world, as I suggest here, but without any decent supporting argument (which would wait upon a theory of *separated* Forms), and thus Plato introduces an irony at the end of the *Gorgias*—Socrates is forced to resort to rhetoric of the sort he has criticized earlier in the dialogue if he is to be convincing in the face of Callicles's reasonable skepticism about the likelihood of perfect justice leading to a happy life in naturalistic terms.

natural evils, and perhaps denied the effects of fortune, good or bad, on our happiness), but being unjust, then, would not improve the situation, but only make it worse, whereas justice might help some. In particular, if being just exposed one to the exploitation of unjust men, becoming unjust would not improve that situation even if it eliminated that particular source of exploitation, since it would lead inevitably to all sorts of other problems. If there were gods with appropriate powers, they would be just, and we can reasonably expect a more positive outcome if there are such gods, but Socrates, though he does not deny it, never argues about the existence of such gods in Plato's dialogues, unlike Plato himself, say in the *Laws*, who is very much concerned to prove that such a God exists.<sup>168</sup> He apparently thought we do not need to know about them to know that a good man cannot suffer harm,<sup>169</sup> at least not because of his goodness—and if he does not suffer harm because of his goodness, he does not suffer harm considered as a good man. In particular, if Callicles claims that a good man suffers for his justice, Socrates would reply he does not. He suffers because he happens to be forced to associate with unjust men, but this would lead to much greater suffering for him if he himself *shared* their injustice, even if it was a different suffering because he avoided being taken advantage of.

### 15. THE SOCRATICS

To sage Philosophy next lend thine ear  
 From Heaven descended to the low-rooft house  
 Of Socrates, see there his Tenement,  
 Whom well inspir'd the Oracle pronounc'd  
 Wisest of men; from whose mouth issu'd forth  
 Mellifluous streams that water's all the schools  
 Of Academics old and new, with those  
 Surnamed Peripatetics, and the Sect  
 Epicurean, and the Stoic severe . . .

John Milton, *Paradise Regained* IV 272-280.

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<sup>168</sup>On the other hand, in Xenophon's *Memorabilia* IV 3, for instance, Socrates is made to argue for the benevolence of the gods toward men as it is evidenced in their arrangement of the universe. So he presents an argument from design for the existence of the Gods. Why didn't Plato report such arguments? Is it that Socrates never made them, or had revealed at some time to Plato that he thought them somehow lacking? Or is it just that the Platonic sources are dominated by the project announced in *Republic* II, to show that justice is good even if it does not produce a good outcome for just people? To that project, the gods are irrelevant, since their existence suggests that justice is rewarded. In effect, what is to be shown is that justice is a good to the just even if there are no gods.

<sup>169</sup>*Apology* 30c-d, 41cd.

A number of Socrates's associates other than Plato wrote Socratic dialogues,<sup>170</sup> but the only one whose writings survive is **Xenophon, son of Gryllus (ca. 430 - after 360)**, an Athenian writer and adventurer. He is known not only for his *Recollections of Socrates*, but also his *Journey Up Country*, in which he recounts how, in 401, he joined a Greek mercenary force fighting for Cyrus, brother of the Persian King, Artaxerxes, in his bid for the throne. Cyrus was killed at the battle of Cunaxa, and his army fell apart despite its victory there. The Greeks refused to surrender and enlist themselves under the King, fearing bad treatment, and Xenophon, chosen as commander, led the force back home intact through Asia Minor after the Persians harried the Greeks out of their own lands. Alexander the Great learned much from Xenophon's adventure—in particular, he recruited sufficient cavalry to counter the Persian mounted force, avoiding Cyrus's over-reliance on the Greek infantry, and he observed the effect of Cyrus's death on his army, and made the King and his staff the target of his phalanx whenever he fought the King in person. Aside from the story of this adventure, Xenophon wrote the *Hellenica*, a history continuing Thucydides's account from 411 to 362, though not with Thucydides's brilliance, and the *Education of Cyrus*, treating the education of Cyrus the Great, founder of the Persian Empire, as the ideal education for a prince.

Xenophon's Socratic pieces round out his literary productions with an *Apology* and a *Symposium*, as well as a dialogue on home economics, the *Oeconomicus*, in which Socrates is the leading speaker.<sup>171</sup> Xenophon is an able man and a charming writer, and his picture of Socrates corroborates Plato's, but he is not much of a philosopher, and his apologetic efforts to portray Socrates as someone innocent of controversial views limits the usefulness of his works for the historian of philosophy. This is evidenced, for instance, in his *Apology*, which we can compare directly to Socrates's *Apology*. Socrates says there that he was identified as the most generous and upright of the Greeks by the oracle at Delphi, not the wisest of them, and none of the play around the identification of wisdom or knowledge of the good and virtue in Plato is even hinted at. Moreover, Xenophon's Socrates is without irony (like Xenophon himself), and simply states outright, rather self-righteously, that he was always just and upright, and so on, without any hint that human virtue is inevitably less than perfect. On the other hand, the identification of wisdom and virtue is perfectly clear in *Memorabilia* III 9, in IV 2 the paradox

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<sup>170</sup>The evidence for these figures is found chiefly in Diogenes Laertius, Book II, but also in scattered references in Plutarch and Cicero. Unfortunately Diogenes is far more interested in clever anecdotes than anything else, and though he gives accounts of doctrines he almost never gives the reasons why his philosophers held them. See Field (1930) Ch. 12, and Rankin (1983) Ch. 11.

<sup>171</sup>Similar Socratic dialogues were attributed to Antisthenes, Aeschines, Phaedo and Euclides, and others, though later writers reporting them regarded most of them as spurious, that is, presumably, forged, or not based on any genuine knowledge of Socrates. Diogenes Laertius II 64. Xenophon's work seems to react to Plato's dialogues, and, or Plato's to his.

of the *Hippias Minor* is proposed, and in IV 6 Socrates's dialectical search for real definitions. Indeed, there are references to most of the chief philosophical views in the *Memorabilia*, with the exceptions of Socratic skepticism and hedonism, both views that Xenophon apparently did not like. Probably, he did not know Socrates that well, and certainly not as a fellow investigator of philosophy. His is perhaps the ordinary, sympathetic fellow's view of Socrates, the sort of fellow Socrates himself might have sent to Prodicus.

**Aristippus of Cyrene** (a Greek trading colony in Egypt) (ca. 435–355 BCE) was a different matter. He was of wealthy origins, and came to Athens as a grown man, already instructed in Sophistic teachings, specifically to hear Socrates. He was notable enough later in life to be invited to Syracuse by Dionysius the Younger when Plato was there in 361, and he established a school in Cyrene. The anecdotes told of him in Diogenes Laertius<sup>172</sup> make a great deal of the fact that he took money for his teaching, and, it appears, did rather well at it. He seems to have been adaptable enough to get on with the rich, and to have frankly advocated pleasure and luxury if one had the means to afford it. Xenophon did not like him, and makes him the target of Socrates's attack on luxury, making Aristippus argue that the best life is not that of the ruler, who, to be a proper ruler, must suffer hardships on behalf of the state, nor that of a slave, subject to the orders of rulers. Rather, he should, if he can, hold himself free of obligations, so that he might be able to maximize his pleasures. Xenophon's Aristippus manages this by wandering from state to state as a guest and a stranger, without the obligations of citizenship.<sup>173</sup> Xenophon's Socrates pursues the matter further, arguing that such a person might be singularly at risk for mistreatment with no state to intervene on his behalf, and when Aristippus rejoins that it makes little sense to opt for suffering and self-denial on purpose to avoid suffering the same unwillingly, it is suggested that the one who opts for it can always limit his suffering to what seems best, for to be abstemious about food means that one can eat if one wants to, whereas not to have any food means one starves willy nilly. In the end, then, he and Aristippus agree on the aim, to maximize pleasure, and Socrates proposes self-restraint with that end in mind. A number of Diogenes's anecdotes suggest, however, that Aristippus might have agreed more closely with Socrates than Xenophon suggests, for he thought anyone who wishes to maintain freedom should avoid *attachment* to pleasures and luxury, adapting to circumstances without

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<sup>172</sup>Diogenes Laertius II 65-83. As usual, these anecdotes are an uncertain source of information. They give a clue to the doctrines he was known for, and to the elements of his life of which others were critical, but no particular anecdote is likely to be true as it stands.

<sup>173</sup>The beginning of *Reminiscences of Socrates* II 8-18. Socrates's rebuttal of Aristippus, as usual in Xenophon, is rhetorical rather than dialectical, and quotes the poets to support the view that happiness is only the result of toil. Aristippus might grant this, while yet holding that one should minimize the toil if he can, while enjoying the pleasures to which he gains access through his toil.

regret if need be. One should not lose self-control from an over-indulgence in pleasure, but self-control can be obtained through a knowledge of philosophy and self-awareness even by one who indulges in pleasure to a moderate degree, and the best life is one in which we take what pleasure we can without becoming attached to it. Aristippus's daughter, Arete (that is, "Virtue"), became a philosopher too, and taught her son, the Younger Aristippus.

