

Plato's Criticism of Socrates

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Abstract

This dissertation concerns the practical and methodological difference between Plato and his Socrates. Whereas Socrates pursues wisdom in oral conversation, directly and publicly examining, questioning, refuting, and reproaching his fellow Athenians, Plato creates wisdom by writing dramatic dialogues chiefly featuring Socrates. Typical explanations of this difference turn on the comparative effectiveness of written texts for Plato's philosophical and political aims, but these explanations have not yet adequately explored the ways in which Socrates' oral dialectic is *ineffective*. The purpose of this dissertation, then, is to explore the ineffectiveness of Socrates' oral dialectic. I do this by focusing on four dialogues in which Plato represents Socrates' interlocutor making an explicit critique of Socrates: the *Apology*, the *Clitophon*, the *Euthydemus*, and the *Gorgias*. These four critiques are related but not identical, occurring each in its own dramatic context and emphasising distinct aspects of Socrates' occupation. As such, I analyse and evaluate each critique individually. In general, I show that Socrates' critics mistake and misunderstand certain details of Socrates and his occupation, but are nevertheless on the right track with their critique. In Chapter 1, I show that Socrates' accusers are wrong to charge Socrates with impiety for the reasons that they do but that Socrates' defence speech itself

nevertheless vindicates their accusations, demonstrating before the judges and Plato's readers that his occupation does in fact imply his guilt. Next, in Chapter 2, I show that Clitophon wrongly expects Socrates to resolve his aporia and teach him justice following his apparently protreptic speech because he is in fact ignorant of justice but that Socrates' ignorance belies his responsibility for Clitophon's aporia and so for his continued injustice. In Chapter 3, I show that Socrates' anonymous critic at the end of the *Euthydemus* rightly critiques Socrates for willingly submitting to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in his conversation with them, and as such for risking the quality of Clinias's soul. Finally, in Chapter 4, I show that Callicles, despite wrongly promoting the tyrannical life of rhetoric, nevertheless rightly critiques Socrates for his inexperience with respect to human affairs and so his powerlessness in actually creating justice. I conclude by reflecting on the significance of these critiques for the difference between Plato and his Socrates: not that Plato's written dialectic is more effective but that it is *safer*.

Cette dissertation parle de la différence pratique et méthodologique entre Platon et son Socrate. Tandis que Socrate poursuit la sagesse par la conversation orale, en examinant, questionnant, réfutant et réprimandant publiquement et directement ses camarades Athéniens, Platon crée la sagesse en écrivant des dialogues dramatiques mettant principalement en scène Socrate. Les explications habituelles de cette différence s'appuient sur l'efficacité comparée des textes écrits pour atteindre les objectifs philosophiques et politiques de Platon, mais elles n'ont pas encore suffisamment exploré les raisons de l'inefficacité de la dialectique orale de Socrate. L'objectif de cette dissertation est donc d'explorer cette

inefficacité. Pour ce faire, je me concentre sur quatre dialogues dans lesquels Platon présente l'interlocuteur de Socrate formulant une critique explicite de ce dernier: l'Apologie, le Clitophon, l'Euthydème et le Gorgias. Ces quatre critiques sont connectés mais non identiques, chacune s'inscrivant dans un contexte dramatique spécifique et mettant l'accent sur des aspects distincts de l'activité de Socrate. Par conséquent, j'analyse et évalue chaque critique individuellement. En général, je démontre que les critiques de Socrate commettent des erreurs et interprètent mal certains détails concernant Socrate et sa profession, mais que leur critique reste néanmoins pertinente. Au Chapitre 1, je montre que les accusateurs de Socrate ont tort de l'accuser d'impiété pour les raisons invoquées, mais que son discours de défense, à lui seul, justifie leurs accusations, démontrant aux juges et aux lecteurs de Platon que sa profession implique bel et bien sa culpabilité. Ensuite, au Chapitre 2, je montre que Clitophon attend à tort de Socrate qu'il résolve son aporie et lui enseigne la justice après son discours apparemment protreptique, car il ignore en réalité la notion de justice. Mais cette ignorance révèle la responsabilité de Socrate dans l'aporie de Clitophon et, par conséquent, dans l'injustice qu'il perpétue. Au Chapitre 3, je démontre que la critique anonyme de Socrate à la fin de l'Euthydème le critique à juste titre pour s'être soumis volontairement à Euthydème et à Dionysodore lors de leur conversation, mettant ainsi en péril l'âme de Clinias. Enfin, au Chapitre 4, je montre que Calliclès, malgré sa promotion erronée d'une vie rhétorique tyrannique, critique néanmoins avec justesse Socrate pour son inexpérience des affaires humaines et, par conséquent, son impuissance à instaurer une véritable justice. Je conclus en réfléchissant à la portée de ces critiques quant à la différence entre Platon et son Socrate: non pas que la dialectique écrite de Platon soit plus efficace, mais qu'elle soit plus sûre.

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Introduction:

Plato beyond Socratic Dialectic

*"Do thou, too, remain warm among ice.
Do thou, too, live in this world without
being of it. Be cool at the equator; keep
thy blood fluid at the Pole ...
But how easy and how hopeless to
teach these fine things!"
– Ishmael¹*

1. A Tale of Two Occupations

Plato does not live a Socratic life. Whereas his Socrates spends his days publicly conversing with reputable people about any matter they might claim to know, Plato spends his days writing dramatic dialogues about those very same conversations. This is not a trivial difference.

¹ Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, in Herschel Parker [ed.], *Herman Melville, Moby Dick: An Authoritative Text, Contexts, Criticism, Third Edition*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co. 2018: 236

In the first place, Plato is well aware that his occupation involves a distinct set of procedures, risks, and benefits as compared to Socrates' oral dialectic; he thrice presents to his readers—in the *Republic*,² the *Phaedrus*,³ and the *Statesman*⁴—largely unchallenged critiques of writing that may threaten to undermine the very occupation that produces the texts that convey them. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates argue against primarily the Homeric tradition that poetry, as an imitative medium, necessarily misrepresents its subject, corrupting its auditors rather than educating them. Socrates here is concerned not so much with the knowledge or the ignorance of the poet; he is concerned rather with the *medium* through which poetry conducts itself. While Socrates of course bemoans the ignorance of poets, he emphasises that even the knowing poet, despite creating more accurate images of their subject, nevertheless creates images that must flatter and please those who receive them, strengthening the irrational parts of the soul in preference to the rational. That Plato is himself not a Homeric poet does not protect him from this critique, for whatever else his dialogues may be, they are at least images that imitate living, oral conversations, whether or not they actually occurred beyond the texts themselves. The *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman* present in slightly different ways largely the same critique of writing and written texts. In the *Phaedrus*, Socrates critiques written texts (σύγγραμματα) ultimately for saying the same thing always and everywhere to whomever might happen upon it. The Eleatic Stranger in the *Statesman* critiques written laws for the same. And in both cases, the central problem that writing faces is that it cannot appropriately adapt to its circumstances; a text can neither question nor be questioned;

² Plato, *Republic*, Bk. X, 595a-608b

³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 274b-279c

⁴ Plato, *Statesman*, 293e-303b

it can neither emphasise nor deëmphasise; it can neither serve a reader who may be helped by it nor veil itself before a reader who may be harmed by it. And if this is accurate, writing remains nothing more than second best to living, moving speech.

Second, Plato at least appears to represent *Socrates* and not himself as his political and philosophical ideal in his dialogues. This is often explicit, such as when he has Phaedo tell Echeocrates that Socrates is the best and most thoughtful and just,⁵ but it is more often implicit. Plato's Socrates generally drives the plot of the dialogues, questioning and ultimately refuting his interlocutors and presenting throughout true or at least irrefutable or unrefuted accounts of the matter at hand.⁶ Commentators nearly universally assert Plato's affinity and reverence for Socrates and rest their interpretation of the dialogues upon them. This approach to Plato's dialogues is often taken to such an extreme that any problem that Socrates might face, any objection to his occupation, is taken to be also a problem for and objection to Plato.⁷

Taken together, these two aspects of the difference between Plato and his Socrates suggest that Plato ought to have followed in Socrates' footsteps, provoking, questioning, examining, refuting, and reproaching others in oral, living conversation rather than writing dramatic dialogues. That he doesn't demands explanation. In this dissertation, I contribute to this explanation by analysing a third aspect of the difference between Plato and Socrates almost universally neglected by commentators: Plato's criticism of Socrates.

⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 118a

⁶ Although consider the argument of Mario Regali, "The Mask of Dialogue: On the Unity of Socrates' Characterization in Plato's Dialogues," in Debra Nails and Harold Tarrant [eds.], *Second Sailing: Alternative Perspectives on Plato*, Helsinki: Societas Scientiarum Fennica, 2015: 125-148, which holds that Socrates is strictly passive in the dialogues, merely reacting to what his interlocutors say. While Regali is correct, as I argue below, that Socrates is not possessed of an autonomous path to knowledge, as he puts it, the view that he therefore refrains from acting as a consequence is implausible at best.

⁷ See for example John Beversluis, *Cross-Examining Socrates: A Defense of the Interlocutors in Plato's Early Dialogues*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.

Before I move to discuss Plato's criticism of Socrates, let me first provide some context for its significance. I begin in Sections 2 and 3 with a brief discussion of the explanandum. I discuss Plato's Socrates and his occupation in Section 2 and then Plato himself and his occupation in Section 3. Next, in Sections 4 and 5, I discuss two approaches to explain the difference between Plato and Socrates. In Section 4, I begin with the hypothesis that Plato undertook writing because he lacked the necessary skills or excellences or predilections to undertake Socrates' oral dialectic. In Section 5, I discuss the hypothesis that Plato undertook writing as an extension of Socratic oral dialectic to more *effectively* achieve some of its ends. In each case, I show that both approaches fall short of a full explanation of the difference between Plato and his Socrates. Finally, in Section 6, I turn to Plato's criticism of Socrates as a modification and supplement to the second approach.

2. Plato's Socrates

The Socrates with which I am concerned in this dissertation is the Socrates present in and implied by the dialogues of Plato, and more specifically the *Apology*, *Clitophon*, *Euthydemus*, *Gorgias*, and (in part) *Phaedo*. I am not concerned with any Socrates who might live beyond the pages of these texts, whether he is the historical Socrates or the Socrates of other authors from Aristophanes to Antisthenes, Xenophon, Diogenes Laertius or anyone else. I do not mean by this that there is nothing interesting to be said about the difference between Plato and these different instances of Socrates, especially since each bears some relationship to Plato's Socrates. On the contrary, I am not concerned with these other instances of Socrates because they do not pose the same hermeneutic problem within Plato's dialogues. In each case, the

degree to which we should expect Plato to practice Socrates' occupation can be determined only by inquiring first into what Plato actually believes about it and second whether he considers it in any way admirable. And as such, the relevant explanandum reduces always to the distinction between Plato and the Socrates represented within his dialogues.

While I write here of "the" Socrates in Plato's dialogues, commentators have become increasingly accustomed to recognising several distinct representations of Socrates in Plato's corpus. Gregory Vlastos of course distinguishes in Plato a historical, aporetic Socrates and a fictional, dogmatic Socrates.⁸ Later commentators have carved Plato's representations of Socrates into even further categories on the grounds of their specific doctrines, on their claims to ignorance, on their use of and approach to rhetoric or poetry or scientific argument, on the objectives of their conversations, and so on. By and large, I follow this tradition throughout this dissertation and limit my analysis of Socrates and his occupation to what can be established within a single dialogue at once. Insofar as I am concerned with five dialogues, I am concerned therefore with five distinct representations of Socrates. But while it is reasonable and appropriate not to too readily condense these representations of Socrates into a single individual practicing a single occupation, the opposed tendency must also be avoided. While the Socrates of the *Apology* may differ from the Socrates of the *Gorgias*, for example, there remains nevertheless an essential core to his occupation shared between the two and beyond. There is little secure agreement among commentators what this essential core might be precisely, but for most commentators, it is something like a sustained practice of inquiry

⁸ Gregory Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991: 45-81. See also Andrea Capra, *Plato's Four Muses: the Phaedrus and the Poetics of Philosophy*, Washington, DC: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2014: 14-16, 287-304, for a discussion of the broader issues surrounding the relationship of the historical Socrates to the broader literary context in Plato.

through oral conversation and argument to acquire wisdom for oneself and for others. The specific tools and techniques and possibly even goals that Socrates considers appropriate may change from dialogue to dialogue, but this general framework, imprecise as it is, remains common to all, and I take it therefore to be one key element among several of my explanandum in this dissertation. The other key elements of the difference between Plato and Socrates concern the specific powers of speech as a medium of communication and inquiry and the specific consequences of Socrates' occupation. Let me begin with the first.

The powers inherent to speech are naturally central to any explanation of a transition from speech to another medium of communication, and this is doubly so for *Socrates'* speech, which is in some way atypical of Athenian discourse. Generally speaking, speech is direct and responsive. I mean by this that an oral conversation has no need for a facilitating intermediary (barring some form of disability, such as deafness), to allow a person to hear from their interlocutor's mouth precisely what they say about a given subject. While, of course, a person can lie, can misspeak, can speak unclearly, and so on, the fact that a speaker is physically present before their interlocutor permits them to face questions, objections, counterarguments, and so on that might then lead them to greater sincerity and clarity. For Socrates, this element of oral communication is all but sacrosanct, and he consistently emphasises the use of short, clear speech in order that he and others effectively examine and test a person's argument. In this sense, the fundamental powers of speech as a medium contribute to and accord with the ends of Socrates' oral dialectic previously mentioned. Other occupations, such as rhetoric and poetry, typically fight against these fundamental powers of

speech, and do so predominantly through a series of institutional norms. Socrates, by contrast, conducts his occupation outside the institutions of the city.

In this position, however, Socrates meets sometimes fierce opposition. He of course finds himself in court being tried for impiety, but he also tells the judges in his defence speech that he had become unpopular long before this as a consequence of his occupation. While he may have had his share of friends and associates and admirers, there was clearly a large contingent of Athenians who were hostile to his occupation, and in the dialogues, many of these men feel free to express their displeasure with Socrates and his occupation by offering their critiques. And this is crucial, of course, for my present project.

3. Plato's Plato

Like Socrates, the Plato with which I am concerned in this dissertation is the Plato present in and implied by the dialogues of Plato. This Plato, however, stands in a very different relationship to the dialogues than Socrates does. While Plato does twice depict himself—both in the *Apology*—he is nowhere else depicted in the dialogues.⁹ And yet, he remains always present in them as their author. While this is not, of course, particularly surprising, we must take care to determine what Plato's authorship of the dialogues actually implies and does not imply.

In the first place, the relationship between the authorial Plato and the historical Plato is far more complex than even the relationship between the literary and historical Socrates. From the perspective of a text itself, there is little that can be reliably inferred about the flesh and

⁹ Plato does, however, once *mention* himself in the *Phaedo* (59b), but only to explicitly *not* depict himself, with Phaedo telling Echecrates that Plato was ill and so not able to attend Socrates' execution.

blood hand that put stylus to wax tablet, as it were. Commentators are only beginning to appreciate the practical complexities of Classical Greek literacy for both lower *and* higher criticism, complexities that severely limit the utility of stylometry and other related techniques for determining the authorship of texts.¹⁰ Very briefly, literacy was new and difficult in the fifth and fourth centuries, and while educated elites were taught letters, much of the difficult, tedious work of writing (and reading) texts was delegated to slaves or other assistants in an author's employ who took dictation from their master or employer. This is not insignificant. There is a skill to translating the spoken word to the written, least of all because writing simply takes more time than speaking. A writer recording dictation orders, organises, and styles the words on a scroll no less than the man does whose dictation they take. And as such, we cannot always be certain from our perch some 2300 years later that some historical Plato of Collytus, son of Ariston, brother of Glaucon and Adeimantus, was truly the cause of any given dialogue containing any given word or even any given argument or character or story—and that is before entertaining the possibility that the dictation itself came from others beyond the historical Plato. And yet, despite this strictly causal distance between the text of the dialogues and the historical Plato, there is something about which we can be certain: that the historical Plato is nevertheless *responsible* for the text of his dialogues.¹¹ Whether he or a slave or Phillip of Opus or anyone else may have chosen any given word or argument or story or any other element of a

¹⁰ Although most of this appreciation does not extend far beyond latter Hellenistic and Roman textual production, for which documents explicitly discussing the role of literate slaves are more abundant. See for example Carolyn Marvin, "The Body of the Text: Literacy's Corporeal Constant," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech* 80(2), 1994: 129-149.