Aristippus was classified as a Sophist by Aristotle because he thought there was no convincing proof that any reality existed outside of one's own perceptions, and, like Gorgias, allowed that one could know only about one's own internal states.<sup>174</sup> He seems to have conceived these internal states as physiological, reducing all sensation to touch, and treating them as motions within the body, identifying pleasure with the smooth motions, and pain with the rough. Pleasure, according to Aristippus, is the only reality to be sought, and in fact all beings seek to enjoy pleasure and avoid pain. Pleasures are varied on his account, and include such items as rejoicing in the prosperity of one's country, but the most important are the most intense, which are bodily pleasures. There is always pain to be endured, but one should see to it that the pleasures are greater and more numerous, and avoid pain whenever possible. Anger, superstitious fear, jealousy, and the like are to be avoided on this account, since they bring more pain than necessary. Friendship and thought are to be valued for the pleasures they bring, and one should not avoid what brings pleasure only because it is ungraceful or generally considered absurd.<sup>175</sup> Aristippus seems to have adopted Socratic Hedonism and taken it a step beyond the Master, perhaps following Gorgias more closely. In any case, he saw a natural connection between Socrates's identification of pleasure as the good, and the Sophistic focus on subjective experience as the only source of validity for our views. Surely, if pleasure, a feeling, is the chief end of life, then nothing outside one's own experience is of importance. (It was assumed that there is something outside experience, namely the causes of our experience, even if we can't know it. "External reality" was not denied, nor was the causal theory of

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<sup>174</sup>Sextus Empiricus, *Against the Learned* VII 196-7: "Everyone grasps his own feelings. Whether a particular feeling comes to both him and his neighbor from something white neither he nor his neighbor can say, since neither receives the other's feelings. Since there no feelings common to us all, it is rash to say that what appears thus-and-so to me also appears thus-and-so to my neighbor. Perhaps I am so composed as to be whitened [to experience white?] by the external object which impresses me whereas someone else has perceptions so constituted as to be differently disposed." This seems to argue for what we would call the privacy, or subjectivity, of experience. Again, VII 191: "feelings alone are apprehended and they are infallible: of the times which have produced the feelings, none is either apprehensible or infallible." VII 194: "The feeling which comes about in us shows us nothing apart from itself."

<sup>175</sup>Diogenes Laertius II 86 ff. Field (1930) argues that Aristippus's views as given here are actually the views of his grandson, also a philosopher and named Aristippus, but his reasons amount chiefly to the silence of contemporaries about such views. Aristotle refers to Aristippus only as a Sophist who held that mathematics was of no account because it has nothing to say about the good and the bad (*Metaphysics* 996a29).

perception. Nor, interestingly, was the existence of other minds. Indeed, the Cyrenaic theory of language is conventionalist! If the more interesting problems associated with their view of the privacy of experience were raised or dealt with by them, we have no evidence of it.) It may be that external things sometimes produce pleasure, but we cannot know that they do so, or how, and so we do well to ignore them, and focus on our experience, within which this pleasure is contained. Observation establishes empirical regularities by which we can guide our actions in the pursuit of pleasure and the avoidance of pain, and these empirical regularities, established wholly within our experience, and without explanation in virtue of underlying realities, are the best guide we can get. One consequence of such a view, of course, is egoism, as long as one assumes that it only makes sense to seek that which one can know one has, that is, which is part of one's experience, for only one's own pleasure is thus knowable, never anyone else's. Plato's criticism of Socratic Hedonism is rooted in an Aristippan conception—he takes it that pleasure is the appearance of possession of the good, and argues that it is consistent with such an appearance that one might not genuinely possess the good. Aristippus would no doubt reply that we cannot know when we genuinely possess the good, and so that has no bearing on the quality of our life, and we do well to make our lives as good as we can, *so far as we can tell*, for nothing else really counts for us.

**Anniceris of Cyrene**, a contemporary of Aristotle, followed Aristippus's Hedonism, but held that friendship, benevolence, respect for others' feeling, and gratitude provide the most reliable sources of pleasure, and that honorable actions are (nearly?) always rewarded in the long term. Apparently the long term here did not extend beyond this life. With Plato, he held that virtue could not be taught, since only the formation of good habits and will power can overcome the bad habits and short-sighted desires we will have developed before the instruction. Perhaps disagreeing with Aristippus, he held that a friend should not be cherished for his utility, but for the sake of a certain unique pleasurable feeling that only finding another dear to us provides. Nonetheless, he denied that the friend's pleasures or happiness is desirable of itself, since one cannot experience a friend's happiness, and this good feeling is, of course, our *own* feeling, caused by thoughts about our friend (perhaps even by thoughts about the pleasures she enjoys), not our friend's feeling.<sup>176</sup> It looks very much as if Anniceris was responding to doctrines about virtue and friendship found in Plato, accommodating what he found plausible in them within a revised form of Aristippus's Egoistic Hedonism.

**Theodorus** (active ca. 308, fifteen years after Aristotle's death) was a pupil of Anniceris and a certain

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<sup>176</sup>Diogenes Laertius II 96 ff.

Dionysius the Dialectician. Like Socrates, he thought knowledge by itself adequate to attain to happiness, equating virtue with this knowledge, and making it teachable. He thought the pursuit of friendship unwise altogether, since a foolish man could not be or have a true friend, and a wise man was sufficient to himself. Similarly, he found patriotism, which suggests one's dependence on a particular, limited group of people, absurd, and held that the wise regarded themselves as citizens of the world. He considered moderation and justice to be important, though we do not know how he handled the latter within the Cyrenaic framework of Egoistic Hedonism without admitting to a certain dependence on others. His behavior was generally rude and insulting towards religion, and he seems to have been banished from Athens for impiety. The story is that he asked the priest in charge of the Eleusynian Mysteries a question about them, and when informed that the information could not be divulged to the uninitiated he shot back that the fellow divulged it to the uninitiated whenever he carried out an initiation. He saw nothing wrong with public sexuality, and was reputed to have been the lover of Hipparchia, wife of Crates the Cynic. King Ptolemy once sent him on an embassy to Lysimachus, probably calculating that he would thoroughly insult the fellow, which he did. Theodorus is most noted for his atheism. The term seems to bear its usual meaning here among the Greeks—one who denies that the gods concern themselves with human welfare, even if he allows there are gods. Diogenes Laertius reports that Epicurus got his views on the gods from Theodorus's book on the subject, a book he himself had seen, so it seems likely that Epicurus derived some inspiration from it, at least.<sup>177</sup>

**Hegesias (d. 283 BCE),**<sup>178</sup> who lived in Cyrene at the time of Ptolemy Soter, also defended Hedonism, but he thought happiness impossible of attainment, since the necessary continuity of relatively unmixed pleasure required for happiness was unattainable. This doctrine was shocking enough so that he had a reputation as an advocate of suicide, though he apparently argued that a wise man is indifferent to life and death, which suggests rather a focus on non-attachment, a freedom from desire, as the road to the good life. Presumably he thought it best to aim for as little pain as possible, rather than maximizing pleasure. Socrates had argued that bodily pleasures of the more intense sort bring more pain than pleasure in the long run, and Hegesias may have extended this to other sorts of pleasure as well. He observed that what is pleasurable to one person is painful to another, since we tend to enjoy what has been unattainable for us, and surfeit destroys

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<sup>177</sup>Diogenes Laertius II 98 ff. Epicurus met Theodorus in Mytilene, in the court of Mithres. The two did not get along, of course, but that does not rule out some influence.

<sup>178</sup>Diogenes Laertius II 93 ff.

pleasure. He argued that a wise man will not only be indifferent to life and death, but will act for his own sake, and depend on himself, alone. This is because one’s happiness depends chiefly on one’s own psychological strategy, not on fortune, riches, reputation, friendship, freedom instead of slavery, and other such external matters. Did he, abandoning psychological egoism, allow that it was possible for the unwise to act for the sake of others? Probably, he only held that it was not in fact to one’s own long term advantage to act on behalf of others, though the foolish think it is. In any case, he certainly did not abandon the Socratic view that we are entirely governed by our beliefs, so that no one does what he thinks wrong or disadvantageous willingly, and he shared Aristippus’s Skepticism. Hegesias’s views are very close to those of his contemporary, Pyrrho the Skeptic.

**16. THE CYNICS**

I had rather be mad than give way to pleasure.

Diogenes of Sinope

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Teles, from references in *On Exile*, can be placed around 240 BCE. Seven extracts of his work are preserved in Stobaeus (taken from an earlier collection by one Theodorus): *On Appearance and Reality*, *On Self-Sufficiency*, *On Exile*, *Comparison of Poverty and Wealth*, *That Pleasure is not the Goal of Life*, *On Circumstances*, *On Freedom from Passion*. These add up to about 30 pages in all.

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The element of social criticism in Socratic views was most strongly pursued among his successors by **Diogenes of Sinope (died ca. 320 CE)**, founder of the Cynic school of philosophy.<sup>179</sup> Diogenes probably emigrated from Sinope, a Black Sea port, to Athens. The doxographers makes him the student of Antisthenes, but given the likely date of his arrival in Athens, Antisthenes would have to have been very old when they first met, and there are no references to Antisthenes in early Cynic writings. Moreover, the Stoics had reason to argue for the succession Socrates-Antisthenes-Diogenes-Crates-Zeno, to establish the descent of their school from Socrates. So the association with Antisthenes is surely to be rejected, though Diogenes was said to have admired Antisthenes's teachings, but to have found them less than consistent with his life, so that he called him a trumpet that cannot hear itself. There is a tale that Diogenes's father, Hikesias, was convicted of defacing the currency in Sinope, and went to Athens in exile, which it seems is true.<sup>180</sup> His father's act might have been for the sake of marking debased currency removed from circulation, or it might have been intended to as a an act of hostility to whoever was represented on the coins. In any case, it would have had a good, patriotic motivation, by Hekesias's own lights, and a change in the party in power no doubt resulted in his conviction.<sup>181</sup>

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<sup>179</sup>For Diogenes and the Cynics I rely chiefly on Rankin (1983), ch. 13. The chief Ancient source is once more Diogenes Laertius VI, which is supplemented especially by the rhetorical pieces of Dio Chrysostomus (whose career is described at the end of this section).

<sup>180</sup>There is archaeological evidence supporting it at Sinope, including many defaced coins and good coins bearing the name of Hikesias as the official in charge of the mint. C. T. Seltman, "Diogenes of Sinope, Son of the Banker Hikesias," in *Transactions of the International Numismatic Congress 1936* (London 1938).

<sup>181</sup>This is putting the best face on it. The charge was "altering the currency." It does not seem to be counterfeiting that is meant, but perhaps putting out coins with less gold or silver in them than the face value indicated is. This deliberate debasement of the currency might have had appropriate motivation as well, of course. It seem Hikesias acted in an official capacity, then his party fell out of favor.

His son seems to have thought the exile unjust, in any case, and perhaps inquired at Delphi about it.<sup>182</sup> Diogenes described himself as one who “defaced the currency,” with another meaning, since “*nomisma*,” meaning “coin,” would strongly suggest “*nomos*,” meaning custom, law, or that which is generally accepted, as opposed to “*physis*,” “nature,” which Diogenes preserved. This is all that can be said with any certainty about Diogenes’s life, and though the many stories about him are worth the reading, they have little to do with history.

In Plato’s *Republic*, Socrates opens the search for an ideal state with a description of a small group of people living off their own work on the land, without the trade or material culture we associate with civilization, in relative poverty, but in enjoyment of their lives and with just and moderate behavior toward all.<sup>183</sup> This utopian vision is rejected as a society of pigs by the audience, and Socrates then launches the construction of a second city, one that provides not merely what men need, but luxuries as well. The second city is immediately involved in injustice toward those outside it, since it must conquer other’s lands to provide for increased consumption by its citizens, and this gives point to Socrates’s remark that the first city seemed to him somehow better, even as he gives in to the audience’s demands. The central idea in the philosophy of Diogenes, a philosophy suited to dogs (hence Cynicism, from “*cynos*,” or “dog”), which we can allow to stand in for Plato’s pigs, is that Socrates was indeed right. Civilization, contrived to provide for desires beyond our needs, to make life soft and easy, inevitably leads to corruption, so that one is no longer suited to endure inevitable evils and thus doomed to unhappiness and injustice to others. The ideal life, then, is one of indifference to hardship, *apatheia*, since the pursuit of freedom from hardship leads to moral destruction; self-sufficiency, *autarkeia*, which reveals itself in both withdrawal from the corrupt, luxurious city into which one is born, and an insistence on living on one’s own efforts, however poorly one may have to live to do this; a blunt openness in speech that describes things just as they are, *parrhesia*; and a lack of shame, *anaideia* in matters such as sexual intercourse, defecation, or preserving one’s life through ‘ignoble’ actions, which involve no true shame, but betray instead hypocrisy and too delicate a temperament. This last was expressed in crude public actions calculated to disgust the artificially over refined. The contrivances of convention corrupt. We

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<sup>182</sup>All these stories come in so many variants that it is very hard to say what might have happened. For a thorough and intelligent review of the evidence see Dudley (1937) Chapter 2. Aristotle, *Rhetoric* III 10 places Diogenes, already referred as “the dog” in Athens about 330, at which time he would have been quite an old man, according to Diogenes Laertius, VI 81, who presumably takes his information from Apollodorus’s early *Chronology*.

<sup>183</sup>Compare Dio Chrysostom’s seventh Discourse, the “Euboean Discourse.”

must live in accord with nature, like dogs. Diogenes was quite sarcastic about the pretensions of civilized culture, and no doubt named himself a dog philosopher with ironic intention—there is, after all, no real shame at all in being like a dog, and it reveals something wrong with cultured society that it should find anything shameful in it. The pattern of living that resulted from taking all this seriously was called an *askesis*, from which our “ascetic” is derived.

Diogenes then, opposed the apology for civilization in such thinkers as Protagoras. What, to the Greek Enlightenment, was progress, new technology and the discovery how to live together in justice, is to Diogenes only a progression toward decadence, vice, and collective injustice. Primitive human beings had the means for survival at hand, and did not need to invent complex social organization so that they could exploit others, or clever machines that only acquaint us with luxury and false security, robbing us of our powers of endurance and creating insatiable desires. There is a parallel here with the viewpoint of the Taoists in China, and the Hippies during the sixties in the United States. The Cynic position is often taken up in one form or another in tolerant and sophisticated civilizations—it is a reaction against sophistication, and an intolerant society won't put up with it. In any case, Protagoras had suggested that social organization was necessary because human beings were soft and easily hurt, unlike the other animals, but Diogenes retorted that any animal goes soft when it lives luxuriously, and human beings must be well enough adapted to the environment in which they live without civilized contrivances, or else they could never have survived to become civilized. Dio Chrysostom has him suggest, in a typical re-writing of an old myth, that Zeus was acting justly when he punished Prometheus for giving fire to human beings, since fire made men weak.<sup>184</sup> Put briefly, although we all tend to think otherwise, loss of the comforts of civilization won't kill us.

Whatever the virtues of civilization are, and the Cynics no doubt habitually underestimated its virtues, Cynic criticism is often on the mark. Political and economic structures were indeed tools of oppression in Ancient times, and remain so today, and they were so in Ancient times because the good life of security and luxury for the better placed could not easily be maintained without reliance on slaves and an impoverished class of farmers and day workers within the state, and on imperialism without. If, indeed, justice was to be followed absolutely and without the least defection, as Socrates demanded it should, that could not be done within economic and political systems like those prevalent in Ancient Greece (or like those prevalent today, for that matter). One either benefitted from the system unjustly, living, at the best, in Plato's “ideal” city, with its

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<sup>184</sup>Dio Chrysostom, *Discourse* 6.25.

imperialism abroad and its social control and stratification within, or one dissociated oneself from the society, and lived like a Cynic. Some compromise with justice was needed, like that provided by Plato, or else some argument justifying the glaring economic and political inequalities present in the Ancient world. The Cynics refused compromise, seeing no real need for it, and were skeptical of any justificatory argument.

Diogenes might be said to have originated the Cosmopolitan ideal, claiming when asked where he had come from to be the citizen of no city, but only of the Cosmos.<sup>185</sup> It should be noted that the remark is negative. He does not envision a universal human community, a brotherhood of Man, as Alexander the Great seems to have done in his drive to unify many disparate cultures in a single polity.<sup>186</sup> He only refuses to pledge fealty to any *polis*. Zeno later argued that the wise are friends of the Gods, and friends hold all their possessions in common, and so everything in the world is the property of the wise.<sup>187</sup> It would seem the wise, then, might be citizens of the world, but in an exclusive sense, implying that those who are not wise, the vast majority of human beings, do not enjoy citizenship in the world. That is not to say that wise men have a right to exploit others, of course, but only that it is the privilege of the Gods to want nothing, that of wise men to want little.<sup>188</sup> The lives of the many are *irrelevant* to the Cosmos.