¹¹ By analogy, Thomas Edison holds some 2332 U.S. patents despite minimal causal contribution to the majority of them. Edison's significance lies rather with his proprietorship of the Menlo Park research laboratory, which is not nothing. The historical Plato probably contributed more to his dialogues than Edison did to his patents, but the basic principle here is the same: their responsibility is due primarily to their authority over their respective creations and not simply some chain of causation.

dialogue, Plato's name sits in its header or its colophon. He is the one whom his contemporaries can question about the text and who can be blamed or praised for it. In this sense, then, Plato's authorship of the dialogues implies an at least minimal conjunction between the authorial and historical Plato, even if it does not imply their strict identity.

Second, while the authorial Plato may be in some way connected to the historical Plato, this does not imply that the authorial Plato either is or is not uniform throughout Plato's corpus. Properly speaking, each text, each dialogue implies its own unique author with their own unique styles, methods, values, concerns, and opinions. Many of these are shared among each of those dialogues that we say are authored by Plato, and we are generally licenced to conclude that a dialogue is Platonic if it shares in these features to some sufficient degree. But these shared features need not trace back to some historical Plato with his own psychological or biological properties that might then explain them. This is significant for two reasons: first, we are not licenced to conclude that a text is not Platonic if it does not share any given feature shared by others, especially since a text's lack of a given feature may be dramatically or narratively or philosophically significant; second, and more practically for my purposes here, we are not licenced to resolve questions or problems within a text by appeal to some more general Platonic principle inferred from the resemblance of the essential features of one dialogue to another. In all, then, we must take care not to infer more about the authorial Plato than can be demonstrated by the overall ideological, stylistic, or methodological coherence of the Platonic corpus.

My emphasis here on Plato as the implied author of the dialogues has broadly the same effect as my emphasis on Socrates as a literary character depicted within the dialogues: I limit

my discussion of Plato's methods and concerns and so on to what can be demonstrated within the single dialogue at issue at any given time unless and until a relevant resemblance can be demonstrated between the implied author of one dialogue and the other. This is not always easy to do, but there is a crucial resemblance that stands out here: Plato's occupation as an author of dramatic dialogues. There of course remains some disagreement, often fierce, concerning the specific elements of that occupation—the relative significance of generic tropes, styles, arguments, and doctrines, Plato's relationship to other forms of literature such as the mimes of Sophron or tragedy and comedy, and so on—but almost no one disagrees about the broader features of Plato's occupation: that he composed dialogues for the purpose of acquiring wisdom for himself and others and that he *did not* examine, question, refute, and reproach the Athenians in oral conversation in the same way that Socrates did—even if the historical Plato conducted conversations of a similar sort with a select few, mostly elite associates at the Academy. For my purpose here, these broader features are sufficient, for they are sufficient to demonstrate the curious contrast between Plato and his Socrates described above.

It is worth noting here that this contrast depends much less on the characterisation of Plato's occupation as one of letters as opposed to speech than on the benefits and risks that Plato's use of writing provides him, for the medium of communication itself is hardly worth mentioning if they possess the same powers. This contrast is important precisely because written and oral dialectic precisely *do not* possess the same powers. Whereas oral conversation is immediate and responsive, written text involves significant delay and cannot similarly respond to changing circumstances. As such, writing typically parasitises oral discourse, which is

the source of Socrates' critique of writing in the *Phaedrus*, as I mentioned, and the Eleatic Stranger's in the *Statesman*. However, writing also firmly separates the composition of a text from its performance and reception, which can and often does present great opportunities for authors and for readers. While Socrates may plan his speech and revise any mistake he might make in it, only the author has the power to plan and revise *in private*. Without this power, Socrates is left to backtrack on a conversation, as he does many times throughout Plato's corpus, not only identifying a potential mistake but also sacrificing the parts of a conversation that followed from it. And this has the potential to introduce serious risks into Socrates' occupation, as I shall discuss below. By writing a dialogue, conversely, Plato need not display for his readers his own planning and revision. He is empowered to present to his readers a finished text free as much as possible of error, unclarity, and anything else that Plato might wish to avoid. The author therefore has a great deal more power over their image and their message than any speaker could ever hope for.

Plato employs this power to compose a very particular form of written text. His dialogues are mimes, written in prose, partly dramatic, partly historical, partly psychological, that concern matters of deep and abiding significance to the souls of his readers and their self-understanding. He places his readers, therefore, in the same position that he occupied a generation previous: as bystanders to Socrates' philosophic conversations. This position is important. Because Plato's readers do not directly participate in the conversation, Plato reduces the need that a text be responsive to their concerns and their questions; that duty is passed onto the living bearers of the text, provoking and ordering subsequent oral conversation, or even the historical Plato himself while he was alive.

As such, Plato's occupation does not wholly differ from Socrates', and this is important for the kinds of candidate explanations that can be given here. Both Socrates and Plato are concerned with acquiring wisdom, with improving their souls and the souls of others, and with the use of speech and argument. In general, as I shall argue variously throughout this dissertation, Socrates and Plato share ends but differ with respect to the means that they employ to achieve their ends. And this pattern of difference and similarity both complicates and facilitates explanation. Let me then turn briefly to the two predominant explanations that commentators give for the distinction between Plato's occupation and Socrates'.

4. A Lesser Plato and a Better Fit

The first and more traditional explanation focuses less on the differing powers possessed by oral and written dialectic and more on the differing skills and predilections of Socrates and Plato as individual persons. While this approach faces several fatal challenges, as I discuss shortly, it also has much going for it.

In the first place, it fruitfully situates Plato's choice to undertake writing in his own excellence and expertise. While Diogenes Laertius tells his readers that Plato "is said to have been weak-voiced"¹² he also tells them that he devoted himself as a younger man to "writing poems—first dithyrambs, then lyric poetry and tragedies."¹³ While he gave up writing tragedies, apparently, upon meeting Socrates, it would be no surprise that he would retain the talent for

¹² Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* [tr. Pamela Mensch; ed. James Miller], Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018: 3.5/135

¹³ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 3.5/135

composing dramatic dialogues, and might later decide that he is better fit for written rather than oral dialectic.

Second, this explanation makes good sense of Plato's motivation not to practice Socrates's occupation insofar as it takes seriously its difficulty. As I mentioned above, whatever benefit Socrates provides to the Athenians, he also pays a great personal cost in the form of both social and legal sanction, and this is unsurprisingly, as Josiah Ober says, "a pretty tough row to hoe for anyone who lacked Socrates' immense physical and moral courage and the clearly audible inner voice that prevented him from engaging in wrongdoing."¹⁴ As the author of the very texts that depict this difficulty, Plato is clear-eyed about the costs of Socrates' occupation. As a consequence, Ober argues, he blamed the Athenians for Socrates' death and declared them ultimately incurable, casting himself away from them and into a more private, quietist occupation alongside close intimates, few of whom being Athenian.

There are, in general, two ways to interpret this kind of explanation. One might suggest, as Ober does, that Plato being either less willing or less able to pay the immense private cost to purchase the greatest possible public benefit reflects poorly upon him. And if this is really what's going on with Plato's occupation then that would be right: if it really is true that Socrates' occupation is and produces the greatest good for human beings, as Socrates says in the *Apology*, then Plato apparently knowingly refusing to practice it is blameworthy. A second interpretation is more charitable, however. It suggests that Plato's distinct skills and predilections imply that he, unlike Socrates, could not produce that same benefit in the same

¹⁴ Josiah Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens: Intellectual Critics of Popular Rule*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998: 185-186

way and so he instead undertakes a distinct occupation to produce a comparable benefit, whether equal or even slightly lesser than the benefit provided by Socrates' occupation.

The first interpretation faces a unique kind of problem. As Steven Robinson argues, it is unreasonable to believe that Plato himself should knowingly and openly present to his readers the very grounds upon which they can and should reproach him.¹⁵ And yet, Ober and others argue that this is precisely what Plato does: they argue strictly on the basis of what Plato himself depicts in his dialogues that Plato falls short of justice by practicing written dialectic rather than Socrates' oral dialectic. For Robinson, this is simply a better indication that something has gone wrong with respect to commentators' interpretations of Socrates' occupation or Plato's. And Robinson is exactly right: Plato's occupation is not as insulated from difficulties as Ober and others conclude, for by writing and publishing his dialogues, Plato risks the ire of the Athenians no less than Socrates does by examining, questioning, and refuting them orally. And yet, as Ober himself recognises, Plato was at least tolerated by the Athenians and importantly never charged as a consequence of his political and philosophical activities.¹⁶

On the other hand, the first interpretation, by confining itself predominantly to what can be demonstrated from within the dialogues themselves, does not face the same problems as the second. Plato does not of course depict in his dialogues his own skills and predilections. The first interpretation lands upon them as a kind of inference to the best explanation given the stakes involved—as if Plato *must* have some deficient set of skills or predilections when promoting an occupation that he does not himself practice—, but the second deflates those

¹⁵ Steven Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," Jonathon Lavery, Louis Groarke, and William Sweet [eds.], *Ideas Under Fire: Historical Studies of Philosophy and Science in Adversity*. Farleigh Dickinson University Press: Plymouth, UK. 2013: 37-65

¹⁶ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 186

stakes into something at least approaching a neutral choice on Plato's part. And in that case, they appeal to an already-established tradition concerning Plato's personal qualities. The problem here is then very simple: should we follow this interpretation of this explanation, then we would be forced also to demonstrate that Plato is in fact possessed of those personal qualities. And the authority of Diogenes Laertius or any other later biographer is simply not sufficient to demonstrate this, for there is a nearly unbridgeable gap between the authorial Plato about whom I am concerned here and the historical, flesh and blood Plato who might lie beyond him. This first explanation does not survive these problems.

5. Socrates on Stilts

A second explanation concerns specifically the distinct powers of oral versus written media. It proposes that Plato and Socrates do not differ with respect to their objectives, both seeking the acquisition of wisdom for themselves and for others, but do differ with respect to the means that they employ towards this end. However, Plato does not so much replace Socrates' oral dialectic with his own written dialectic; on the contrary, Plato's written dialectic is taken to be an extension of or supplement to Socratic oral dialectic that allows it to more effectively reach its higher objectives.

There are several ways in which writing can be understood to more effectively achieve Socratic ends. First, and most obviously, written texts persist with greater fidelity over space and time than do words and stories told in the presence of even the best memorists. This is not to say, of course, that textual variations do not exist, for transmission and copying errors are

well-known to have occurred, and even purposeful modification of a text.¹⁷ But these variations pale in comparison to variations in oral stories and songs. While oral communication must employ techniques to help people remember, such as verse and rhyme and so on, written communication empowers an author to dispense with these techniques and communicate more directly in prose while nevertheless extending their arguments sometimes over thousands of kilometres and just as many years. But while Thucydides emphasises this power of written texts in his own writing, Plato makes no significant mention of it.¹⁸ If anything, as Jacques Derrida notes, the apposition of written texts alongside the princess Oreithuia in the *Phaedrus* might indicate that the power of texts to extend over space and time worried rather than excited Plato.¹⁹

A second way in which written texts might be more effective than oral speech to achieve Socratic ends lies primarily with the power an author has to plan and order a text in order that it predictably achieve its results. Kenneth Sayre uses the analogy of a garden to capture this basic idea.²⁰ As he understands them, Plato layers drama and argument into a complex ecosystem in which his reader must, like Phaedrus, find an appropriate place to sit. This is not by any means a straightforward process for the reader, and purposely so. The interpretation of Plato's dialogues—the process of finding a place to sit, as it were—requires

¹⁷ See for example David Cohen, "Writing, Law, and Legal Practice in the Athenian Courts," in Harvey Yunis [ed.], *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003: 78-96.

¹⁸ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War*, 1.22

¹⁹ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," *Dissemination* [tr. Barbara Johnson], London: The Athlone Press, 1981: 69-74; See also Catherine Osborne, "No Means Yes: The Seduction of the Word in Plato's *Phaedrus*," *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy* XV, 1999: 263-281, for a related worry about the abduction of texts.

²⁰ Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden: How to Read a Platonic Dialogue*, Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.

the same sort of active, reflective, and probative reasoning that Socrates' oral dialectic requires, but with a twist. Whereas Socrates' oral dialectic is immediate and responsive, with Socrates himself pushing the conversation forward, Plato's dialogues are passive and yet capture and use their readers' own activity for their own ends, much like a skilled wrestler using their opponent's momentum against them. For Sayre, these ends consist in the preparation and cultivation of insight.²¹ For Danielle Allen and others, these ends consist in the more traditional persuasion of others about matters of settled doctrine.²² But whatever we take Plato or Socrates to be doing acquiring wisdom, written texts are, by hypothesis, more effective than oral speech in at least certain circumstances. And by recognising this, Plato undertakes written dialectic to extend the reach of an otherwise Socratic project.

It is worth noting that Plato is not ever explicitly concerned with the *effectiveness* of either oral or written dialectic within his dialogues. Allen especially, who provides the most complete version of this explanation, centres Plato's concern with effectiveness upon Socrates' discussion of the power of stories and images over the soul in the *Republic*. While Socrates is of course critical of stories and images for this reason, Allen argues that Plato's own use of stories and images in his dialogues illuminates these arguments and shows that there is a genuinely philosophical way to use them to better persuade others. This is right in the broadest of terms, but we must recognise here that stories and images are not the sole property of written texts. Socrates himself makes effective *oral, spoken* use of stories and images in the *Republic* and elsewhere, and while a text provides an author the power to more easily plan these stories and images, this is a difference of degree at best. The foundational problem faced by Allen and this

²¹ Kenneth Sayre, *Plato's Literary Garden*, 1-32

²² Danielle Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2013

second explanation more generally is that she and it do not provide an account of the *ineffectiveness* of Socrates' oral dialectic or even what it might mean for Socrates' oral dialectic to be ineffective. If Socrates can already reach the pinnacle of wisdom on his own two legs, there is little sense standing him upon stilts, especially since doing so adds further cost—in time, in resources, and in safety—to the process overall.

Even so, I argue in this dissertation that the basic framework of this second explanation is the right one. I propose, however, that the focus on the comparative effectiveness and power of written dialectic is misplaced. Written dialectic is of course at least minimally effective for Plato's purposes, but I suggest that a more fruitful explanation of the difference between Plato and Socrates centres on an account of Socrates' ineffectiveness, and not simply ineffectiveness, but *counter*-effectiveness. In other words, I propose in this dissertation that a complete explanation of Plato's turn away from Socrates must reckon with the fact that Socrates practices an occupation away from which it is reasonable to turn.

6. Plato's Criticism of Socrates

In this dissertation, I provide what I take to be the keystone for any plausible explanation of the difference between Plato's occupation and Socrates' and build therefore upon the explanatory work already done by Sayre and Allen and others. This keystone consists, I argue, of Plato's criticism of Socrates. I mean by this Plato's consistent practice throughout his corpus of showing his readers the ways in which Socrates not only falls short of excellence, of wisdom, of justice, et cetera, but also causes others to so fall short. I recognise, of course, that my interpretation of the Platonic corpus represents a radical departure from the existing scholarly

consensus. I focus my argument therefore upon four dialogues that present the clearest critiques of Socrates and show that Plato asserts or could assert an often modified but not tempered version of each critique.