One might ask whether the Cynics hoped to bring about real reform, or the real establishment of one of their ideal, natural, communist states. The answer must be that they were committed to the ideal, but understood the enormous difficulties in the way of its fulfillment. This did not lead them to give up the ideal, but rather to take the first steps in the direction of its accomplishment. They undertook to convince people of the legitimacy of the ideal by open and free criticism of existing conditions, not concealing their real character to justify personal advantages gained from them. They tried to exemplify the ideal life, as far as possible, in their own person. Their hope was, at its most sanguine, that a small band of Cynics living the natural life might become the seed of a truly natural and just community, which, by its example, might give rise to other such communities, and eventually lead to a world in which only such communities were to be found. Even if they perceived these hopes to be impossible of fulfillment, they must have considered that they were required to do what they could to bring their ideal to realization, no matter how long the odds against success. Moreover,

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<sup>185</sup>Diogenes Laertius VI 63. On this Dudley (1937) 35 ff. is especially good.

<sup>186</sup>See Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Brotherhood of Man," *Proceedings of the British Academy*, xix (1932).

<sup>187</sup>Diogenes Laertius 6.72.

<sup>188</sup>Diogenes Laertius 6.104.

realization of the ideal, even to a small degree, in the life of the individual made that individual's life worth living, while competing ideals of power and sensory titillation, even if accomplished almost perfectly, only gave the appearance of well-being in a life that was in fact a hell. Justice and the good life cannot be set aside as aims simply because they can be accomplished only imperfectly, any more than it is reasonable for someone short of good food to dine on poisons.

Diogenes, it is related,<sup>189</sup> believed that nothing was unnatural in the eating of human flesh or stealing from a temple, because everything pervades all things. The point is unclear, but perhaps it is that nothing is intrinsically taboo. Human flesh may be eaten, though one presumably cannot murder to acquire such food, and even temple goods, with their peculiar aura of holiness, may be taken for use, if this does not constitute some injustice to another. Whatever mana might make these things taboo will be found in all other things, as well, including ourselves. Nothing is naturally alien to us, or super-natural with respect to us, that is, outside our nature in the way that God is sometimes thought to be outside all nature. What this suggests is that Diogenes's Naturalism led him to reject the notion that any values or prohibitions were to be found inscribed in the facts. What is good for us is what is useful to us, given our desire for happiness, and nothing is good or bad, permitted or forbidden, in itself. Possibly, his formulation of a position that we have already seen in many thinkers was an attempt to get at the Platonic notion that ultimately real values could be found residing in the Forms, which were decidedly *not* conceived by Plato to be mixed with all things. In that case the argument is that, in the absence of unmixed supernatural Platonic Forms that specify what is good or bad, right or wrong, in itself, we are left with a naturalistic relativism of values that will not allow the possibility of intrinsically polluting actions.

Dio Chrysostom<sup>190</sup> makes a related point when he has Diogenes argue that one should not consult the gods about the future, since the god's utterance must be interpreted, and hitting on the right interpretation of the always cryptic oracle requires precisely that wisdom which would enable one to figure out what to do on one's own. We can hear an echo of Socrates here—as far as the gods are concerned, one must always be just. Nothing more is required, and every commandment from the gods comes to this. But the interpretation of signs and oracles gives the unjust person an opportunity for disaster. The gods, in bitter irony, allow us to destroy ourselves by their ambiguous advice, and our destruction is just, for we see only our own desires in

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<sup>189</sup>Diogenes Laertius 6.73.

<sup>190</sup>Discourse 10, "On Servants."

what they say. The upshot is that we do best to seek wisdom and justice, and the authority of divine utterances are no substitute for these, since they are needed to understand divine utterances in the first place.

Diogenes and his successors are known for the invention of a number of new literary types. Since their teaching did not proceed by dialectic (a soft, civilized invention), their discourses and writings took rather a different turn than did Plato's and Aristotle's. Diogenes, it seems, wrote a number of essays (apparently not dialogues), among them a *Republic*, and apparently some dialogues.<sup>191</sup> The titles given to some suggest rather abusive content. He also, perhaps, wrote a number of tragedies, in which he is reputed to have introduced arguments suggesting that cannibalism, incest, and other such terrible deeds as tragic heroes are driven to are in fact natural enough, and no shame. They were probably more anti-tragedies, suggesting the absurdities implicit in a cultured sense of shame. He invented another literary form, the "diatribe," which seems to have been a direct and forceful, but essentially unargued, presentation of a position on a philosophical topic for an inexpert audience. Even briefer were his *chreiai*. So he remarked that people rot their bodies with luxuries such as baths and excessive sex when alive, and then have themselves embalmed when they die. Finally, Diogenes also seems to have resorted to symbolic actions in his teaching (at least if the stories were not made up later), such as the famed episode when he was discovered looking about with a lighted torch in broad daylight, and upon being asked what he was doing, announced that he was looking for an honest human being. When Alexander the Great came to visit the noted philosopher, Diogenes was sitting in front of the large abandoned vat that he had made his home, and when Alexander offered to give him whatever he wished, he asked the King not to stand in his sun.

The Cynic ascetics are certainly to be compared to the ascetics of India, though they differed from them in some important respects. They did not base their lives on metaphysics, after the manner of the Hindus, and engaged in no meditation, and though we might compare the Naturalism of Diogenes with the Empirical Naturalism of Buddhism, the Cynics never had an organization supervising their activities and maintaining a settled doctrine, like the Buddhist Sangha. As a result, a Cynic was always a self-proclaimed philosopher, and many such fellows would have been nothing more than neurotic bums with delusions of grandeur and a taste for shocking more conventional folk. Again unlike Buddhism, the Cynic rejection of the usual manner of life was not coupled with any organized lay movement of people who admired the ideal but were not willing to

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<sup>191</sup>See Dudley (1937) for an intelligent review of the evidence. It is clear that many of the works later attributed to Diogenes were forged, but it seems as though four or five works, at least, can be assigned to him. None of them survive, of course.

govern their lives by it, at least not beyond certain compromise measures allowed to be adequate in the official doctrine. So although the theoretical motivation of their ascetic way of life is in a number of ways strikingly like the theoretical motivations behind Buddhism, and although the Cynics taught their doctrines to whoever would listen, often with techniques somewhat like those later found in Zen Buddhism, Cynicism could not establish itself as a real, continuing movement. It was more or less absorbed into Christian asceticism in the later phases of the Roman Empire. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century CE we find St. Gregory Nazianzen and St. Basil of Eastern Church exhibiting a good deal of approval for the Cynic way of life. The individual cynic becomes the holy man who rejects worldly values, and is quite capable of being thoroughly unpleasant about the rejection, and the ideal Cynic city becomes the monastery, typically placed as far from civilization as can be managed. Christians recognized in the Cynics an image of the *Old Testament* prophets, complete with their symbolic actions. Diogenes was said to have begun rolling his barrel about at random in Corinth, when the city broke into frantic activity to prepare their defenses, on news that Philip of Macedon was on the way with his army. No one had given him a job to do, and it seemed about as useful as anything else. Jeremiah could hardly have done better. The Cynics often represented themselves as scouts and messengers of the Gods, seeking out human evil-doing and condemning it for them. (Jeremiah's God, of course, needed no scouts.)

**Crates of Thebes (ca. 325 - ca 275)** studied first under Bryson, the Megarian philosopher, and then came to Athens, where he was converted by Diogenes and remained his associate. He gave up his wealth, but married when Hipparchia, a daughter of a wealthy family, sought him out. She threatened to kill herself if she was not allowed to marry Crates, and Crates himself could not dissuade her from her choice. Hipparchia gained some note as a philosopher in her own right, following the Cynic way of life quite strictly. The stories of Crates suggest a fellow of good humor and cheerful spirit. He was said to have been given free entrance to people's houses as an arbiter of disputes, and to have been kind even in reproof. Apparently he had some wealth, for he is never described as a beggar, and he set aside his money for his sons, should they be ordinary men, but expected they would not claim it if they became Philosophers, and it could then be distributed to the poor. He wrote a utopian piece describing a city called Pera (the word for the wallet in which a Cynic carried whatever he collected in his begging),

. . . in the midst of the wine-dark confusion, fair and fertile, filthy and having no wealth, to whose shore there sails no scrounging stupid creep nor any sensualist stirred up by the hips of a whore. It produces thyme, onions, figs and loaves, and the people do not go to war with

each other for these, and do not bear arms to compete for money and glory.<sup>192</sup>

This is a parody of Homer, and, of course, of the values expressed in Homer. In the typical Cynic mixture of comedy and seriousness, Crates goes on to describe the ideal life according to nature in Pera, a simple life of liberty, not seeking the excessive pleasures of a Greek city-state. Crates argued against Hedonism that if we make pleasure the aim of life, we end up with an intolerable complexity in which all sorts of different pleasures are constantly tormenting us for attention at the expense of other pleasures. Attention to future pleasures assure us that the present moment is continually spoiled by the “necessary” tasks of education, hard labor, military and governmental duties, and the like. To seek maximal pleasure rationally simply leads to frustration. The proper end in life is to live according to nature, not inventing needs beyond the natural ones. If one follows that way, pleasures will take care of themselves. Crates also had a proper disdain of dialectic. One becomes virtuous by acting virtuously, not by dialectical wordplay, which only generates confusion of mind.

**Metrocles** was a fairly wealthy individual, brother of Crates’s wife, Hipparchia. There is an entertaining tale that he inadvertently farted while rehearsing a speech, and was so depressed by his lack of control that he determined to commit suicide. Hipparchia prevailed on her husband to talk him out of it, and Crates ate a meal of beans, argued that farting was natural enough, and no sign of a lack of virtue, and then farted himself to demonstrate his point. Thus Metrocles was jollied out of his funk, and adopted Cynicism, though he never gave over his wealth, arguing that it was all right as long as it was put to good use. He had a number of notable pupils, produced his own *chreai*, and collected those of Diogenes.

**Monimos**, an associate of Crates and Diogenes, is reported to have thought there was no *kriterion*, or standard of judgment that, properly applied, would guarantee the truth of whatever it certified. The rejection of the *kriterion* defined a Skeptic in later Antiquity. Monimos went so far in his rejection of all theory going beyond the mere “shadow drawing” of experience, that he held we cannot even be sure we know nothing. Presumably he intended that there might be some reliable *kriterion* that yields knowledge, and we might even use it, perhaps unconsciously, now and again, but we cannot know what it is or be sure when we have used it.

**Onesicritus of Astypyleia** was a pupil of Diogenes, though he did not himself become a philosopher, who accompanied Alexander the Great on his conquest of Asia. He traveled with Nearchus in a

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<sup>192</sup>Diogenes Laertius VI 85.

maritime exploration through the Persian Gulf, and wrote a popular book, somewhat like Xenophon's *Education of Cyrus*, about Alexander and the expedition, full of tall tales about the strange men and animals of India. He described the Indian "gymnosophists" ("naked Sophists"), suggesting that their discipline make Socrates and Diogenes seem to adopt custom rather than nature as their guide. He apparently learned nothing of Indian metaphysics, and to have had no clear notion why the "gymnosophists" engaged in their austerities. He merely assimilated them to what he knew, assuming that, like Diogenes, they intended to follow nature, abandon civilized corruption, and live the life of hardship and labor arising from that choice.

One of Metrocles's pupils was **Menippus of Gadara (active ca. 300 - 250 BCE)**. A Phoenician, he was reputed to have been a slave who eventually earned his freedom and became a wealthy citizen of Thebes. He is supposed to have hanged himself over a loss of money, though one must be suspicious of such a hostile story. He was noted as writer of satires, including a book about the underworld that influenced Lucian's *Dialogues of the Dead*, a story about Diogenes being sold into slavery, a collection of satirical last wills and testaments (wills and last testaments of famous men were often collected and reported in a serious way), and another collection of epistles written by the gods. He originated and gave his name to Menippean Satire, a mixture of humor and reflection, prose and poetry, a style which Varro copied in his *Menippea*, and Boethius used as a model for his *Consolation of Philosophy*.

**Bion (ca. 350 - ca. 275 BCE?)** was born of reasonably prosperous parents, but sold into slavery when financial disaster rendered them penniless. He was bought by a teacher of rhetoric who used him sexually, but got enough into his good graces so that he was freed, and inherited the man's possessions on his death. He burned his speeches and used the money to go to Athens (before 314) and study philosophy. A similar tale is told of Socrates's student, Phaedo, and both Bion and Phaedo seem never to have fully recovered from their experiences. Both were given to a defensive sarcasm and disdain of others ever after. Bion went the round of the schools, studying under Xenocrates in the Academy, Theodorus of Cyrene and Theophrastus, Aristotle's successor, but Crates influenced him most. His philosophical views cannot be very well reconstructed from the evidence. It is clear that the man confused his biographers, who found it hard to place him in a school. He adopted the Cynic view that the ability to endure evil was the key to a good life, though he did not recommend seeking out hardship, and he respected wealth as a sign of real achievement, living well and charging goodly sums for his instruction.

**Euhemerus of Messene** served under King Cassander of Macedon, 311-298, before Antigonus drove Cassander out and established his dynasty there. He wrote a *Sacred Narrative*, which recounted an

imaginary journey to some islands in the Indian Ocean where nature and man were both made perfect. This Utopia was a Greek city-state with universal citizenship. There was no private property or money, and the land was divided among those who work it. The Gods in the story were worshiped, but reduced to the founders of the city, whom he held deserved divine honors.<sup>193</sup> This may well be intended as a defense of the Hellenistic practice of giving divine honor to Kings, but was later interpreted as a bit of skepticism about the Gods.

**Iambulus (3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C.E.)** Also produced a utopian travel tale, involving a journey to the Island of the Sun south of Arabia. This focuses on marvels, reporting that the people often lived 150 years, when they were subjected to euthanasia, that infants were placed on the backs of giant domestic birds, and allowed to live only if they behaved well during flight, that the people had two tongues, so that they could carry on two conversations at once. But as in Euhemerus, the people worship the heavenly bodies, and, free of any class system, practice communism, having wives and children in common, which keeps them free from all discord.<sup>194</sup> In the Hellenistic and Roman periods there were periodic attempts to establish such ideal cities, a suitable action for a virtuous King, but one has to doubt the seriousness of such enterprises. They are more or less on a par with the Charlemagne's play at converting his court to a school of philosophy, and sometimes rank lower than that, among the expedients of political propaganda. It should be noted that the ideal worship is represented in these stories as a worship of the Sun, who represents the all-seeing eye of Justice, and even some of the later Roman Emperors made an effort to associate themselves with a similar Sun cult.

There are a number of other more or less Cynic philosophers, about whom we know progressively less and less, but there is little point in reporting mere names. These folks may have been of some importance in Greek lands, but the major schools were now making their home in the Roman milieu, and Cicero apparently had no interest in contemporary Cynics. The history of Philosophy, if not Philosophy itself, does follow the money. The Cynic view was coopted for a while by the Stoics, including Cato and Cicero (in ethics), but as the philosophical public, now removed to Rome, began to develop its doubts about the Stoic ideal of public service under the Empire, regular Cynics once more emerged. So **Demetrius the Cynic (4 BCE to 65 CE)**, a contemporary of Seneca the Younger, held to the original values of Diogenes quite closely. Under the Roman Principate it was fairly easy to become convinced that civilized society was intrinsically corrupting, and Demetrius firmly opposed the emperors, though he never quite drove any of them to the point of executing

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<sup>193</sup>Diodorus Siculus, 6.1.4, 6, cited in Eusebius, *History of the Church*.

<sup>194</sup>Diodorus Siculus, 2.55–60. For Euhemerus and Iambulus see Shipley (2000) 187–189.

him. He was a member of the circle of intellectuals about Thrasea Paetus, who opposed Nero, and was banished when Thrasea was compelled to kill himself. When restored to Rome, he still did not hold his tongue, and there is a well attested tale of his abusive criticism of Vespasian, who took his tongue lashing and refused to order the “howling dog” killed.

**Dio Cocceianus, “Chrysostomus,”** the “Golden mouthed” (ca. 40 C.E. - after 100 C.E.), a relative of Dio Cassian, the historian, likewise became involved with the imperial family, came out on the wrong side of a quarrel, and was banished for his trouble in 82, but he became a Cynic only after his banishment, roaming for many years throughout the Empire and earning his living from whatever menial work he chanced to come across. Under Nerva he regained favor, and eventually became adviser on the Greek part of the Empire to Trajan, whom he much admired, dying during that Emperor’s reign. He was most skilled as an orator, and is said to have talked a body of Roman troops out of taking revenge for the murder of the Emperor Domitian (for whom no one but the soldiers had any use). To the classical Cynic values, and an emphasis on the life of nature and virtue, he added *philanthropia*, sympathy for human beings in the troubles they must face, and stressed the need for the king to bring about like-mindedness and concord among his people.<sup>195</sup> Against those who would be unjust in order to gain pleasure, he points out that the unjust only increase their toil since they have to guard against retribution and so get no more pleasure in the end.<sup>196</sup> He argues also that happiness requires the ability to rule (as Plato argues in the *Meno*), at least to rule oneself, and that only one able to endure hardship can rule, so that luxury and a habit of seeking pleasure rather than self-mastery leads to a less pleasant life. He thinks, then, that pleasure is not the *aim to seek*, self-discipline and hard work being better goals, but argues in the end that these are better because they make life pleasant. Again, he argues that the way to approach hardship is to attack it head on, entering into the difficulties cheerfully without shrinking back. Thus one discovers that they are not so terrible as one had imagined. It is not clear that he would deny that a properly enlightened Hedonist, seeking the surest road to a pleasant life, could be virtuous, but it may be that subtleties are hidden here. For instance, perhaps different things become pleasant to the well-disciplined person, so that his life is pleasant *to him*, but would not be to those who are not well-disciplined.