I begin in Chapter 1 with the *Apology* and the most significant critique that Socrates faces in Plato's corpus: that Socrates is guilty of impiety. I argue there that Socrates' apologetic argument not only fails to undermine his accusers or demonstrate his innocence but in fact emphasises that he is in fact (unknowingly) guilty of corrupting the youth and acknowledging gods other than the gods acknowledged by the city. While Socrates may intend the best for the Athenians and while he may even attempt to achieve the best at great personal sacrifice, Socrates shows in his speech that the actual fruits of his occupation are not only not the best that Socrates intends but are positively bad. While a juster end may have been achieved had Meletus simply instructed Socrates, Plato shows that Socrates is nevertheless convicted justly, a fact he emphasises with his own self-representation in the text as proposing on Socrates' behalf a penalty, implicitly affirming the judgement of the court.

Next, in Chapter 2, I analyse perhaps the most controversial critique of Socrates in Plato's corpus as presented in the *Clitophon*: that Socrates is an impediment to arriving at the end of excellence. At least part of this controversy arises from the doubts that some (but decreasingly many) commentators have about the authenticity of the dialogue. The bulk of these doubts arise from two features of the text: the sometimes infelicitous style of the text and the substance of Clitophon's critique of Socrates, especially since it stands unanswered at

the end of the dialogue.²³ I am not concerned, for my part, with these doubts because, first, I suspect that the style of the dialogue can be easily explained by the dramatic context, and especially by the fact that Clitophon, not Socrates, is the principal speaker, and second Clitophon's critique of Socrates is consistent with other critiques made of Socrates elsewhere in Plato's corpus. Clitophon's critique centres on Socrates' role in his aporia. While Clitophon praises Socrates for his apparently protreptic discourse that exposes his aporia at first, he then undertakes the pursuit of justice first with Socrates' associates and then Socrates himself without success. Clitophon tells Socrates that he was disappointed again and again in his conversations with him until he finally gave up persevering and turned instead to Thrasymachus, who promises to teach justice. While commentators have long noted that Clitophon wrongly believes that Socrates knows justice and must therefore share his knowledge, I show that Socrates himself bears the responsibility for Clitophon's misunderstanding because his protreptic arguments reasonably imply that Socrates lives under the guidance of the knowledge of justice. While Clitophon critiques Socrates in a final attempt to motivate the latter to teach him justice, Plato shows that an even more severe version of Clitophon's critique is actually warranted and that, once again, Socrates' occupation is simply unable to achieve the ends for the sake of which it is practiced.

Chapter 3 concerns a critique by an anonymous composer of speeches about whom Plato has Crito tell Socrates at the end of the *Euthydemus*. This anonymous critic argues that Socrates' philosophy is worthless insofar as Socrates wrongfully surrenders to the petty and

²³ These are not the only reasons that commentators doubt Plato's authorship of the *Clitophon*, but they are the most significant. See Simon Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999: 227-234, for an overview of the relevant arguments and evidence.

laughable practice of the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. While Socrates argues that his critic cannot speak truly because he is concerned with elevating his own self-regard as occupying the intersection and therefore inferior position between politics and philosophy, I argue that the preceding story that Socrates' tells Crito about his conversation with the brothers in fact vindicates his critic. Not only are the brothers and their practice petty and laughable, but Socrates in fact surrenders to them when he need not have. But even further, Socrates' pursuit of wisdom in this story ultimately shows that his critic does not occupy an inferior position: Socrates shows, albeit unknowingly, that he, through his philosophy, does not know how to use the soul or wisdom and that the brothers' occupation knows how to use the soul but not how to acquire wisdom. At the intersection of these two occupations, however, Socrates' anonymous critic knows both how to acquire wisdom and how to use it and the soul. And this is important, for Plato himself, I suggest, stands also upon the intersection of politics and philosophy as a composer of speeches.

In Chapter 4, I turn to a broader critique of Socrates as Callicles presents it in the *Gorgias*: that he is inexperienced with respect to human affairs. While Socrates argues ultimately that he practices true political expertise, I show that he in fact lacks a crucial element of that expertise: a true account of the *causes* of justice. Without this account, Socrates lacks the power to protect himself and others from committing injustice, which he (rightly) takes to be the most important element of politics. As a consequence, Socrates succumbs to the same argument that he himself develops against Pericles and the other statesmen whom Callicles cites as good men: because Socrates is a caretaker of men and yet men become no less wild in his care, he must in fact fall short of true political expertise, even while he is, unlike Callicles

and the others, possessed of a true account of the good for the sake of which he practices politics.

I conclude, finally, by returning to the explanation of the distinction between Plato's written dialectic and Socrates' oral dialectic. I situate this explanation in the context of Socrates' death in the *Phaedo* and apparent turn towards poetry, arguing that Plato, like this Socrates, undertakes his occupation not because it is more effective, as Allen has it, but because it is *safer*.

Chapter 1:

Plato's Apologetic Critique of Socrates

*"Aaaaiiii! The pain!!!
That gadfly stings me once again.
That ghost of Earth-born Argus,
That herdsman with a thousand eyes—
Get him away from me, O Earth,
The very sight of him terrifies me!"
– Io²⁴*

1. Plato in His *Apology of Socrates*

Plato twice represents himself in his *Apology of Socrates*. He first appears as the sixth of seven young associates of Socrates whom Socrates calls upon, along with their brothers and fathers, to testify whether, he says, "I have ever given to them any bad advice."²⁵ Like the others, Plato says nothing; he does not step forward to testify against Socrates but is, on the contrary, as

²⁴ Pseudo-Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound*, 565-568; all translations are my own unless otherwise stated.

²⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 33d

Socrates says, “prepared to help me, the one who corrupts ... as claim Meletus and Anytus.”²⁶

Plato’s apparent helpfulness persists through his second appearance too, in which Plato represents himself as the first alongside Crito, Critobulus, and Apollodorus to advise Socrates that he ought to propose a penalty of 30 minas to which he and the others will stand as sureties.²⁷ Socrates ultimately accepts Plato’s advice, however hesitatingly, and proposes this penalty to the judges, who thereafter vote instead to execute him.

However straightforward these two self-representations may seem, they nevertheless generate several interesting hermeneutic puzzles. After all, Plato need not have represented himself in the *Apology* in the first place. He is explicitly absent from the *Phaedo* and does not appear in the *Euthyphro* or the *Crito* or any other dialogue. He appears only in the *Apology*, which depicts the most contentious event in Socrates’ life, to understate the matter only slightly. This is not insignificant. Socrates had been judged guilty of impiety and executed; by explicitly associating himself with the guilty party, Plato risks arousing suspicion also against himself, even if the Athenians later felt remorse at the outcome of Socrates’ trial.²⁸ Whatever Plato intends to tell his readers, then, it should be in some way worth the risk he incurs. The straightforward interpretation does not reach this bar, as it were. It suggests only that Plato fulfills his private duties, his duties to aid and support his friend; but this is not acceptable if it leaves open the possibility that Plato does this at the cost of his public duties like some real life

²⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 34a

²⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 38b

²⁸ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 2.43; we should also note here that the timeline following Socrates’ trial and execution is unclear from the surviving sources. We cannot know with certainty how quickly the Athenians came to regret executing Socrates, what the cause of their regret was, when versions of Socrates’ apology, such as Plato’s, began circulating, or whether the Athenians ever reacted similarly against their regret also. This being the case, we likewise cannot know whether Plato’s audience was more sympathetic to Socrates or to his accusers.

Antigone. But even worse, Plato's depiction of himself and his Socrates further problematises the aid Plato contributes. Crucially, while Plato's interventions into Socrates' trial apparently serve Socrates' defence in order that he not be convicted or executed, Plato represents his Socrates in the *Apology* as explicitly unconcerned with whether he wins or loses, whether the judges convict or acquit him, or even whether he is executed or fined. Rather, Plato's Socrates mocks both the prosecution and the court as a whole and tells the judges that his private divinity (δαίμόνιον) does not oppose him and therefore that the outcome of his trial, including his impending death, cannot have been bad. The historical Plato may or may not have disagreed with the historical Socrates about the seriousness of his trial and death, but no such distance can be afforded to the *literary* Plato, the author of the dialogue who chooses to represent himself and his Socrates in this way. What may be a straightforward interpretation of Plato's actions within the text cannot therefore be a straightforward interpretation of Plato's *representation* of those actions as the author of that text.

A fuller and more complete interpretation, I suggest, must also account for the cultural, ideological, and procedural significance of what Plato does and does not do in the *Apology*. Here then there are two relevant facts that orient and guide our interpretation. First, Plato's two self-representations are separated by a dramatic event: that the Athenians vote to convict Socrates. As such, Plato's self-representations occur over dramatic time in the *Apology*, conveying not a simple claim but a narrative; Plato's two self-representations depict in part his initial belief about Socrates' justice and his reaction to the verdict of the court. Second, Xenophon tells his readers in his *Apology of Socrates* that Socrates "neither himself proposed a lesser penalty nor permitted his friends to do so, but said that to propose a lesser penalty is

admitting to wrongdoing.”²⁹ And Plato’s Socrates clearly endorses a similar line of thought, steadfastly rejecting the judgement of the court that has just convicted him, proposing that he be rewarded like an Olympic victor as a consequence, and only very reluctantly proposing that he pay a miniscule fine of one mina after emphasising once again that he does not believe that he has done anything wrong and that the fine would not harm him. Together, these two facts suggest—but do not prove—an interpretation of Plato’s self-representations that altogether opposes the straightforward interpretation: while Plato can say nothing against Socrates at first, he later, with Crito and the others, accepts the judgement of the court and recognises Socrates’ guilt, even if Socrates himself does not.

In this chapter, I provide the final piece of the puzzle. I argue that Plato uses Socrates’ defence speech in the *Apology* to explain his guilt; he presents through Socrates’ own mouth a subtle but powerful critique of Socrates that corroborates the judgement of the court and that insulates Plato himself and the other associates of Socrates from suspicion. My argument here emphasises three main elements of Plato’s *Apology of Socrates* that together develop into Plato’s *critique* of Socrates. I begin in Section 2 with Socrates’ accusers and the argument he marshals against them. I show there that Socrates attempts the interesting strategy, to say the least, of attempting to *explain away* the accusations made against him as a consequence of his accusers’ ignorance and resentment—and not of his guilt. This strategy is limited in several ways. It fundamentally depends upon the actual consequences of Socrates’ occupation while not ever actually rebutting the claims that Meletus makes about those consequences. Socrates’ accusers, or even the judges themselves, are free to propose alternate explanations for the

²⁹ Xenophon, *Apology of Socrates*, 23

accusations made against him, and Socrates himself, unwittingly or not, provides them the resources to do so by mentioning several consequences of his occupation that indicate his guilt. Next, in Section 3, I show that Socrates supplements his argument against his accusers with a second argument intended to vindicate his occupation and show that it is impossible in principle that he does harm by practicing it. This second argument is the familiar defence of philosophy that commentators so often attribute to Plato: Socrates practices his occupation because of an oracle given about him to his friend Chaerephon but discovers ultimately the beneficial function of his occupation—that by means of it he lives the best life for a human being and shares the supremely valuable human wisdom that makes the best life possible—and concludes therefore that it is ordained and sanctioned by the god out of love for the city. I show, however, that this argument faces serious internal problems. In the first place, each of its elements are deeply ambiguous; Socrates leaves it unclear whether and how he is possessed of human wisdom or in what human wisdom even consists, whether and how the god actually ordains and sanctions his occupation, what value that occupation actually provides to Socrates and to the city, and most important of all, whether he even acknowledges the gods of the city—the very subject of his trial. But second, only one side of the ambiguity in each case supports Socrates’ defence, and disambiguating them by appeal to the actual effects of Socrates’ occupation, even as he describes them, shows that he does not live up to its best possible interpretation, securing for the judges not his innocence, but his guilt. Finally, in Section 4, I return to Plato’s self-representation and reflect upon the meaning of the *Apology* as a whole to diagnose the reasons for Socrates’ guilt and Plato’s judgement of its extent and severity. I show there that Plato protects and rehabilitates the *core* of Socrates’ occupation and attributes his

guilt to accidental features of his person: that while he is the wisest of the Athenians, he nevertheless remains crucially and criminally ignorant. As such, I argue, Plato uses the ambiguous claims he gives to his Socrates not only to critique Socratic dialectic, but also to innovate upon it, lighting the way for his own occupation and claiming that he shall succeed where his mentor fails.

2. Undermining Socrates' Accusers

Socrates stands accused, as he says, of corrupting the youth (τούς τε νέους διαφθείροντα) and of not acknowledging gods that the city acknowledges but other new divinities (θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει οὐ νομίζοντα ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινά).³⁰ As far as he is concerned, however, these accusations are just the latest in a long line of accusations made against him. Socrates has also been accused, he says, of being a wise-guy (σοφὸς ἀνὴρ),³¹ a theorist (φροντιστής)³² who

³⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 24b-c; Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 2.40.3-7, citing Favorinus, formulates the indictment thus: "This indictment is brought on oath by Meletus, son of Meletus, of Pithus, against Socrates, son of Sophroniscus, of Alopec: Socrates is guilty of not acknowledging the gods that the city acknowledges and of introducing other divinities, and he is guilty of corrupting the young." While it's often unwise to trust Diogenes Laertius over earlier sources, in this case, the form of the indictment lends support to the claim that the formulation Diogenes Laertius gives is more original than the one Socrates gives in his defence speech. Specifically, Athenian law forbade impiety in terms of a citizen's actual participation in the public cults; corrupting the youth is not a charge that can be tried as impiety and can only be understood as the *consequence* of impiety. That Socrates places this decidedly secondary charge first when he reports the indictment in his defence speech reveals his assessment not only of Meletus's motivations, but also his rhetorical goals, which may not accurately reflect the historical situation he faced, or even the meta-drama within Plato's *Apology*, historical or not.

³¹ I translate σοφὸς ἀνὴρ here as "wise-guy" to capture the slightly mocking sense in which it is often used in Athenian political discourse around the time of Socrates' trial. There is, of course, a kind of reverence that accompanies a reputation for wisdom, but the Athenians do not generally intend to compliment Socrates by asserting that he is wise: they intend to convey that he is, first, somewhat ridiculous and odd, and, second, powerful and threatening. A fruitful analogy may be drawn to the popular perception of yogis in ancient and medieval India. See for example David Gordon White, *Sinister Yogis*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009: 1-37, and his later "Yoga: A Brief History of an Idea," in D.G. White, *Yoga in Practice*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012: 1-23.

³² Φροντιστής is often translated as "thinker," "deep thinker," or even sometimes as "student," but as with σοφὸς ἀνὴρ, I want to capture the relative oddness conveyed by this accusation and so choose the less literal "theorist," especially since the things about which Socrates apparently thinks are above the sky and below the earth and making the weaker argument stronger.

researches all those things above the sky and below the earth and who makes the weaker argument stronger.³³ Those who hear these accusations and who believe that those who research these things and theorise about them do not acknowledge gods, accept these slanders as true and naturally infer that Socrates too does not acknowledge gods. Socrates claims that this is false, but his earlier accusers, as he calls them, are many and nameless and all the more terrible for it; they have instilled into many of the judges these prejudices since childhood without previously allowing Socrates to make any defence at all against them. And so Socrates makes his defence now before turning to the accusations of his later accusers. By doing so, however, he does more than simply refute a prejudice. He has already outlined the target of his entire defence; he identifies two separate inferences made by his earlier accusers and their hearers that literally cause the later: first the inference from Socrates' occupation to his researching the things above the sky and below the earth and making the weaker argument stronger, and second the inference from his researching these things to his not acknowledging gods. If he can show not only that these inferences are invalid and misleading but also that his later accusers accuse him of impiety because they make these same inferences then he can effectively *undermine* them. And he does so. But this strategy is also risky, depending as it does upon the actual causes of the accusations made against him and therefore the consequences of his occupation. I argue here that while Socrates succeeds in undermining his later accusers, he does not succeed in undermining their *accusations*, and in fact vindicates them before the judges. Let me begin then where Socrates begins: with his earlier accusers.

³³ Plato, *Apology*, 18b-c

Whereas his earlier accusers say that he is a wise-guy much like Gorgias or Hippias or Prodicus, Socrates says that he is not possessed of the divine wisdom of which they are possessed and for which he has nevertheless gained a reputation. He is, however, possessed of a different sort of wisdom: human wisdom, the knowledge of what he doesn't know.³⁴ And this wisdom implicates him in a very different occupation than researching cosmology or oratory, let alone teaching these things to others. He tells the judges that his childhood friend Chaerephon once impulsively asked the oracle at Delphi, he says, "if anyone is wiser than me; the Pythia ordained then that no one (μηδέν) is wiser (σοφώτερον)."³⁵ And when he heard

³⁴ The meaning of Socrates' human wisdom is controversial. Gregory Vlastos, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," *The Philosophical Quarterly* 35(138), 1985: 28-29, argues, for example, that Socrates' human wisdom consists of two claims: 1) that Socrates knows that he lacks divine wisdom, and 2) that Socrates knows more or more significant provisional and elenctically justified propositions than all other men. This cannot be right for several reasons. Let me mention only two here. Firstly, Socrates says that he certainly knows that he is neither a lot nor a little wise, which implies something additional to divine wisdom: he also knows that he is not possessed of any wisdom less than divine. Second, Socrates suggests to the judges that his wisdom is unique and that he is wise because he knows that he is not wise, which is difficult to cash out propositionally due to paradox, and reflects better a kind of know-how or practical knowing. Michael Forster, "Socrates' Profession of Ignorance," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 32, 2007: 1-35, argues, by contrast, that Socrates' human wisdom consists of two different claims: 1) that Socrates is possessed of a set of true ethical principles, and 2) that Socrates does not arrive at those principles through knowledge, but rather through divine inspiration. This is better, but Forster struggles here to explain how Socrates can claim to certainly know that he is neither a lot nor a little wise. As Forster understands it, Socrates would have to be able to give a definition of wisdom here in order to bridge the gap between true belief and knowledge, but this is precisely what he cannot do and what motivates him to practice his occupation in response to the oracle.

As Dylan Futter, "Socrates' Human Wisdom," *Dialogue* 52, 2013: 61-79, recognises, the problem at the heart of the debate concerning Socrates' human wisdom is that Socrates describes it in at least three different and not obviously consistent ways throughout his defence speech: 1) that he certainly knows that he is neither a lot nor a little wise (Plato, *Apology*, 21b), 2) that Socrates does not believe what he does not know (Plato, *Apology*, 21d), and 3) that Socrates recognises that he has no value in truth with respect to wisdom (Plato, *Apology*, 23b). Futter reframes the debate then as about which of these three senses is primary. As far as he is concerned, the last is primary firstly because it comes at the conclusion of Socrates' description of his occupation, and secondly because it faces fewer and less significant problems. I do not agree with this assessment, but will leave a full argument until Chapter 4. Briefly, this final formulation creates a puzzle for the value of Socrates' human wisdom the details of which Futter neglects as "somewhat unimportant" (64). In the present chapter, I use a somewhat neutral combination of Futter's formulations 1 and 2: that Socrates knows what he doesn't know.

³⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 21a; while Émile de Strycker and Simon Slings, *Plato's Apology of Socrates: A Literary and Philosophical Study with a Running Commentary*, Leiden: Brill, 1994: 74, assert that "there is no reason to doubt the historicity of Chaerephon's question and of the response given by the Pythia," many commentators have nevertheless found reason to doubt it. For example, Robin Waterfield, *Why Socrates Died: Dispelling the Myths*, New York: W.W. Norton and Co., 2009: 11, challenges that if the oracle were historical, it would play a more

this, he says, Socrates was immediately arrested by it. If no one is wiser than him then he must be in some sense possessed of a greater wisdom than all other men. And yet, he says, “I certainly know that I am neither a lot nor a little wise.”³⁶ Socrates therefore spends his time systematically questioning and ultimately refuting those men who have a reputation for wisdom—the politicians, the poets, and the craftsmen—in order that he discover the meaning of the oracle. The problem, however, is that the men whom Socrates questions and refutes, as well as the bystanders to his conversations, all conclude that he is possessed of that wisdom that he proves that his interlocutor is not. And they infer that if he is possessed of that wisdom without himself practicing as a politician, poet, craftsman, or anything else, then he *must be* a theorist thinking about those things and so occupy himself with the sorts of things every theorist occupies himself: with researching the things above the sky and below the earth, making the weaker argument stronger, and teaching these things to others.

Socrates denies that these earlier accusers are correct about him. He denies that he is possessed of that wisdom for which he has a reputation. He denies that he is a theorist, that he researches the things that theorists research and teaches the things that they teach. But

central role in the literature surrounding Socrates rather than being mentioned only once by Plato and once by Xenophon (whose reference to it, Waterfield says, “now begins to look decidedly derivative”). For Waterfield, Plato invents the oracle story in order to define and justify his own philosophical mission, the mission for which Socrates is the mouthpiece. Xenophon then does the same thing, but for an importantly different philosophical mission. See also David Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense of Socrates: Plato's Apology*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 63-66 and 101-102, and Michael Stokes, “Socrates' Mission,” in Barry Gower and Michael Stokes [eds.], *Socratic Questions: New Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates and Its Significance*, London: Routledge, 1992: 52-62, and *Plato: Apology of Socrates*, Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1997: 115-116, for two more thorough and distinct arguments congenial to Waterfield's. Nevertheless, de Strycker and Slings do make a plausible and I think compelling case for the historicity of the oracle story even recognising any plausible rhetorical goal Plato might have for inventing it: “There was no pressing need for Plato to include all these precise details which, if false and publicly exposed by some adversary, would have damaged the credibility of the *Apology* as a whole” (74). But irrespective of the historicity of the story, the fact remains that the oracle plays an essential role in Socrates' defence speech as Plato presents it; whether it is historical or not is beside the point and we should proceed *as if* it were historical, as I do here, unless there is good reason *internal* to the *Apology* itself that points towards its fabrication. There isn't.

³⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 21b

denying that these accusations are true is not even half the battle. At this point, the judges have before them two sets of opposing claims about Socrates' occupation: either he is wise or he is not; either he researches the things above the sky and below the earth or he does not; either he makes the weaker argument stronger or he does not; either he teaches these things to others or he does not. If the judges are going to believe him and not his accusers then he must somehow show that he is more believable than they are. And there are broadly two ways to do this. He could first *rebut* his accusers by providing additional evidence that supports his claim and contradicts theirs. He doesn't do this; he calls upon the judges themselves as witnesses, and then also the god, but neither is obviously sufficient. Second, then, he could *undermine* his accusers by showing that they come to their conclusion through some kind of unjust or unjustified means. And this is what Socrates attempts to show. He claims that his earlier accusers are "ambitious, violent, and numerous ... men believing that they know something but knowing little or nothing;"³⁷ They are embarrassed by having been refuted by Socrates and they become, he says, "angry with me, not with themselves."³⁸ But when they complain about Socrates, they have nothing specific to say, and so "say the things available against all philosophers" because "they are not willing to tell the truth: that they have been discovered pretending to know while knowing nothing."³⁹ His earlier accusers don't merely speak falsely: anything they say about him is poisoned by ignorance and resentment. And if this is true then Socrates' earlier accusers' claims about him and his occupation do not stand on equal footing with Socrates' own and cannot be equally believed.

³⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 23d-e, c

³⁸ Plato, *Apology*, 23c

³⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 23d

Socrates employs this same strategy also against his later accusers, but now with a twist. He not only undermines the inference that Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon make about him and his occupation, but he shows that even if that inference were valid, even if it were reasonable to infer that any given theorist, any given wise-guy, were also by virtue of their occupation an atheist, these later accusers must trust the claims made about Socrates by his earlier accusers that he has already apparently undermined. If Socrates is successful then he doubly undermines his later accusers. With this strategy, Socrates' need not concern himself, as John Burnet recognised long ago, with the content of Meletus's accusations at all;⁴⁰ it simply doesn't matter what Meletus says, for Socrates undermines it nonetheless by showing how and why he has come to his conclusions about him. Meletus, he says, "is wrong to joke in earnest, recklessly bring men to court, and pretend to be earnest and distressed about things for which he has never cared."⁴¹ And he attempts to prove this through Meletus's own mouth.

Socrates begins by questioning Meletus about whether he corrupts the youth. He asks Meletus: "Are you concerned something less or about the most that the youth are as good as possible?"⁴² Meletus agrees that he is concerned about the most, and Socrates asks him therefore who improves the youth, the opposite of corrupting them. Meletus first answers, if reluctantly, that the laws improve the youth. When pressed to name a person, he answers, again reluctantly, that "these judges" improve the youth and at Socrates' suggestion adds to these also the bystanders, the councilmen, the assemblymen, and indeed all the Athenians except for Socrates himself; Socrates alone corrupts the youth. Meletus's intent is clear

⁴⁰ John Burnet, *Plato's Euthyphro, Apology of Socrates, and Crito*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1954: 100; see also Slings and Strycker, *Plato's Apology*, 98.

⁴¹ Plato, *Apology*, 24c

⁴² Plato, *Apology*, 24c-d

enough: like any good Athenian democrat, he argues that the youth are cultivated by the systems of norms and customs that the Athenians instantiate *together* and not by any individual person.⁴³ It takes a village to raise a child, as the proverb goes. And Socrates, by opposing the village and its norms and customs, corrupts the child. “You condemned me,” Socrates says, “to much misfortune. But answer me,” he continues: “do you believe that this also holds about horses?: that all men are making them better but one man is corrupting them?”⁴⁴ Meletus does not answer. It’s unclear whether he is simply confused or believes (rightly, in this case) that Socrates’ analogy between young men and horses is ridiculous. Even so, Socrates presses on unfazed; he insists that horses are cultivated not by all men, but only by the few who are possessed of expertise concerning the training of horses and asserts that there would be much happiness if it were actually true that the majority of men improved the young while only the few corrupted them. Without belabouring the point any further, however, he simply moves on, concluding that Meletus actually cannot answer his question and is therefore ignorant or indifferent about how best to teach and cultivate the youth.

⁴³ Many commentators, aware as they are of what Anytus says in the *Meno*, interpret Meletus here to be suggesting the same thing: that every sincere Athenian is *individually* capable of improving the young. And Socrates himself attributes Meletus’s answer to both Meletus *and* Anytus. See, for example, de Strycker and Slings, *Plato’s Apology*, 112. Even so, there are several problems with this interpretation. Firstly, Meletus’s answer here and Anytus’s answer in the *Meno* are not identical: at the very least, nothing in Meletus’s answer implies that any man ever individually improves the young. Second, even if Meletus believes that all the Athenians but Socrates improve the young, it’s clear that he and Socrates have different understandings of what this means: Meletus, beginning by answering that the laws improve the young, implies that all the Athenians improve the young by teaching them about and enforcing the laws. The laws then do the rest. Whatever Socrates thinks it means to improve the young, it is in some sense independent from the laws. The ultimate take-away here is this: that Socrates is talking past Meletus rather than addressing his actual view. Perhaps Meletus doesn’t notice this or perhaps he does. In either case, this line of questioning does not help Socrates’ case. Probably, Plato puts it here to emphasise Socrates’ opposition to the democracy, as Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense*, 118-120, notes, and to foreshadow Socrates’ role as the gadfly who rouses the noble steed that is Athens.

⁴⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 25a-b

Socrates must recognise, however, that this line of questioning does not fully support his apologetic goal and attempts a different line of questioning: “tell us,” he demands, “whether it is better to live among worthy (χρηστοῖς) or worthless (πονηροῖς) citizens.”⁴⁵ Meletus reluctantly answers that it is better for a man to live amongst worthy people rather than worthless. Socrates therefore asks: “is there someone who wishes to be harmed?”⁴⁶ And here Meletus faces a problem. The obvious answer that he must give is that yes, there is someone who wishes to be harmed, and that man is Socrates. He alone not only corrupts the youth, therefore, but also *intends* to do so. But this is at the very least easy to contradict and difficult to demonstrate, especially since Socrates ostensibly defends himself at this very moment against being harmed by his fellow citizens. Should Meletus argue instead, however, that no one, not Socrates and not anyone else, in fact prefers that he be harmed by his associates then he is committed to arguing that Socrates simply does not know what he’s doing and so corrupts the youth accidentally or, as Socrates prefers, unwillingly. But if Socrates corrupts the youth unwillingly, as Socrates himself points out, then “the law is not to bring [him] to court but privately getting a hold [of him] to instruct and admonish.”⁴⁷ Meletus clearly hesitates but ultimately agrees that no one prefers to be harmed by his associates. Socrates predictably seizes upon his answer and highlights the tension in this view before then pointing out that while he could and should have merely instructed Socrates about how best to live piously, he instead avoided conversing with and teaching him. This does double-duty for Socrates, for he shows first, he claims, that “what I said is already apparent: that Meletus has

⁴⁵ Plato, *Apology*, 25c

⁴⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 25d

⁴⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 26a

never cared either a lot or a little about these things,”⁴⁸ and second that Meletus does not have first-hand experience with Socrates’ occupation, having never spoken to him. The judges are provoked to question then where he could have gotten the idea that Socrates corrupts the youth, and Socrates has already given that answer: by inferring from the claims made about him by his earlier accusers. Socrates, that is, succeeds in undermining Meletus with respect to at least this first of his accusations. He now continues on to the others.

He asks Meletus whether he believes that he corrupts the young by teaching them not to acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges, but instead other new divinities. Meletus confirms that this is what he believes. But Socrates recognises that this accusation is ambiguous as stated and asks Meletus to clarify. He could say either that Socrates acknowledges gods other than those acknowledged by the city or that he does not acknowledge any gods at all; if the former then Socrates could possibly acknowledge the Egyptian Wesir and Anup, for example, in place of the Greek Hades and Thanatos;⁴⁹ if the latter, he does not acknowledge any god in those roles and might acknowledge in their place some chthonic spirit or something else or even nothing at all. But in either case, the effect is the same: Socrates upsets the established religious order of the city. It then only remains to be demonstrated whether one or the other is true in order that Socrates’ crime be proved. And so Socrates asks Meletus which of the two he intends. Meletus answers that the second is true of Socrates: that Socrates does not acknowledge gods at all. But when he elaborates, he faces a similar problem as before: he accuses Socrates of acknowledging no gods at all because he asserts that “the sun is a stone

⁴⁸ Plato, *Apology*, 26b

⁴⁹ Wesir, the king of the West, the afterlife, is better known by his Greek name Osiris; Anup, the god of death and dying, is likewise better known as Anubis. Their roles almost exactly correspond to Hades and Thanatos in the Greek pantheon. I use their demotic transliterations here first because they are more accurate to the time period, preceding the syncretism of the Hellenistic period, and second to emphasise their foreignness.

and the moon earth,”⁵⁰ revealing again that he is unfamiliar with the kinds of things that Socrates habitually says. While Meletus’s claim may be true of *Anaxagoras*, Socrates is not that venerable theorist. He may acknowledge a minor divinity that others do not, but he implies that he does so in line with the common view that this divinity is the child of the gods that the Athenians do acknowledge.⁵¹ There is nothing obviously impious about this in itself, and so

⁵⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 26d; there is strictly no contradiction here, as Socrates alleges, between this statement of Socrates’ apparent materialism and with the accusation that he introduces new divinities. For a divine thing to be a god implies that it accedes to a specific rank or fulfill a specific role in the cosmos. Socrates may well believe in divine things while also believing that the sun and the moon are not among them or that there is nothing more generally that accedes to the rank of a god or that fulfills such a role in just the same way as a contemporary atheist may believe in ghosts or a Christian believes that there is only one god and that Hades and Wesir and Thanatos and Anup are demons. The problem that Meletus faces is not yet a theoretical problem about the nature of divine things; the problem he faces is about his familiarity with Socrates’ religious practice.