In his 80 *Discourses*, Dio explicated the full range of Cynic doctrine, and he adapted Cynic view to

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<sup>195</sup>Musonius Rufus, a Stoic of the time, regarded the King as “Law Incarnate, the contriver of good government and harmony, the emulator of God and, as God is, Father of his subjects.” Fragment 8.

<sup>196</sup>Discourse III 60-61.

problems Diogenes would never have recognized when he made his Orations on kingship before Trajan.<sup>197</sup> Although he clearly prefers abandoning society altogether in much of his work, he does provide a justification for Kingship, making Alexander the Great his hero, and arguing, with many a supporting tale, that the best form of government is the rule of an enlightened King. Some of his arguments are ancient indeed, as when he points out that a King, Zeus, rules the universe, an arrangement that should therefore be imitated in the state.<sup>198</sup> But his convictions are really rooted in the reflection that large states such as the Roman Empire are unavoidable, given the difficulty in making small city-states like those of Plato's and Aristotle's time militarily viable, and in such large states aristocracy (or timocracy) and democracy are impossible to carry off, so that the only choice is between kingship and tyranny.<sup>199</sup> The true King, fond of toil, rules his subjects for the sake of their own good as a kind of emissary from Zeus, while the tyrant, fond of luxury, aims at exploitation and private advantage.<sup>200</sup> (Much of this is drawn from Plato.) When he speaks of the education of the King, he urges, in the typical Cynic fashion, that it not be over-intellectualized, and concentrate on molding the feelings and passions of its student with poetry, music, and the like. Clearly he does not envision philosophers ruling, though he may see them as educators of the ruler, as Aristotle educated Alexander.<sup>201</sup> Dio sees one of the chief functions of the king as military, the protection of the state from outsiders. This was a traditional role, of course, and Dio had already given over the game as far as the ideal goes, settling for a distant second best. So he was no doubt disinclined to argue for an impractical pacifism, though his apparent acquiescence even in wars of conquest reminds us once more forcibly of the second best state in Plato's *Republic*. The King, he suggests, is much in need of friends, to share his pleasures, console him in misfortune, and extend his power both to act and to know.<sup>202</sup> Again, this is a loosening of the Cynic ideal, and he does not present friendship as essential to the true philosopher, who aims at self-reliance.

Dio's social criticism is, of course, uninformed by modern economic theory. He is especially hard on

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<sup>197</sup>Among the *Discourses* are some Socratic pieces, and among their number, his Discourse 13 may contain some otherwise unknown early material from Antisthenes.

<sup>198</sup>*Discourse* 1.43.

<sup>199</sup>*Discourse* 3.

<sup>200</sup>*Discourses* 1.2.

<sup>201</sup>*Discourse* 2.

<sup>202</sup>*Discourse* 3.86 ff.

the use of slaves in brothels, but does not come out against slavery in general, even though he argues that all human beings are equally honored by the gods because of their rationality and their knowledge of right and wrong, a premise that might seem to take one farther. Perhaps he is saying less than he means here. In the Ancient world one might reform the brothels, but one could not eliminate slavery.

The political thought of Dio is a natural compromise, of course, if one is to have an upper-class Cynic, but one must bear in mind the impracticality of revolution against the monarchies of the time. It is not that revolutions cannot succeed, but rather that they inevitably lead, in the military struggle for power, to a new one man rule. A Cynic Kingship, it seemed, was simply the best that could be hoped for, and it is not fair to chide Dio for his compromise with existing powers. His views seem to have had some influence on Christian thought. Saint Augustine's view of the state as a great robbery, but one necessary to prevent even worse, because less organized, predations by many smaller robbers, is truly Cynic.

In one place Dio presents us with some reflections on the problem of evil, under the guise of three theories about the relation of the gods to the world. The first suggests that the universe is a place of punishment for some crime.<sup>203</sup> The soul may escape the prison at death, but only if it keeps the body and its emotions under control, singing charms to them to quiet them. Reason is a file with which one can break the emotional chains that bind one to the prison-house body. The second view suggests that human beings form a colony settled here from the world of the gods. On this view the world is a good place, not a prison, and our troubles are self-created, arising as we have drifted away from the old customs and laws, and the Gods have withdrawn, leaving us to our own devices. The third view is that we are here to have our characters tested. Plato, in the *Laws*, has his ideal citizens test young men by getting them drunk and see how they deport themselves, and in the same way, Dio suggests, the gods may be testing us by seeing how we handle pleasure. The world is a great banquet, and if we carry ourselves off well in our encounter with its temptations, eschewing the drunken state that pursuit of pleasure leads us to, we will be approved to join with the gods after the banquet. The last view seems to be the Cynic one, though one wonders how seriously to take the suggestion that there is some reward in the offing for virtue. All three views, of course, get the gods out of responsibility for evil. It is either a matter of deserved punishment, or simply our own fault and avoidable if we just act right. The later views are presented as better, and one can see a movement here from the portrayal of the world as a bad place to its portrayal as a good one, and from the simple assertion that we are responsible for our own affairs (and have

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<sup>203</sup>Compare Plato's *Phaedo* 62b and the ancient idea that we are sprung up from the blood of Zeus's enemies, the Titans.

a good enough world so that evil is unnecessary if we behave well), to an account why such apparently incompetent people should be left to conduct their own affairs without help. It cannot be said that these reflections penetrate deeply into the intellectual problem, and one is always unclear whether Dio believed there were gods or not, but they do present a Cynic's view how we ought to react to evil. We ought to consider our sufferings to be our own fault, arising from the drunken pursuit of pleasure, and reform ourselves accordingly. It seems to be suggested that we will not find the world at all a bad place if we do so.<sup>204</sup> Even if there are no gods, the idea of God is innate in human beings, is brought to consciousness by contemplation of the design of the world and providence. Indeed, poets and artists portray God better than philosophers do. If there are indeed gods, we must be as children before them, and not imagine that we know much about them.

Cynicism reached its apogee of its influence (and extravagance) in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century. There were many charlatans, but one real philosopher was **Demonax** (ca. 50 – 150 CE), who was universally honored in Athens for his goodness. It is said that when the Athenians were about to institute gladiatorial shows, he advised them first to demolish the altar of Pity. He refused to sacrifice since God needs nothing, and had no respect for the mysteries since they would not inform everyone of their good news.

## 16. THE MEGARANS

Leaving Cyrene and the Cynics, we find a quite different school of philosophers in Megara, a Doric city a day's walk from Athens, and generally in a state of hostilities with her. The founder of the Megaran school was **Euclides (ca. 430 - ca. 360 BCE)**, a friend of Socrates who was with him at his death, and provided refuge in Megara to his companions after it. His thought, like that of his successors, is known only from very brief, late reports, which seem, with little understanding of what they are reporting, either to revel in its paradoxical nature, or to assimilate it to whatever is vaguely similar in the schools of their own time. One must use considerable imagination, and be willing to suffer considerable uncertainty, to give any account of these thinkers at all. But it is worth the effort to do so, for buried here are the views of the contemporary opposition to Plato's and Aristotle's Realism. To make no attempt at all to elaborate these doctrines, out of respect for the lack of evidence, is to misrepresent the development of philosophy even more than the errors which are sure to be in an account of them. So let us sin boldly.

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<sup>204</sup>Discourse XXX.

Euclides is known for a single doctrine, to the effect that the good is one, but known by many names, including “thought” and “mind,” and that no opposite to the one exists. This could be nothing more than a restatement of the Socratic position that the good was the one reality lying behind the many apparent virtues, namely wisdom, but then it is hard to say why Euclides would have denied that there is any opposite to the good. Isn’t ignorance opposed to wisdom? Perhaps he thought ignorance was somehow unreal, a mere absence rather than anything positive. Or perhaps his view was that the underlying reality behind all things was one, and was properly called the good, all the things of this sensible world being mere appearances (or, after Plato’s manner, imitations?) of the one reality. His view could have been perfectly consistent with Plato if he gave an appropriate account of the relation of the one to sensible appearances and the particular minds and physical things that seem to make up the world. He was supposed to have rejected arguments based on mere analogy or likeness, insisting that we work from what things really are, which looks like an insistence on seeking proper scientific knowledge, after the manner of Socrates, possibly with a dig at Antisthenes. It is also reported that his dialectic was concerned more with conclusions than with premises, possibly meaning that he was interested in driving his opponents into contradictory conclusions, and saw little hope of establishing his premises independently of such a process of testing. Again, it looks like Socrates.