⁵¹ Many commentators have challenged Socrates’ orthodoxy on this front. Gregory Vlastos, “Socratic Piety,” in Vlastos, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 162, says, for example: “What would be left of [Hera] and of other Olympians if they were required to observe the stringent norms of Socratic virtue which require every moral agent, human or divine, to act only to cause good to others, never evil, regardless of provocation? Required to meet these austere standards, the city’s gods would have become unrecognizable. Their ethical transformation would be tantamount to the destruction of the old gods, the creation of new ones—which is precisely what Socrates takes to be the sum and substance of the accusation at his trial.” Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, “Socrates’ Gods and the Daimonion,” in Nicholas D. Smith and Paul Woodruff [eds.], *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 75-81, argue, however, that Socrates’ ethical transformation of the gods cannot be the reason for the accusations made against him for several reasons: first, there was no clear orthodoxy in Athens concerning the nature of the gods prior to Socrates’ trial, for the Athenians cared more deeply for the ritual aspects of religion than the doctrines about those rituals; second, Socrates does not say that his accusers believed that Socrates held a different conception of gods, but that he didn’t acknowledge gods at all because he was a naturalist and researched the things above the sky and below the earth, consistent with the depiction of Socrates by Aristophanes; third, the judges in the *Apology* and other interlocutors elsewhere are consistently unbothered by Socrates’ moralising beliefs about the gods; finally, both Socrates in the *Apology* and Euthyphro in the *Euthyphro* attribute Socrates’ accusations to his private divinity, his δαιμόνιον. While these reasons are largely sufficient, it must nevertheless be recognised that Brickhouse and Smith are guilty of misunderstanding what Vlastos says. He does not suggest that the Athenians object to Socrates’ ethical transformation of the gods *per se*. He suggests that Socrates’ ethical transformation of the gods *looks to them like* disbelieving in the gods of the city and introducing new gods, especially if, as Mark McPherran, “Does Piety Pay?,” in Nicholas D. Smith and Paul Woodruff [eds.], *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 100-102, argues, Socrates’ ethical transformation of the gods implies that he need not sacrifice to the gods for the gods’ or the Athenians’ benefit, challenging the purported *do ut des* logic of the Athenian sacrificial cult.

Other commentators deny that Socrates held revolutionary, heterodox religious views. Asli Gocer, “A New Assessment of Socratic Philosophy of Religion,” in Nicholas D. Smith and Paul Woodruff [eds.], *Reason and Religion in Socratic Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 115-129, rightly argues, to my mind, that Vlastos, McPherran, and others too readily assimilate Socrates’ religious beliefs to later neo-Platonic or Christian doctrines and therefore emphasise too much their difference from the wide range of legal and acceptable religious practice of late-fifth century Athens. In general, the apparently revolutionary religious beliefs they attribute to Socrates

Socrates declares victory, at least to this extent. Meletus is not only wrong about Socrates' religious practice, but wrong in a way that requires that he have trusted the lies of Socrates' earlier accusers: "but Meletus, it must be that you surely write this indictment either testing us, or being without any means by which you would accuse me of any true crime."⁵²

Socrates succeeds at undermining Meletus, and leaves the matter there, telling the judges that "for how I am, men of Athens, indeed not guilty with respect to Meletus's indictment, it seems to me to need not much defence, but even that is sufficient."⁵³ Socrates is well aware that he does not directly rebut Meletus's accusations themselves. He simply believes that he does not need to, that if Meletus himself has been undermined, his accusations are sufficiently disposed of. The problem, as we shall see going forward, is that they are not sufficiently disposed of, and entirely due to the straightforward limitations of Socrates' apologetic strategy. He employs what argument theorists sometimes call an etiological debunking argument, which works by offering a causal explanation for, in this case, the accusations made against Socrates that do not invoke Socrates' actual guilt.⁵⁴ Generally

either aren't clearly and unambiguously present in Plato's dialogues or have important and orthodox antecedents in Athens, such as Aeschylus. It is not possible to conclude with any certainty, given the sources we have, that Socrates' actual religious beliefs were sufficiently heterodox to explain his trial and execution. Probably, Socrates' own explanation for his trial is closer to the truth (although not entirely true, as I argue below): that the Athenians merely misunderstood his occupation as akin to the naturalists, whose religious beliefs were radical and heterodox.

⁵² Plato, *Apology*, 27e

⁵³ Plato, *Apology*, 28a

⁵⁴ The literature surrounding etiological debunking arguments is complex and controversial. The name "etiological debunking argument" captures several different types of argument that seem to coalesce around a similar strategy: namely to show that an agent's making a claim can be explained independently of the truth of the claim. As I interpret it, Socrates' argument against both his earlier and later accusers takes the form of what Shaun Nichols, "Process Debunking and Ethics," *Ethics* 124(4), 2014: 727-749, calls "process debunking," which aims to undermine a claim by showing that it is the result of an epistemically defective process—in this case, a series of inferences made by analogy, prejudice, and resentment rather than rational and just analysis. Obviously this category of argument distantly post-dates Plato, but it is notable that forensic arguments of the time regularly take this form or similar—and largely because Athenian courts were focused primarily upon identifying the *cause* of a given act, requiring that sophisticated argument forms be developed by defendants to explain away witness

speaking, Socrates has been accused of impiety either because he is actually guilty of impiety or for some other reason. Socrates obviously claims that it is the latter, and specifically because his accusers unjustly make the two inferences I mentioned earlier: that because Socrates is able to refute his interlocutors, he must therefore research the things above the sky and below the earth, make the weaker argument stronger, and teach these things to others, and because he does these things, he must therefore also not acknowledge gods that the city acknowledges. And moreover, Socrates argues that they make these inferences not out of some good will towards him but because they are violent, arrogant, and resentful men who blame him for their own injustice and impiety. While Socrates proves this with respect at least to Meletus, he nevertheless faces a more general problem: etiological debunking arguments—and Socrates' is no exception—are notoriously incomplete. They offer an explanation for a claim without at the same time, first, establishing that this explanation is the *best* explanation or, second, foreclosing on the possibility of other explanations.⁵⁵ And so, despite adequately explaining Meletus's animosity towards him, Socrates does nothing to prevent Meletus or Anytus or Lycon from proposing themselves an alternative, possibly superior explanation, one that may not in fact exonerate him. His saving grace, if he has one, may just be that Socrates, as the defendant,

statements, circumstantial evidence, and the like. But as these arguments developed, so did the recognition of their limitations. That is the most important take-away here.

⁵⁵ Curiously enough, some argument theorists have developed a form of etiological debunking argument that they call "best explanation debunking" that is intended to defend against the possibility of reflexive debunking, universal scepticism and the like by limiting debunking only to those cases in which an agent's making a claim is *best* explained by a situation that does not attest to the truth of the claim. See for example Jonathon Hricko and Derek Leben, "In Defense of Best-Explanation Debunking Arguments in Moral Philosophy," *Review of Philosophy and Psychology* 9, 2018: 143-160. The curiosity here arises because these argument theorists nevertheless bracket off whether in any given case the debunking explanation is in fact the best explanation first because each given situation will present its own unique explanatory criteria that must be met and, second, because what counts as a *best* explanation is itself always a matter of some controversy. See Peter Lipton, *Inference to the Best Explanation*, London: Routledge, 2004. As a consequence, it remains possible for these argument theorists that there are in fact no genuine cases of debunking. It also remains possible that every claim is always already debunked.

speaks last. And ordinarily, that may have been enough. But we know that the judges decided against him. And they have a greater role to play in Athenian legal dialectic than merely judging between the arguments presented by the prosecution and the defence. This is why it is so important for Socrates to dissuade them of their prejudice. They critically evaluate the evidence provided to them. They fill in gaps in reasoning or rhetoric. And they can themselves provide their own competing explanations that might challenge Socrates'. Plato may even expect that his readers join them, for he has his Socrates describe just enough of the actual consequences of his occupation to open up a different and more damning explanation for his being accused of impiety: that he is himself responsible, causally and morally, for the injustice of his accusers.⁵⁶

Now, clearly, this is not the only explanation that a judge or a reader must make for the consequences of Socrates' occupation, and not every consequence of Socrates' occupation is going to imply something one way or the other with respect to his guilt or innocence—or at least not directly. Socrates' occupation has wide-ranging effects on at least five overlapping groups of people: the politicians, poets, and craftsmen whom he questions directly, the bystanders to those conversations, the sons of the very wealthy, the men they question, and Socrates' close associates and their kin. The effects of Socrates' occupation on *some* of these people are in themselves decidedly neutral with respect to whether Socrates does not acknowledge the gods of the city, introduces new divinities that the city does not acknowledge, or corrupts the youth. That Socrates' interlocutors, for example, come to dislike him as a consequence of his questioning need not say anything at all about his guilt in this respect. But

⁵⁶ I distinguish causal and moral responsibility here strictly for the benefit of contemporary readers for whom one does not necessarily imply the other. Ancient people did not make this distinction: because like only causes like, it is not possible for the wise to cause ignorance or the just to cause injustice. That Socrates is causally responsible for injustice implies that he too is unjust.

this is not true of *all* of these groups, and Socrates himself is painfully aware of this. He devotes nearly his entire defence to a single, secondary, and derivative charge: that he corrupts the youth. Whereas Meletus only says that Socrates corrupts the youth insofar as he teaches them not to acknowledge the gods of the city but acknowledge instead other new divinities that the city does not acknowledge, Socrates diagnoses his influence over especially the sons of the very wealthy as the primary motivation for his being brought to trial at all and spends significant time reframing, apologising for, and insulating himself from their activities. Much of his defence then depends upon the fact that he, as he says, “neither promised anyone anything nor ever taught any lesson.”⁵⁷ But he nevertheless describes other ways than teaching that he has an influence over Athens’ young men. And the effects of this influence may—and in fact do, I argue—demonstrate that Socrates corrupts the youth, even if not precisely in the way Meletus alleges. This influence takes two forms: first as a model or paradigm of wisdom and second as an associate, intimate, or companion. Let me begin with the former.

Socrates tells the judges that “the young men following me, those who have most leisure, those of the wealthy, of their own mind take pleasure in hearing the examination of people, and often imitate me themselves and try their hand at examining others. I think that they then find a great many men believing that they knew something but having known little or nothing. Those therefore under questioning are angry with me, not with themselves, and say that Socrates is most foul and corrupts the youth.”⁵⁸ Socrates believes, of course, that neither he nor the sons of the very rich have done anything wrong here. While some men may be angry with him, *he* is not responsible for their anger; *they* are. *He* did not force these men to claim to

⁵⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 33b

⁵⁸ Plato, *Apology*, 23c-d

know what they do not know. And had they not claimed this, they would not have been embarrassed by the ignorant questioning of mere boys. In this apparently causal story, while Socrates directly affects the sons of the very rich—for they can only imitate what they have seen or heard—he does not even indirectly affect the men whom they question. They alone are the cause of their anger and their resentment. Were they different than they are, were they possessed of the human wisdom of which Socrates is possessed, they would not have become angry with him or anyone else but themselves for not knowing what they perhaps ought to know.

This is all well and good, but it's worth noting here that Socrates too does not know what he perhaps ought to know; he just knows that he doesn't know it. Socrates diagnoses the anger of those whom the sons of the very wealthy question as a consequence of their not being possessed of his wisdom. And he is certainly correct to at least some extent. But however bad, however wrong their reaction might be, these men react this way because they identify Socrates as in some sense the cause of their being embarrassed. As far as they are concerned, he is the intervention by whose activity they are changed from not angry to angry. And clearly the principle involved here is not Socrates' human wisdom, for neither they nor their questioners are possessed of it. The sons of the very wealthy do not question others because they recognise their own ignorance, after all. They question others because they find it entertaining to refute their social betters, and not because they genuinely pursue wisdom. They do not know how or when or whom to question, and yet they question nevertheless. And the consequence is the anger of their interlocutors towards Socrates. However much Socrates may wish to defer responsibility for the anger of others, then, he cannot expect the judges to believe

that he cannot be responsible for ignorance and injustice and impiety because he is wise and just and pious. That is the very question at issue in this trial. The judges know only that in the aftermath of Socrates' occupation, others assess that Socrates is the cause of their being embarrassed and so the object of their anger; the judges must then infer from this aftermath and from the activities inherent to Socrates' occupation what its actual consequences were.

So what should the judges infer from this episode? Here is a fitting comparison: in the climax of Aristophanes' *Clouds*, Pheidippides has returned from the Phrontesterion pale and unmanly, having just learned from Socrates the weaker argument. While his father, Strepsiades, boasts of his son's newfound wisdom and dismisses his creditors, he soon thereafter faces the true evil of Pheidippides' learning: he complains of receiving a beating at his son's hands, but the now clever Pheidippides argues that it is in fact good and right that he beat his father. Strepsiades has no effective response; he can do nothing but submit to his son's superior argument and superior strength, even as the latter retires to his house to beat also his mother. Strepsiades blames the Clouds for his fate, but the Clouds respond just as Socrates might to his earlier accusers: "No you are certainly yourself the cause of these things, having turned yourself in worthless ways."⁵⁹ The Clouds only encourage Strepsiades to do what he would otherwise already do in order to bring about the realisation in him of his own injustice. Plato's readers, alongside the judges in Socrates' trial, must ask themselves and each other whether Socrates plays this same role in his life as the Clouds do in Aristophanes' play. They must answer that he does not. There are, of course, some interesting parallels between the Clouds encouraging Strepsiades to carry out his plan and the ways in which Socrates questions his own interlocutors

⁵⁹ Aristophanes, *Clouds*, 1454-1455

in other texts—encouraging them to develop their own account of some matter until they are able to see themselves its problems. But, firstly, the judges and possibly even Plato's readers don't know that Socrates questions his own interlocutors in this same way for this same purpose, and, secondly, the judges here are not considering Socrates' effects on his own interlocutors: they are considering his effects on the young men who follow him around, the sons of the very wealthy. These young men take the role of Pheidippides, and Socrates takes the role of, well, Socrates. Aristophanes' Socrates is clearly responsible for Strepsiades' fate: while Strepsiades may be worthless and can say nothing in his own defence, Pheidippides could not have been empowered to defraud his father's creditors or beat his father and his mother were he not to have learned the weaker argument from Socrates, and Pheidippides says as much. He only ever previously wanted to bet on horse races, but he has now been remade and reconstituted as a devoted Socratic and practitioner of the weaker argument. Socrates therefore earns his ultimate fate in the play, with the angry and desperate Strepsiades burning down the Phrontesterion around him. And although less comedic and less extreme, Plato tells essentially the same story. His Socrates does not teach anything, not the stronger argument and not the weaker, but he *uses* those arguments in order to question, refute, and reproach his interlocutors, and the sons of the very wealthy use them too. By doing so, he and they nevertheless, like Pheidippides, foment resentment in Athens, resentment against Socrates, and cause his life to burn down around him, now only metaphorically. Without a clear and effective rebuttal to Meletus's accusation, Socrates can only stand and watch as those who may be responsible for failing to answer the questions put to them convict and kill the man

responsible for their facing questions at all. The causal story Socrates constructs to undermine his prosecution undermines also his defence.

The second instance in which Socrates mentions his influence over the youth, here by name, reinforces this same pattern, although in a very different way. He is not here a model for them to imitate but an associate of theirs, and this difference is substantial. Socrates shows in the earlier episode that by allowing the sons of the very wealthy to overhear and imitate him he plays an essential role in the etiology he constructs to explain why he faces Meletus's accusations. But at this point, this role is nothing more substantial than that he is at least a partial cause of the resentment of others. It is not yet clear that the influence Socrates has over the sons of the very wealthy in fact harms *them* rather than their interlocutors or the city as a whole by giving the power of argument to those who do not know how to use it correctly; it is not yet clear, in other words, that Socrates in fact corrupts those young men themselves. In this second episode, Plato has Socrates raise precisely this question. He reiterates near the end of his defence speech that he neither claims to teach anyone anything nor actually does so. "But why exactly then," Socrates asks himself, "do some people take pleasure in spending time with me?"⁶⁰ The answer he gives is the same as before: that they enjoy overhearing Socrates refute those who pretend to know. And if, he continues,

I corrupt or corrupted some young men, then perhaps some of them becoming older and recognising that I ever advised them to do wrong when they were young must now come up here themselves to accuse me and take vengeance. But if they are themselves unwilling, then some of their kin, their fathers and brothers and anyone else present, if their kin had been treated badly by me, be it recalled now and avenged.⁶¹

⁶⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 33b-c

⁶¹ Plato, *Apology*, 33c-d

Socrates then names several of his close associates and their kin who are present with him at the court, whether merely as bystanders or even possibly as judges. And by doing so, he emphasises that Meletus has apparently not thought it fit to call up any witness who actually knew him or knew someone with whom he closely associated to testify against him. There is, in other words, Socrates argues, no actual Strepsiades whose son had been taught the weaker argument and who was willing to testify against his son's corruptor.

There are, however, two key problems here that the judges and Plato's readers might immediately recognise. First, there is an important distinction between corruption and *recognising* corruption. Had Pheidippides, for example, merely done what his father asked of him and defeated his creditors in court, Strepsiades would not have complained at all about Socrates and his Phrontisterion; it is only because Pheidippides turns his newfound wisdom against him that Strepsiades recognises that Socrates has corrupted his son. Perhaps this is the very state in which Crito exists concerning Critobulus or Lysanias with Aeschines, or Antiphon with Epigenes, and so on, and it is perhaps important that all of these young men are still young: their corruption cannot yet be easily recognised. But second, and much more to the point, there are some names that Socrates could mention that are conspicuously absent. The judges and Plato's readers both knew well that Socrates was a close companion of Alcibiades, the skilled orator, brilliant general, and notorious traitor who was convicted of impiety in 415 BCE (in absentia) for profaning the mysteries and desecrating the Herms.⁶² And worse, Socrates

⁶² Some commentators, such as Thomas Brickhouse and Nicholas D. Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990: 84, "Socrates' Evil Associates and the Motivation for his Trial and Condemnation," *The Society for Ancient Greek Philosophy Newsletter*, 1986: 17, argue that the close student-teacher relationship between Socrates and Alcibiades is a later invention in part because neither Plato's *Apology* nor Xenophon's *Apology* mention it but Polycrates' apparently later *Accusation of Socrates* does. Isocrates, *Busiris*, 5, apparently attributes this invention to Polycrates when he writes "But when you [Polycrates] tried to accuse Socrates, even

was also a well-known associate of the even more notoriously evil Critias and Charmides, the leaders of the Thirty Tyrants and Piraeus Ten respectively. The relatives of these men, however, cannot come forward to testify against Socrates, and Socrates knows it. No one, not Socrates nor anyone else, can be tried for any crime occurring before the amnesty of 403 BCE.⁶³ And since these associates of Socrates not only died before this amnesty but were also chiefly responsible for its necessity, nothing Socrates could have done with them can be brought against him during his own trial four years later. It's fitting then that the associates he mentions in his defence speech are all too young in fact to have been implicated in any wrong-doing before the amnesty. But even so, with the more salacious associates of Socrates on the tops of

wishing to praise, you assigned Alcibiades to him as a student whom no one noticed being educated under him but who far surpassed the others, everyone agrees." Xenophon even later, *Memorabilia*, 1.2.12-46, attempts to defend Socrates from the accusation that he corrupted Alcibiades made by "the accuser," which most likely refers also to Polycrates. In both cases, however, the matter is far more complicated. If Isocrates attributes to Polycrates anything in the above passage it is that Socrates *educated* Alcibiades, which, he suggests "no one noticed." This does not imply that Alcibiades and Socrates were not associated in some other way or that Socrates could not have advised, and so taught and corrupted him in a less formal way than the typical παιδεία. See Niall Livingstone, *A Commentary on Isocrates' Busiris*, Leiden: Brill, 2001: 32-40. Xenophon, for his part, actually accepts Polycrates' claim that Alcibiades was a student of Socrates but challenges only that Socrates corrupted him. He proposes a more complicated psychological and sociological explanation for Alcibiades' wayward path founded predominantly upon his ambition and his separation from Socrates—an explanation Plato also has Alcibiades himself give in the *Symposium*. So whether Socrates corrupted Alcibiades remains an open question; the fact that they were relevantly associated does not remain an open question; and Plato's readers would surely have known this. Brickhouse and Smith are right, however, to deny that the prejudice Socrates' earlier accusers had against Socrates stems solely from his association with Alcibiades (and Critias and Charmides); even as Socrates himself claims, he was blamed for a much wider array of activities than just the most notorious.

⁶³ Brickhouse and Smith, "Socrates' Evil Associates," 5-6, argue that while Socrates could not be tried for any crime committed before 403 BCE, the amnesty did not expressly prevent prosecutors or witnesses or even defendants from mentioning those past crimes as evidence of more recent crimes, or even just to prejudice the judges. In this sense, the forgetting commanded by the amnesty is not a forgetting of every event or action that happened previous to it, but a forgetting of the previous ψηφίσματα and therefore any ways in which they were violated. If this is right, and I think it is, then that leaves at least two possible interpretations of Socrates' request for anyone to come forward who believes they or their kin have been harmed by him: first, that Socrates attempts to highlight that Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon have in fact not presented any instance at all of him corrupting the youth and so their accusation is without merit; and second, that Socrates attempts to show that Meletus, Anytus, and Lycon have brought against him an illegal accusation because they accuse him of corrupting Alcibiades, Critias, and/or Charmides but present no *recent* instance of his doing so. In either case, however, this defence is unlikely to succeed in large part because the judges are liable to know already about Socrates' association with Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides and perceive this association as a stain on Socrates' character irrespective of any specifically recent corruption—especially because corrupting the youth remains a secondary and derivative charge in this trial.

each of the judges' heads, Meletus need never have called any witness forward at all to testify that Socrates has corrupted him or his kin: everyone already knew about young men who turned out badly in Socrates' company. They need only explain *how* they turned out badly, and Meletus gives an answer: because Socrates does not acknowledge the gods that the city acknowledges but other new divinities that the city does not acknowledge and teaches others to do the same. And if he harms Alcibiades and Critias and Charmides in this way, who's to say that he will not continue with Critobulus and Aeschines and Epigenes or even with Plato himself, who is of course a blood relative of Critias and Charmides? If Socrates should defend against this charge, he would have offered some clear rebuttal against the primary accusations Meletus makes against him. He does not. And so Plato allows his readers to connect the dots, as it were, between Socrates and his criminal associates. There are several ways in which these dots might be connected, and as I argue in later chapters of this dissertation, Plato himself connects some of these dots for his readers in other dialogues. In the *Apology*, however, he leaves this a mystery. The crucial thing here is not *how* Socrates might corrupt the youth; it is only that he does. For even if Socrates did not teach Alcibiades or Critias or Charmides or anyone else to turncoat or to maim, murder, and rob, his occupation clearly doesn't prevent these things at best, and at worst empowers these bad actors to act badly. Without any rebuttal from Socrates against this possibility, the judges are free to conclude that there may well be a direct causal line from Socrates practicing his dialectic to young men with whom he associates becoming corrupt and so causing Meletus or others to accuse Socrates of corrupting them.

Socrates argues that his accusers make two inferences and that these inferences are unjustified. The core of his defence is that these inferences go only one way: Socrates practices an occupation that is simply misunderstood by his earlier accusers, and his later accusers infer from this misunderstanding that he is guilty of impiety. But while this is true of Meletus himself, the actual consequences of Socrates' occupation show that these inferences can also be made in reverse: his earlier accusers can and probably do infer that Socrates is a wise-guy and a theorist because he corrupts the youth, at least as far as they can tell. And if this is the case, Socrates not only fails to undermine his earlier accusers; he allows the judges to vindicate the accusations of the new.

3. Socrates' Vindicating Etiology

Plato's readers should not believe that Socrates' defence speech so easily falters—even if for no better reason than that by writing this speech on Socrates' behalf, Plato associates himself with him. But even so, the reprieve Plato gives to Socrates is not sufficient to demonstrate his innocence, despite his Socrates' confidence that it does. In addition to the less-than-successful etiological debunking argument discussed in the previous section, Plato has Socrates also construct a second, parallel argument that aims to show, ultimately, that it is impossible in principle for him to be guilty of impiety. Whereas his accusers accuse him of impiety because they misunderstand Socrates' occupation and are themselves unjust and impious, Socrates asserts that he practices his occupation because he is strictly and unwaveringly pious, obeying the command of the god to share his human wisdom. The cause of Socrates' occupation is, unlike the accusations made against him, epistemically and morally beyond reproach. Let's call

this Socrates' etiological *vindicating* argument.⁶⁴ If Socrates can defend it, he can effectively defend himself against *any* accusation made against him, for he, perfectly just and pious, cannot ever be the cause of anything unjust or impious. But that's a big if, and Socrates' success is not to be. His account of his occupation, beginning with its putative origin—the oracle given about him to Chaerephon⁶⁵—and carrying through to its ultimate ends is essentially and

⁶⁴ This is not a readily recognised *name* for an argument form by argument theorists, but it is a readily recognised argument form nonetheless. Reliabilist formulations of knowledge readily employ it. See for example Alvin Goldman, "What Is Justified Belief?" in George S. Pappas [ed.], *Justification and Knowledge: New Studies in Epistemology*, Dordrecht: Reidel, 1979: 1-25. Argument theorists (and epistemologists more generally) less commonly recognise the relationship reliabilist epistemology has with etiological debunking arguments, which is especially odd since Stewart Cohen's, "Justification and Truth," *Philosophical Studies* 46 (3), 1984: 279-295, so-called "new evil demon problem" takes the precise form of an etiological debunking argument.

⁶⁵ Commentators sometimes deny that the oracle given to Chaerephon really is the *origin* of Socrates' occupation, and they give a variety of arguments for this. de Strycker and Slings, *Plato's Apology*, 78-79, give two: that Socrates' reaction to the oracle is not obviously appropriate and that there is no mention of the oracle in any other work by Plato. The second is obviously insufficient: Plato's dialogues are never about Socrates *per se*, but rather about his interlocutors and their opinions. No mention of the oracle is ever needed argumentatively or dramatically and can be reasonably left out. The first, however, is at least plausible. de Strycker and Slings argue that Socrates' insistence that he certainly knows that he is neither a lot nor a little wise contrasts with the very fact that Chaerephon asks the oracle whether any man is wiser than Socrates. "How could Socrates," they ask, "whom his close associates Chaerephon thought to be a σοφός, have become convinced of his own ignorance if not by philosophical inquiry?" (79) It's hard to tell how seriously to take this question; the incredulity it conveys appears to be an especially common attitude, one held by each of Stokes, "Socrates' Mission," 69-70, Mark McPherran, *The Religion of Socrates*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1996: 214-223, and "Elenctic Interpretation," in Gary Alan Scott [ed.], *Does Socrates Have a Method?: Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2002: 120-122, Francisco Gonzalez, "The Piety of Questioning and the Questioning of Piety," in Antoni Bosch-Veciana and Josep Monserrat-Molas [eds.], *Philosophy and Dialogue: Studies on Plato's Dialogues (I)*, Barcelona d'Editions, 2007: 46-47, and Dylan Futter, "Socrates' Human Wisdom," 61-79, among others. But however common this incredulity might be, it faces serious problems. First, Socrates tells the judges about the oracle "for I am about to explain to you whence came the slanders against me" (21b). If Socrates already practiced philosophy prior to the oracle then the oracle does not factor into that explanation at all. Second, de Strycker and Slings' question is easily and plausibly answered, and in several different ways. Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 87-100, present the most complex and systematic of these answers. As they read it, the best way to establish how both Socrates knows that he is neither a lot nor a little wise and that Chaerephon believes him sufficiently wise to ask the oracle whether anyone is wiser is to maintain that Socrates already practiced philosophy before the oracle, and only undertook his mission afterwards. But whereas commentators have assumed that any pre-oracular philosophy Socrates might practice must be elenctic and so indistinguishable from his post-oracular occupation, this need not be the case. Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense*, 65-73, and Thomas West, *Plato's Apology of Socrates*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1979: 107-108, both argue that prior to the oracle, Socrates practiced natural philosophy rather than his post-oracular occupation, which need not be practiced in public or with the knowledge of anyone but Socrates and Chaerephon (although West, at least, implies that Socrates had a reputation for wisdom beyond Chaerephon). Brickhouse and Smith suggest that Socrates' reputation for wisdom must have reached Delphi lest they not answer Chaerephon as they did, but that, firstly, is much too cynical and implausible an interpretation of the temple institution, an

unavoidably ambiguous.⁶⁶ And worse yet, while only one side of that ambiguity supports Socrates' defence, that is not the side that is borne out by the actual consequences of Socrates' occupation; just as before, those consequences show that the vindicating interpretation of Socrates' occupation is simply not defensible.

Let me begin once again where Socrates begins: this time with the oracle. The Pythian, recall, tells Chaerephon that no one is wiser than Socrates, and Socrates interprets this to mean first that he is possessed of some kind of wisdom and second that the wisdom of which he is possessed is in some way greater than that of any other. This is a possible interpretation, of course, but it is not inevitable. The meaning of the oracle is yet indeterminate; it transcends the limits of language, turning on the various ambiguities of words such as "no one," "wiser," or even "Socrates." But it shall not be indeterminate forever; the judges in Socrates' trial, as all

interpretation unlikely to be held by Plato's earliest readers, and secondly, leads them to face the same problem as de Strycker and Slings (and the chorus surrounding them), undermining their answer. My own answer to de Strycker and Slings' question is much simpler: Socrates need not have performed any great elenctic feat to recognise that he is neither a lot nor a little wise, for this is the natural condition of young people who are surrounded by impressive and highly regarded adults in the prime of their career—especially in an Athens that had just constructed the Parthenon, the long walls, and other great feats of engineering. This is one reason that Socrates finds it so much easier to speak productively with Clinias and Theaetetus and Lysis and Menexenus and Meno's slave boy; none of them assert that they know anything great or small. Furthermore, Chaerephon need not have in fact seriously believed Socrates to have been the wisest of the Greeks to ask the oracle whether he is. As Socrates says, the judges "certainly know what kind of man Chaerephon was, how excessive in anything he would rush into" (21a). So while Socrates was not wise and did not have a reputation for wisdom, he need not have had such a reputation for Chaerephon to have asked anything of the Pythia about it.

⁶⁶ I must distinguish my argument here from the superficially similar but importantly different argument given by Gonzalez, "The Piety of Questioning," 33-58. Gonzalez there argues that Socrates' apologetic argument is *ambivalent* insofar as Socrates justifies his occupation as both following the god and following Socrates' own (secular) reasoning. My own assessment of Socrates' apologetic argument precludes any similar ambivalence. This is not to say that Socrates' intentions are not ambivalent in Gonzalez's sense, or even the highest and most robust justification at which Socrates aims. They very well may be. Any disagreement I have with Gonzalez here comes down to our fundamentally distinct approaches to the text: he approaches the text as a Socratic (or at least with the assumption that Plato is a Socratic) and so with a hermeneutic of innocence, concerned as he is with Socrates' highest ideals; I approach the text from the perspective of Plato's readers, who need not be Socratic partisans and who must ask themselves and each other whether the judges justly convicted Socrates. As such, I approach the text with a hermeneutic of suspicion, often transforming Gonzalez's Socratic ambivalence into Socratic ambiguity. The fruit of this distinction is that Socrates' ambiguity here results in one possible meaning of a premise or a term that supports Socrates' apologetic argument and another that does not.