**Eubulides**, a successor of Euclides, is supposed to have attacked Aristotle. He is noted as the author of a number of subtle logical paradoxes, though we have no idea what lessons he drew from them. The most noted is the “Liar”: if someone tells you he is lying, making reference to his own statement that he is lying, is he lying about this business of his lying or not? If he is, then he is not. And if he is not, then, of course, he is. The paradox has drawn a great deal of attention from logicians in every age, but we have no idea what, if anything, Eubulides did with it, so we shall leave its discussion to our accounts of later thinkers.

Another of his paradoxes is the “veiled person.” Say your mother is veiled, and you do not recognize her. Do you know who the woman is or not? This paradox would suggest that one knows who someone is only “under appropriate descriptions.” Knowing who one is is not at all like “being to the left of something,” for if one is to the left of a large rock, then whatever description “x” singles out that rock, one is straightforwardly to the left of the x as well. But someone might know who his mother is, even though he does not know who the person in the veil is, and all the while the person in the veil is indeed his mother. He knows who she is under the description “my mother,” but not under the equally true description, “the lady in the veil.” To know who someone is, then, under different descriptions of that person, is apparently to know different things. This paradox may be used to raise important issues for our knowledge of the external world. After all, we do not

know our mother as she is in herself even when she is as directly presented to us as she can be. We know her only under certain descriptions, namely as whatever it is that presents certain appearances to us. Her true self is concealed behind “the veil of appearances.” That suggests at least some brand of Skepticism, if not a more openly Sophistic rejection of the notion of reality altogether, but something like it has been used to work around Skepticism in figures as diverse as Immanuel Kant and Bertrand Russell. Again, we shall have ample opportunity to discuss it in connection with later thinkers.

A third puzzle is the “Sorites” or “Heap.” How many grains, exactly, is the minimum number it takes to make a heap of grain? It seems impossible to give an answer, for then subtracting just one grain from the heap will leave one with something less than a heap, which is certainly not possible. This puzzle suggests that language is, at least sometimes, not a tool that draws sharp lines between realities. The word “heap” has definite application to some things, and is definitely inapplicable to others, but there is a class of things, borderline cases, which we cannot either say are heaps, or are not heaps. Are we to take a Platonic way out, and claim that degrees of resemblance to the Heap Itself are at issue here, and that some things just fall into the twilight zone, resembling it to some extent, but not enough to be a clear case of a heap? Here, too, the paradox had an interesting and ambiguous life ahead of it, being used both to support and to attack the existence of Real Definitions and perfect Forms, in figures such as Plato himself, and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

**Stilpo of Megara (ca 380 - after 307-6)**<sup>205</sup> acquired a considerable reputation, so much so that Ptolemy Soter of Egypt gave him money (Stilpo limited the amount he would take) and still saw his invitation to visit Egypt turned down. When his town was sacked, the victorious general ordered Stilpo’s house spared. Another story has it that when asked what he had lost in the looting, Stilpo said he had lost nothing, for he had seen no soldiers carting off wisdom or virtue with them. So it is not clear exactly what did happen here. Stories of the respect in which notable philosophers of the Hellenistic period were held, and of their lack of respect for common values such as money and propriety, are commonplace in the later tradition, and not terribly trustworthy.

Stilpo is portrayed in Diogenes Laertes as an opponent of Plato’s successor, Theophrastus, and in that role he rejected the possibility of useful talk about universals,<sup>206</sup> that is, about any reality predicable of many particulars. Everything that really exists, he thinks, is a particular. So, in pointing to a cabbage, Stilpo insisted

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<sup>205</sup>For Stilpo’s doctrine, I rely especially on Denyer (1991) 33-37.

<sup>206</sup>Diogenes Laertes, *Lives of the Philosophers* 2.119 (cited in translation in Denyer (1991) 33-4).

that he was not pointing to cabbage in general or cabbagehood, for what he was pointing to existed right then, and cabbage had existed ten thousand years before. The argument seems to be that we are acquainted only with particulars, never with universals. Stilpo insists, moreover, that if one says “man”, meaning by it no one man more than any other, then one intends no man at all. But wouldn’t it be all right to say that “all men are mortal”, allowing “men” here to refer to each and every man? But in “all men are mortal” “men” refers to no particular man any more than any other, but all equally, and, it seems, as a consequence of this, it refers to no particular man at all. Thus, from “all men are mortal” one could not conclude that Socrates is mortal, for to name all men is not to name Socrates. The upshot is that not only is reference to universals such as whiteness, or the White Itself, ruled out on epistemological grounds, but reference to another sort of universal, namely collections, is limited (at best) to cases in which the collection is treated as a single whole, as in “my baseball cards are in the bottom drawer,” and no logical descent from talk about the collection to talk about its members (say, concluding that my Stan Musial is in the bottom drawer) is allowed.

This seems to have led Stilpo to reject the possibility of a true sentence with a subject-predicate structure, on the ground that whatever the subject named, it would be different from that which the predicate named, and so the subject could not be said to be the predicate. He argues that the predicate and subject (assuming that they both refer to something) must refer to different realities as long as they have different definitions, presumably because the definition of a term specifies what reality it designates.<sup>207</sup> This would mean that a subject-predicate statement is always an identity statement, referring to two things (both of them particulars, of course), and then claiming that they were identical to one another. So “Josie is Josie” would be true enough, but “Josie is a dog” could not, unless “a dog” means the same thing as “Josie”—but, of course, the whole point of the statement, all the information contained in it, hangs on “Josie” meaning something *other* than “a dog.”

All this seems to come together when we consider Stilpo’s pupil, **Menedemus (died 278)**.<sup>208</sup> He

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<sup>207</sup>So Plutarch reports in *Against Colotes* 23, pp. 1120 a-b (cited in translation in Denyer (1991) 35). See also Simplicius in *On the Physics of Aristotle* (cited in Denyer, p. 36), which tells us that the Megarans thought it evident that things with different *logoi* were different, and separated from one another, so that Socrates would be separate from himself if different descriptions were applied to him. One way to respond to such doctrines, of course, is to insist that one particular may have different *logoi*, revealing different aspects of it. Another way would be to grant that the different *logoi* hold of different things found in the same particular, which are not themselves particulars even though they are realities that can be referred to independently of one another. This was the view of Aristotle, who held that qualities and the like were found *in* a particular, had different definitions than the particular and were “really distinct” from it, even though they could not exist independently of being in a particular.

<sup>208</sup>See Denyer (1991) 37-43 for Menedemus and the Eretrian school.

was supposed to have come from Elea, and to have moved Phaedo's school to Eretria, but the details of his biography are even sparser and more confused than usual, so it is hard to say much about him. He seems to have participated in the politics of Eretria, and attempted to use what influence he had to protect the city from attack. He took his own life, while resident in Macedonia, to terminate a painful and protracted old age. This practice was common among the Cynic philosophers, with whom he shared a number of doctrinal traits. He followed Socrates in holding that virtue was simply wisdom, and was skeptical of the possibility of knowledge outside of ethics.