Athenians, are given to know that whatever the god means by the oracle, it shall be vindicated however Socrates reacts—indeed *because* he reacts. And so they need only determine with Socrates how his subsequent occupation, his reaction to the oracle, reflects back upon it. Should the oracle vindicate his occupation then his occupation must be a provably appropriate reaction to it.

Socrates describes this reaction, the development of his occupation, in four stages.⁶⁷ He tells the judges that when he hears about the oracle, he is at first arrested by an apparent contradiction between what the god says and what he already believes. Either, then, the god is wrong or Socrates is. Socrates sits with this puzzle for a long time, he says, before he very reluctantly decides that he must resolve it. This is stage two. But how he attempts to resolve it foreshadows the ultimate end of his occupation. While he stands to gain every advantage against his accusers by demonstrating, as he is poised to do, that he undertakes his occupation in strict obedience to the god and his oracle, this is not what he says, at least not at this early stage. He doesn't tell the judges that he immediately defers to the god, whatever that might mean here. He doesn't tell the judges that he seeks a definition of wisdom that might vindicate the oracle. No. He tells them that he sets out to *refute* the god by finding someone wiser than himself.⁶⁸ However reluctantly he does so, this is not straightforwardly pious.⁶⁹ And while he

⁶⁷ Dylan Futter, "Socrates' Human Wisdom," 68, 76 n.38, notes that the four stages of Socrates' reaction to the oracle follow the same pattern as Socrates' interlocutors' reactions to Socrates' questioning. While Futter infers that this is an indication that Socrates was already practicing his occupation, understood by him as elenchus, I suggest that this four-stage reaction is more deeply and universally human and psychological than this. I discuss this reaction in more depth in Chapter 2.

⁶⁸ Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 96, curiously argue that Socrates only "sets out to refute the oracle's *apparent* meaning. This is not an impious attempt to prove the god wrong, but only an attempt to understand what the god sought to convey" (italics mine). See also Stokes, "Socrates' Mission," 33-37 and McPherran, "Elenctic Interpretation," 114-144. Socrates does not, of course, say that he only attempts to refute what the god *appears* to say, and he certainly has the words to say this if it is in fact what he means. And worse: Socrates then

attempts to head off this interpretation by asserting that it is not appropriate for the god to lie and later says that he does this to prove the god irrefutable, there are other, more clearly pious descriptions he could have used; as it stands, his description plants a seed of doubt about Socrates' true piety, a seed that shall only sprout, mature, flower, and fruit as Socrates' occupation develops into something quite different from the performance of piety and justice that Socrates pretends it to be.

Having undertaken to refute the god, then, Socrates begins by questioning one of Athens' public men, and then another, discovering that neither man was possessed of the wisdom he professed. But Socrates quickly realises that he cannot refute the god by questioning only one man or two; the god makes a universal claim, and so Socrates must *systematically* question every man who has a reputation for wisdom in order that he be confident that no one is in fact wiser than he is. Socrates begins this third stage with the public men, the politicians, refutes them, and proceeds next to the poets, and then to the craftsmen, discovering in each case that he was wiser than these men at least to the extent that he alone does not believe that he knows what he does not know.

That Socrates mentions these three occupations is important, and not just because they correspond to his three accusers; each occupation is associated with its own kind of wisdom:

goes on to say that he practices his occupation in order to prove the god irrefutable and describes himself consistently as doing just that. He could not do this by only attempting to refute what the god appears to say.

⁶⁹ Gonzalez, "The Piety of Questioning," 36-43, develops this point fruitfully in order to reconceptualise what Socrates means by piety. Others, such as West, *Plato's Apology*, 106-107, argue that Socrates' initial intent was impious and that the judges would and indeed ought to recognise it as such. If Gonzalez is right then Socrates puts forward his conception of piety in order to persuade the judges and awaits their judgement and the god's according to its fruits. If West is right, however, then we have to accept first that the judges are never open to renegotiating the meaning of piety, and second that Socrates either carelessly or contemptuously tells the judges that he flouts the established norms surrounding his relationship to the oracles. Both are possible but implausible, especially since a court that so regularly interrupts Socrates in outrage notably doesn't interrupt Socrates here.

thoughtfulness (φρόνησις), creativity (ποίησις), and expertise (τέχνη), respectively.⁷⁰ The ordinary Athenian believes—and this is Socrates’ initial interpretation too—that each of these three varieties is in some way sufficient for wisdom, that if a person is thoughtful, for example, then they are also necessarily wise, and so also for creativity and expertise. By refuting each of these varieties of men, however, Socrates shows that this is not the case. But what that implies is not immediately clear: wisdom is either not or not merely any of these varieties. And while this distinction might appear minor, it is not: if wisdom is not thoughtfulness then a wise person need not be thoughtful; but if wisdom is not *merely* thoughtfulness then a wise person must be thoughtful in addition to something else, and likewise again for creativity and expertise. By refuting the politician, then, Socrates might show either that they must also become creative and expert or achieve something else entirely. And so again, *mutatis mutandis*, for the poet and the craftsman. Here, then, Socrates and the judges and Plato’s readers can reflect back upon the oracle. If the god is right that no politicians, poets, or craftsmen are wiser than Socrates then Socrates is left with two possible interpretations: either, first, the oracle means that each are equal with respect to their wisdom, which implies that no one, neither Socrates nor anyone else, is possessed of any wisdom at all, or it means, second, that each variety of man is possessed of their own unique variety of wisdom and Socrates is possessed then of some kind

⁷⁰ This point is made most clearly by Sara Ahbel-Rappe, *Socratic Ignorance and Platonic Knowledge in the Dialogues of Plato*, Albany: State University of New York Press, 2018: 34-35. Leibowitz, *The Ironic Defense*, 74-100, mentions three other occupations that Socrates mentions earlier and that he thinks don’t clearly fit Socrates’ typology: the orators, the prophets, and the sophists or theorists. West, *Plato’s Apology*, 107-124, proposes that Socrates’ typology be broadened, however, by recognising that the three occupations correspond to the first three occupations Socrates’ mentions in the prothesis of his speech—the politicians, poets, and *sophists*—as parallel to the occupations he questions. That Socrates earlier mentions sophists and later mentions experts indicates for West that the sophists are merely a variety of craftsman, those who pretend and aspire to expertise concerning education. This is surely possible, but I think that it makes nonsense of Socrates’ assertion that the sophists are possessed of a wisdom more-than-human. I return to this question in Chapter 4. Probably, West could propose a similar synthesis for the other occupations that Leibowitz mentions, and with fewer problems.

of wisdom superior to the other three. Socrates recognises that the first cannot be true because at least the craftsmen are possessed of wisdom, and perhaps also the poets too (although less so as Socrates reckons, and in a very different way). But if the second is true and the craftsmen or poets or politicians are in fact possessed of their unique variety of wisdom, then Socrates can be possessed of a superior wisdom in two further ways: either he is possessed of the same variety or varieties of wisdom as they are in some greater quantity or quality or he is possessed of a fourth and wholly distinct variety of wisdom.⁷¹ Socrates is confident that he is not possessed of any of the varieties of wisdom of which his interlocutors are possessed and infers therefore that he is possessed of a fourth variety of wisdom: the knowledge of what he doesn't know.

At this stage, Socrates can reasonably conclude that the god has not been refuted. He cannot yet conclude that the god is irrefutable, however. He cannot yet be certain that he is possessed of some kind of wisdom and has made little progress in determining what wisdom even amounts to, *id est* whether it is either not or not merely thoughtfulness or creativity or expertise. If he can conclude anything, it is only that his fourth variety of wisdom can be added to that puzzle. Socrates must therefore approach the matter differently, and although he doesn't do so explicitly, his story changes focus. When he concludes that the craftsmen are in fact possessed of some degree of wisdom while pretending to greater wisdom also in other matters, Socrates doesn't merely infer that expertise is insufficient for wisdom; he infers that, he says, "it profits me to be as I am" with neither the craftsmen's knowledge nor their

⁷¹ One possibility here is that there are only three varieties of wisdom and Socrates' human wisdom is identical to thoughtfulness. In this case, only Socrates and therefore no politician is actually thoughtful, and only because Socrates alone knows what he does not know. For the present chapter, I will assume that this possibility is not in fact true and continue on as if Socrates' human wisdom is some secret fourth thing.

ignorance.⁷² Socrates shifts then from investigating the nature of wisdom *per se*, the first claim he attributes to the oracle, to investigating now its *value*, the second claim. And here he challenges another assumption that Athenians typically make about wisdom: the ordinary Athenian understands the value of wisdom *instrumentally*, by which I mean that they believe that wisdom is valuable insofar as it empowers a person to reliably identify and achieve some good.⁷³ Socrates need not doubt (whether or not he actually does) that thoughtfulness, creativity, and expertise are valuable in this way or that the politicians, poets, and craftsmen earn or produce value by means of their unique variety of wisdom. He challenges, however, that this instrumental value is *sufficient* to describe the ultimate value of wisdom, or at least any specific variety of wisdom. Whatever value the politicians, poets, and craftsmen might earn or produce by means of their wisdom, Socrates argues, it is offset in some way by their ignorance, by the wisdom of which they are *not* possessed. Socrates, apparently uniquely,

⁷² Plato, *Apology*, 22e

⁷³ That the Athenians of the fifth century were broadly instrumentalist about the value wisdom is not controversial (or at least not as controversial as it maybe should be). See David Roochnik, *Of Art and Wisdom: Plato's Understanding of Techne*, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010: 17-88. That Socrates is an instrumentalist is only slightly more controversial. Roochnik, *ibidem*, 233-251, argues that he is not. So likewise do Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 161-182, and Matthew Matherne, "The Value of Socratic Inquiry in the *Apology*," *Ancient Philosophy* 43, 2023: 337-355. But these three commentators are alone in this view (and curiously at odds with each other in several ways). Against them stand, as far as I can tell, *every* other commentator who has written on the subject. Hugh Benson, *Socratic Wisdom: The Model of Knowledge in Plato's Early Dialogues*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000: 152-156, Richard Bett, "Socratic Ignorance," in Donald Morrison [ed.], *Cambridge Companion to Socrates*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010: 222-223, Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 100-108, James Doyle, "Socratic Methods," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 42, 2012: 39-75, Richard Kraut, "The Examined Life" in Sara Ahbel-Rappe and Rachana Kamtekar, *A Companion to Socrates*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006: 238-242, de Strycker and Slings, *Plato's Apology*, 135-140 and 187-191, and Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 1-29 and "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge," 39-66, each argue for or assume instrumentalism explicitly in their own way. Vlastos curiously recognises something of a paradox when he says that Socrates' "avowals of epistemic inadequacy, frequent in the dialogues, are never paralleled by an admission of moral failure; the asymmetry is striking," (43 n. 13) without ever questioning either the validity of his instrumentalism or Socrates' apologetic judgement that he never does wrong to anyone. Brickhouse and Smith recognise the full force of this paradox but even they do not truly doubt their instrumentalism. While I agree that a specific variety of instrumentalism is appropriate to ascribe to Socrates and to Plato, this requires more argument than it is typically afforded.

knows what he does not know and so knows the degree to which his ignorance offsets the value of his wisdom. And because he knows that he is not thoughtful or creative or expert, he can conclude that his specific ignorance is at least as profitable, as valuable, as the varieties of wisdom of which he is not possessed; and since his ignorance is not valuable, he concludes that thoughtfulness and creativity and expertise are likewise not valuable. This, then, is the ultimate meaning of the oracle: that the man is wisest who, like Socrates, knows that he has no value with respect to wisdom.

If this is right then the oracle is more than a statement of fact. The god, in his genuine wisdom, knew Socrates' reaction to the oracle before it had even been given to him. He knew that Socrates would systematically question those men who had a reputation for wisdom. He knew that Socrates would refute those men. And he knew that Socrates would conclude ultimately that their wisdom has little value or none because it is offset by their ignorance. And because the god knew all these things before giving Chaerephon the oracle, he therefore *ordains* these things. Socrates' occupation is not merely his own idiosyncratic reaction to the oracle: it is sanctioned by the god as an expression of the greatest wisdom of which a mortal may be possessed. The god therefore *commands* that Socrates practice Socratic dialectic.⁷⁴ And so he does, even now. This is the fourth and final stage in the development of his occupation.

⁷⁴ As many commentators note, it's not obvious that Socrates should interpret the oracle as a command because, as a proposition, "no one is wiser than Socrates" lacks imperative force. See for example Brickhouse and Smith, *Socrates on Trial*, 88, de Strycker and Slings, *Plato's Apology*, 80-81, and Gonzalez, "The Piety of Questioning," 45-46. Whereas Brickhouse and Smith attempt to understand how Socrates, with the opinions he already holds about piety and about himself, receives the oracle as a command, other commentators are content to accept either that Socrates uses the oracle as a pretext for what he would otherwise already do or that Socrates merely misinterprets it. I agree ultimately with the last of these, that Socrates misinterprets the oracle, but it's worth noting nevertheless that commentators often fail to appreciate the force of an oracular pronouncement. The Athenians, including Socrates, are not likely to receive an oracle as merely a true proposition: the god tells people things in order to accomplish their own ends: the oracle structures, activates, and participates in human life, and the recipient's reaction to it is crucial to understanding its meaning and its force. Here, because Socrates discovers by

That Socrates ultimately interprets the oracle as a command is the linchpin that holds his defence together; it is because, on his view, he practices his occupation in strict obedience to the god that no possible justification could be given for Meletus's accusations. The god, being fully good, cannot ordain and sanction, let alone command, that which is impious or unjust. Rhetorically, this is brilliant; it makes it seem like his accusers must argue that the god might command something evil and impious himself, which they certainly would not like to argue.⁷⁵ But this only works as an argument if Socrates can defend his interpretation of the oracle as a command, and he can do this only by showing that his occupation is in fact somehow good—for human beings, for the city, and of course for the god himself in his love for the city. At this point in his defence, therefore, Socrates' account of his occupation must undergo a complete reversal of focus from describing his occupation as at first questioning others for the sake of his pursuit of wisdom to describing it now as pursuing wisdom for the sake of those others whom he questions. Ideally, of course, these descriptions are both consistent and mutually reinforcing; his occupation under them ought to be one and the same, and pursuing wisdom and improving others ought also to occur simultaneously. To this end,

attempting to interpret the oracle that he is *better* than other men at least to the extent that he does not believe that he knows when he doesn't know, the god must have given Chaerephon the oracle with that value judgement implicit in mind, so to speak. And thence arises the command: that other men would be better if they were possessed also of Socrates' wisdom.

⁷⁵ This is not to say that the Athenians could not believe that the gods might command something evil. Athenian religion was varied and complex, typically committing its practitioners to a paradoxical collection of claims that don't obviously entail the perfect goodness of the gods; while the divine will of Zeus, the origin and end of everything present, past, and future in the cosmos, is *ultimately* good, the Athenians did not generally believe that it was *wholly* good. Zeus of course ordained the destruction of Ilium, the murder of Agamemnon, and the vengeance of Orestes. He ordained the exposure of Oedipus, his murder of his father Laius, and his marriage to his mother Iocasta. And more relevantly, Zeus ordained also the Spartan victory in the Peloponnesian War, the subsequent tyranny of the Thirty, and all the horrors that risked killing or maiming even the judges themselves. As far as the Athenians know, their divine punishment has not yet reached its end and the god may ordain Socrates as a test for them or even ordain that his questions only grind their souls into dust as a means of their ultimate destruction. And this is before we even then distinguish Apollo from Zeus, if it is in fact Apollo who commands Socrates to practice his occupation.