Now Menedemus reproduced Stilpo's argument against the truth of subject-predicate statements, but restricting it, it seems, to statements connecting subject and predicate with the verb "to be." (Probably the reason for this restriction was that he did not think we had to read a statement such as "Plato runs" in such a way that "runs" refers to anything, but he thought we would have to read a statement such as "Plato is a running thing" in that way.) In response to his teacher's difficulty, he seems to have used the resources of the Greek tongue to refrain from the use of the verb "to be" altogether. So he would not say "Socrates is white" but "Socrates has-whitened." (Lycophron took a similar line, it seems.)<sup>209</sup> Apparently he saw no difficulty with the internal structure of such a sentence. But why not? Well, Menedemus, like Stilpo, rejected the possibility of a universal. His idea, then, was probably that "white" in "Socrates is white" should not be considered to have any reference outside of Socrates to some universal, to whiteness or the White Itself or even the collection of all white things. The meaning of the statement cannot be "Socrates is one among the white things there are," or "Socrates participates in the White Itself," or "Socrates has whiteness," as though there were a relation between a particular and some universal to be asserted here. Perhaps Menedemus, and Stilpo, thought that the predicate in a sentence employing the verb "to be" as a copula joining subject and predicate always referred by intention either to something other than the subject or to some universal reality imagined to be the same as the subject, so that the statement is either false (since the subject is what it is and not another thing) or refers to a universal, which is impossible. Thus, even though there is nothing wrong with naming a single reality that we are acquainted with by reference to various aspects of its complex presentation to us, still, one cannot say this reality "is" something (it is not identical, for instance, with some aspect of its presentation to us), or that it is or "has" some quality. If this reading of them is right, then Stilpo and Menedemus certainly reject real

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<sup>209</sup>Aristotle, *Physics* I 2, 185b26 - 186a3. Philoponus, in his commentary on the *Physics*, identifies Menedemus as the one who would change "the man is white" to "the man has been whitened" ("has been whitened" is all one word in Greek, and the verb to be does not occur as an auxiliary verb in the perfect tense as it does in English) to avoid the verb "is."

universals, but it is not at all clear that they reject real particulars and reduce the world to mere appearances, or that they think that nothing can truly and informatively be said about such particulars. In fact, they may only be trying to find a way to speak of a world made up of *particulars alone*.<sup>210</sup> Perhaps Menedemus thought that a predicate of a sentence is not a name of anything, but serves a function irreducible to naming, so that it describes, say, what has been named in the subject, where description is *not* a matter of naming some universal and asserting that it belongs to the subject, or that the subject imitates it, or any other such process involving naming.

Menedemus also rejected the meaningfulness of negative statements, perhaps on the ground that the predicate of a negative statement does not *say* or *mean* anything. Everything true about Socrates can be expressed in positive terms (for instance, that he has tanned), and a negative term (say, that he has not greened) seems at best to take its meaning from the collection of all the possible positive terms it does not rule out. Menedemus rejected “hypothetical” statements, too, that is, complex statements combining several subject-predicate, or “categorical,” sentences, such as “John is coming *if* Jane is,” or “John is coming *or* I am not.” Such sentences, it seems, cannot be suitably represented as naming a subject and then saying something about it. If the world consists solely of individuals, and a true statement must represent one of those individuals, then there seems to be little room for these “hypothetical” statements.<sup>211</sup>

**Diodorus Cronus** was noted for his debate with Stilpo in 307 BCE. He is best known for a puzzle he posed about probability and necessity, possibly as an attack on Aristotle’s work *On Interpretation*, which deals with such matters, among others. In his “Master Argument” he poses three reasonably plausible statements such that the falsehood of each is entailed by the truth of the other two. Thus, at least one must be false. They are (1) every true statement about the past is necessary, (2) nothing impossible follows from something possible, and (3) what is neither true now nor ever will be true can nonetheless be possible. Besides forcing us to defend some paradoxical view or other, the three statements form a test to help determine one’s conception of possibility and necessity, and to force one to work that conception through consistently.

Diodorus himself<sup>212</sup> took a possible statement to be one that either is true now or will be true

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<sup>210</sup>It is not at all clear that Aristotle was not in agreement. He holds that the whiteness in a particular white thing is a particular instance of whiteness, for instance, even if it shares a definition with other instances of whiteness in other things.

<sup>211</sup>Perhaps a truth-functional reduction of them to the truth and falsehood of simple subject predicate statements would have been received favorably by Menedemus.

<sup>212</sup>According to Boethius’s commentary on Aristotle’s *On Interpretation*.

sometime in the future. Such a statement may make no reference to any particular time, and so be true at one time and false at another. Take “my cat is out in the back yard,” for instance, which is sometimes true, and sometimes false. When considering such statements, a certain hard-headed approach might lead one to say that if it never happens that the cat is out back, then it is, of course, impossible at any given time that she should be out back. We might even say such a thing—“Where is the cat? Did I just see her out in the back yard?” “No, that’s impossible, she’s never back there.” (Why is it impossible? Because if I saw the cat out back, it would follow that the cat *is* out back, which is assumed impossible, of course. So, by (2), this cannot follow from a possible statement, and so it cannot be possible that I saw the cat out back.) An interesting consequence of this way of taking possibility, though, is that statements or events with the time of occurrence marked in them will never be merely possible, but either necessary or impossible. So, it is not possible that the Brewers should have won the pennant in 1990 if in fact they did not, for it will never be true that they won the pennant in 1990 if it wasn’t true in 1990. The past, being inalterable, is necessary. Plausible enough, perhaps, for the past is something we are stuck with. It cannot be changed or made to go away, so it makes sense to say that it is necessary, that is, that it is forced upon us. But there is more. Is it possible the Brewers will win the pennant in 2080? It is, on Diodorus’s conception, just in case they will in fact win the pennant then, and so, just in case it is necessary that they win it, for a statement is necessary which is true and will never be false. Every concrete event turns out to be necessary, then, or impossible, and mere possibility applies only to statements that do not specify a concrete event, but instead speak of a certain kind of event, which sometimes occurs and sometimes does not.

So how would Diodorus react to his three statements? He rejects (3), but accepts (1) and (2). His student, **Philo of Megara**, a friend of the Stoic, Zeno, held to quite a different notion of the possible, arguing on the assumption that a statement is possible if nothing internal to it prevents its being true. For instance, the statement “a triangular disk is lying on the table” is impossible. We don’t need to check on the way the world is to see if the statement is true or not, but can rely on the internal incoherence between “triangular” and “disk” to assure ourselves that nothing could happen that would make such a sentence true. “A disk is on the table,” on the other hand, will be prevented from truth, if it is, only by external circumstances. The sentence is not internally contradictory, and we will have to check the table to see if there are any disks on it to see if the statement is true or not. Similarly, a statement is necessary if its truth is already determined by its own nature, so that nothing external to it can prevent its truth, as in “triangles have three sides.” This would be one meaning philosophers might nowadays attach to the terms “possible” and “necessary,” and it led Philo to accept (3), since

a statement may be prevented from ever being true by external circumstances, even though nothing internal to it rules out its truth, as in our example, “The Brewers won the pennant in 1990.” He agreed also with (2), though we don’t know how he argued for it, and he rejected (1), for he thought there were any number of possibilities in his sense that had not been, and never would be, realized.

The difference between Philo’s and Diodorus’s positions here might look significant, for surely it makes a difference whether every event that actually occurs occurs necessarily, as Diodorus held, or instead most events are merely possible, so that something else might occur even if it in fact does not. Diodorus’s view suggests determinism of the sort we have already seen in Democritus, and so perhaps suggests as well that a certain attitude of fatalistic resignation should be taken to the world, while Philo’s view would support neither determinism nor fatalism. It is impossible for us to know if these philosophers really did mean to justify such attitudes, though we shall see that the Stoics pursued these issues and held out for fatalism, but we can point out that what is actually said here in fact has no bearing on them. Diodorus’s position, if we call it determinism, is very different from the determinism of Democritus, for Diodorus never argues that events that are to occur are already predictable from their causes. Even if events happened in an entirely unpredictable manner, and the future was in no way determined by the past, Diodorus would still hold that every concrete event is necessary, just as long as it actually occurred. His way of speaking collapses the necessary into the actual, and leaves no room, for instance, for our commonplace distinctions between what actually happened and what could have happened. We may be bullied into agreement with him by the hard-headed insistence that we have to deal with reality here, so that if a cat never in fact goes into the backyard, then it is just stupid to speculate on the ersatz possibility that it is in the backyard. Only *real* possibilities should be taken into account, and that means only those possibilities that actually materialize now and again. But this is a matter of browbeating, not a demonstration that what we meant by “possible” all along was the actual. If we want to understand what we mean by “possible,” Philo’s attempt is much better. It at least leaves in place those distinctions we actually make and understand. But, of course, causal determinism is no more refuted by Philo’s position than it is proved by Diodorus’s. It may well be that, in Philo’s sense, it was possible that the Brewer’s should win the pennant in 1990, but it does not follow that certain external circumstances, namely the situation in the beginning of the year, might not have been sufficient to completely rule the event out. Their loss in the competition might well have been causally determined, even though, in the Philonic sense, it was still possible that they should win. Philo’s notion of possibility and necessity has evolved into what nowadays is called “logical” possibility and necessity, and it is a commonplace that what is logically possible may be known with absolute certainty to be

false. So it is logically possible that Cornell should win the national championship in Football next year, but I know that they won't. In some other sense of "possible," neither Philo's nor Diodorus's, it seems it is impossible that they should win it, and it is that sense that is relevant to the rationality of fatalistic attitudes. But it would be anticipating too much to pursue the matter farther here. Suffice it that Diodorus and Philo initiated a discussion that was carried on by the Stoics and Epicureans afterwards, and eventuated in the rich and complex reflections on freedom of will, determinism and fatalism that play such a large role in the Western philosophical tradition.