Socrates describes for the judges the five elements of his occupation mentioned previously—provoking, questioning, examining, refuting, and reproaching the Athenians—and their function: to persuade (πείθειν) others not to care (ἐπιμέλεσθαι) for their health or their wealth before or more than the greatest excellence of their soul.⁷⁶ This function, he argues, is the true benefit of his occupation: it is unconditional, unqualified, and superior to any other benefit that the Athenians might receive from any other occupation. But precisely *how* this function benefits the Athenians is less than clear, and that’s where his defence begins to come apart.

Let me begin with the ostensive aim of Socrates’ occupation: what does it actually mean to care preferentially about the greatest excellence of one’s soul? To care, ἐπιμέλεσθαι, is a deponent verb, and like other deponent verbs—χρῆσθαι, for example, which is another favourite of Plato—it can always be interpreted in two different ways: either as if it has a distinct actor, action, and acted upon, or reflexively as if the actor, action, and acted upon are all one and the same.⁷⁷ Either, then, the greatest excellence of one’s soul is some quality itself beyond the person caring or the greatest excellence of the soul is the soul caring about its greatest excellence. This latter interpretation unites excellence and its pursuit in a way that is ultimately favourable to Socrates’ defence; if he can defend it then there can be nothing more

⁷⁶ Plato, *Apology*, 30a-b

⁷⁷ This is not often appreciated by commentators. See de Strycker and Slings, *Plato’s Apology*, 187-188, 331-332, Christopher Rowe, *Plato and the Art of Philosophical Writing*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012: 75, Jacob Stump, “Socrates’ Project of Philosophical Conversion,” *Philosophers’ Imprint* 20(32), 2020: 1-19, and Matthew Matherne, “The Value of Socratic Inquiry,” 349-354. Matherne notably concludes that caring for the greatest excellence of the soul is identical to Socratic inquiry and is an activity with ultimate, non-instrumental value. But he doesn’t infer this strictly from the meaning of the word “ἐπιμέλεσθαι” itself and doesn’t appear to recognise the grammatical ambiguity. This grammatical point is raised most clearly about χρῆσθαι by Brian Marrin, “What’s Next in Plato’s *Clitophon*? Self-Knowledge, Instrumentality, and Means without End,” *Epoché: A Journal for the History of Philosophy* 21(2), 2017: 313-315, and specifically connected to the fact that the soul is doing the using, or here the caring.

beneficial to the Athenians than his occupation: by means of it, he raises their souls into orbit, as it were, in order that they approach the divine. But if he can defend only the former interpretation then his occupation is decidedly more modest: while the ordinary wise-guy, from Euenus to Hippias, Gorgias, Thrasymachus, and so on, might claim to teach some form of excellence, Socrates only claims to persuade his interlocutors that one form of excellence, the excellence of their souls, is more important than the others, without then actually making their souls excellent.

Ambiguities such as this are typically resolved by the rhetorical or argumentative context in which they appear. But in this case, the ambiguity is followed only by further ambiguity. Socrates tells the judges that he persuades others to care preferentially about the greatest excellence of their souls “λέγων ὅτι ‘οὐκ ἐκ χρημάτων ἀρετὴ γίγνεται, ἀλλ’ ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ τοῖς ἀνθρώποις ἅπαντα καὶ ἰδίᾳ καὶ δημοσίᾳ.’”⁷⁸ Commentators have long recognised that this clause can be translated in one of two ways with two very different meanings. Either Socrates persuades the Athenians “saying that from wealth is not born excellence but from excellence [is born] wealth and all the goods for men, both private and public,” or “saying that from wealth is not born excellence but from excellence wealth and everything else, both private and public, [become] good.” The latter of these interpretations is of course more friendly to Socrates’ defence, for only it is compatible with the exclusive and ultimate goodness of Socrates’ occupation—and commentators have defended it on grounds such as these; it would be strange, after all, for Socrates to challenge the Athenians’ preference for health and wealth over the excellence of their souls by arguing that they should earn

⁷⁸ Plato, *Apology*, 30b

greater health and wealth and everything else by cultivating more excellent souls.⁷⁹ The problem, however, is that while this interpretation is *possible*, it is not the *natural* reading of what Socrates says. The word order of “ἐξ ἀρετῆς χρήματα καὶ τὰ ἄλλα ἀγαθὰ ... ἅπαντα” easily lends itself to the first interpretation, and not the second. And we should not presume that the judges or even Plato’s readers would overrule the natural reading of a clause simply to help Socrates’ case; Socrates must himself provide them reasons to do so. He does not; he only adds for himself further problems and further ambiguity.

Shortly after describing the elements and function of his occupation, he provides the judges with an image of it: he says that he has been assigned to the city by the god “like to a great and noble steed that, because of its size, is slothful and needing to be roused by some gadfly.”⁸⁰ To rouse the Athenians, to wake them, to make them aware of their ignorance, then, is no less the function of his occupation than persuading them to care about the greatest excellence of their souls. But while we might hope that this version of the function of Socratic dialectic resolves the earlier ambiguities, it too only presents more, for images bear with them implications at varying depths. And Socrates’ image is particularly pregnant. At its shallowest, that Socrates stirs up the great Athenian steed might imply either that he drive them to or fro in order that they arrive at greener pastures, and so health or wealth or some other good; but it might equally imply, conversely, that Socrates merely make them aware of their surroundings and so allow them to take their fate into their own hooves, so to speak, and seek greener pastures on their own. No ambiguity is resolved here, but we can dive deeper. Socrates, significantly, does not rouse the Athenians like the sunrise or the cock’s crow—like something

⁷⁹ See for example Rowe, *Philosophical Writing*, 66-80

⁸⁰ Plato, *Apology*, 30e

effective but harmless; he rouses them like a gadfly, inflicting upon them the painful sting of refutation and reproach. Now, clearly, Socrates believes that the awareness that he prompts is worth this pain; should the judges agree with him? Socrates is not the only gadfly about which they are familiar. Io is roused by a gadfly,⁸¹ and Bellerophon too.⁸² And on one hand, these examples don't bode well for Socrates: Io does not clearly live an excellent or even tolerable life on the gadfly's account, and the gadfly causes Bellerophon to be thrown from Pegasus back down to the Earth where he too, like Io, would wander restlessly with no friends among gods or men. If this is the benefit that Socrates aims to provide to the Athenians then the judges may rightfully do without it. But, on the other hand, these examples also suggest another interpretation. In both cases, for both Io and Bellerophon, the gadfly upholds the strict separation of the mortal and the divine. Hera sends a gadfly against Io because Zeus wished to have sex with her; Zeus sends a gadfly against Bellerophon because he attempted to fly Pegasus to mount Olympus and live amongst the gods. Perhaps Socrates is the same; perhaps the god sends him against the Athenians to punish them for their hubris and ensure that they remain in their rightful place, subordinate to the gods. Perhaps it is even out of love for the Athenians then that the god sends the gadfly *before* they transgress the boundary between the mortal and the divine, and sends it with so self-conscious a project. Should they tolerate him and allow him to practice his occupation as he has been, then Socrates should actually prevent them from

⁸¹ The story of Io being chased by a gadfly is recounted in Pseudo-Aeschylus's *Prometheus Bound*, 562-1101 which dates to no later than 424 BCE, when it is referenced in Aristophanes' *Knights*, twenty-five years before Socrates' trial. See Ian Ruffell, *Aeschylus: Prometheus Bound*, London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012: 14-18. Aeschylus also refers more briefly to Io's torment by the gadfly in his *Suppliants*, 540-546.

⁸² The overall story of Bellerophon was among the most popular of the classical period, being told in Homer's *Iliad* VI.155-203 as well as a couple of Pindar's odes (Olympian XIII.87-90, Isthmian 7.44-47). Most relevant to the role of the gadfly, however, is probably Euripides' *Bellerophon*, which was performed circa 430 and concerns Bellerophon's flight to Olympus and fall from Pegasus.

suffering Bellerophon's fate, for Bellerophon only learns too late the folly of his hubris and that human excellence has little value or none; the Athenians could do and be better by learning this same lesson before they make this same mistake.

So which is it? Is Socrates a punishment for the Athenians' transgressions or the means by which the god prevents just that? One way to answer this question is to ask which god Socrates serves. Should Socrates serve a god that the city acknowledges, then even if the judges cannot conclude that the gods' commands are wholly and completely good, they can reasonably conclude that his service to the god is at least some benefit to the city; those gods that the city acknowledges have some interest in the welfare of the city, after all, and the judges can trust that they would not send Socrates to harm it. But should Socrates serve other gods or other divinities, the judges cannot know for certain whether his service to them, if it is in fact service, is a benefit to the city; they can only guess that a foreign god or upstart divinity uses Socrates to harm the city or conquer it, opposing those gods that the city already acknowledges. Socrates, however, leaves it unclear precisely which god he serves. While he traces the origin of his occupation to the oracle at Delphi, he does not specify that this god is Apollo; he refers exclusively to "the god (ὁ θεός)" and never approaches a more precise identification. This could mean any number of things: that he believes the god to be so obviously Apollo that he need not say it, that he has some other, perhaps more monotheistic interpretation of Apollo or of the gods generally, that he identifies another god as the cause of the Pythian's ecstasy, or any number of other, less-than-favourable interpretations. But whatever Socrates means, he never clarifies or gives the judges any recourse to discover his

meaning.⁸³ He occasionally swears by Zeus, at least, but he also swears importantly by another god: the dog, Anup, the god of the Egyptians.⁸⁴ Swearing to Anup obviously does not imply that Socrates practices his occupation in service to Anup. But it does highlight for the judges and for Plato's readers that Socrates' religious practice is at the very least conspicuously heterodox; it signals that there is more to the etiology Socrates constructs for his occupation than he lets on, and it is left ambiguous whether Socrates even acknowledges the gods of the city. And in a trial concerning that very question, this is important.

Socrates' account of his occupation leaves him in a particularly ironic position; while he assures the judges that he is not a wise-guy and is not possessed of their variety of theoretical or scientific wisdom, he is forced to advocate for his occupation on the same grounds that they do. He is forced, in other words, to provide some demonstration of its value not theoretically or conceptually but *practically* by appeal to its consequences and the goods that it might provide to those that have had the (mis)fortune of interacting with him. And he tries to do precisely this through the latter portion of his speech, emphasising his own excellence in every respect he can imagine—that he obeys the god at great personal cost, that he righteously refused to prosecute the Ten Generals, that he disobeyed the Thirty Tyrants, that he doesn't demean the judges by begging for pity, displaying his young sons, and so on. But he faces two key problems nevertheless. First, the apparent evidence that Socrates presents to the judges is itself at least possibly ambiguous. The great personal cost Socrates pays for his obedience may reveal the extent of his piety, but it may also reveal that the god is displeased with him, that he is, like Bellerophon or Oedipus or any other terrible tragic hero, condemned to wander with no friends

⁸³ See Gonzalez, "The Piety of Questioning," 35 n.9,10

⁸⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 22a

among gods or men. That Socrates refused to prosecute the ten generals may reveal his respect for the law, but it may also reveal his contempt for the democracy; and his disobedience of the Thirty Tyrants reveals something similar: either that he respects due process or that he decided to stay in the city in the first place with the tyrants and against the democrats. And, of course, Socrates does display his sons before the judges simply by making a show of not doing so. Second, even if these consequences were unambiguously to Socrates' benefit—and a case can be made for this—they are not the right sort to actually confirm or disconfirm any interpretation of the god's oracle or description of Socrates' occupation in response to it. Socrates must argue from the actual activity and consequences of his occupation. And this involves, as Socrates says, actually persuading others to care about the greatest excellence of their souls, which is to recognise their presently deficient quality. This is in turn equivalent, if not identical, to Socrates' human wisdom: to know what one doesn't know. By persuading others to care about the greatest excellence of their souls, therefore, Socrates merely shares his human wisdom; and the value of his occupation depends then upon the value of that wisdom.

If Socrates' wisdom is valuable in the same way as that of the politicians, poets, and craftsmen whom he questions then, minimally, it has a value proportional to the good it empowers a person to identify and achieve and the degree to which it reliably empowers them offset by the disvalue of any coincident ignorance. It is difficult to see, however, what good Socrates' wisdom might produce or how it might produce it. One interesting proposal—interesting because it may help Socrates resolve an earlier ambiguity—is that the product of Socrates' wisdom is itself that same wisdom; Socrates' wisdom, that is, empowers him to share

his wisdom with others. If that's true and if it's true also that Socrates' wisdom, the knowledge of what one doesn't know, is equivalent or identical to caring for the greatest excellence of one's soul then caring for the greatest excellence of one's soul produces, as it were, that very same caring. The idea here is that if Socrates' wisdom produces itself then it instantiates the kind of virtuous circle considered above through which a person approaches the highest good, the divine—especially if Socrates' wisdom has no other product than itself. There are several problems with this, and I deal with them in more detail in Chapter 2. For now, I must mention only one: by hypothesis, Socrates shares his wisdom by practicing his occupation, but his occupation is not the consequence of Socrates' wisdom alone. Socrates practices his occupation in response to an apparent contradiction that arises from the conjunction of Socrates' wisdom and the oracle given to Chaerephon; Socrates undertakes to question, refute, and reproach those reputed to be wise not because he certainly knows that he is neither a lot nor a little wise but because he believes that the god nevertheless says that no one is wiser than him. This could mean that the god causes Socrates' occupation and that Socrates himself does not. But it could also mean that Socrates' own ignorance, his inability to correctly interpret the oracle is actually the cause of his occupation. But deciding between these two possibilities requires that the judges and Plato's readers know whether Socrates' occupation is good, which is the question at issue here. This first proposal is not helpful.

A second proposal might be given that stretches even more the vague and modified instrumentalist framework we've inherited from ordinary Athenians: that Socrates' wisdom is valuable because it produces *a lack* of bad, shameful, blameworthy ignorance that might otherwise offset the value of other varieties of wisdom. If this is the case, the value of Socrates'

wisdom is not so much that it empowers a person to identify and achieve some good; it is rather that it prevents a person from doing something wrong; Socrates allows the politicians, then, and the poets and the craftsmen to realise the true and maximal value of their own varieties of wisdom; from his wisdom, in other words, wealth and health and everything else public and private become good. This is certainly plausible. Socrates or even Plato may even believe it. But we must also recognise that this proposal is extraordinarily speculative; nothing Socrates says in his defence speech could confirm it.⁸⁵ In the first place, despite Socrates claiming that there is no greater service to the city than his occupation, he doesn't ever say in his defence speech that the wisdom it ostensibly functions to share ever reaches a positive valuation.⁸⁶ He says at most that his wisdom profits him and does not say how or how much. For all we know, it could also be bad, shameful, or blameworthy not to be possessed of thoughtfulness or creativity or expertise; the god may assert that it is equally as bad or worse not to be possessed of Socrates' wisdom as it is not to be possessed of any other variety, but this does not imply that Socrates or anyone else is off the hook for their own ignorance, and this may well be the reason for Socrates' ultimate conclusion: that human wisdom, presumably including also his own, has little value or none. But second, and much more significantly, no one exists who is possessed of both Socrates' wisdom and either thoughtfulness or creativity or expertise. Socrates is certainly not possessed of any of these three varieties of wisdom, but he *alone* knows what he does not know. There is no single case therefore that permits the judges or Plato's readers to truly compare, apples to apples, the value of Socrates' wisdom and the

⁸⁵ Although commentators do make this proposal on the grounds of what Socrates says in other dialogues. See for example Danielle Layne, "In Praise of the Mere Present of Ignorance," *Proceedings of the American Catholic Philosophical Association* 83, 2010: 253-267.

⁸⁶ Socrates later says (38a) that everyday discussing excellence is the greatest good for humanity, but only *after* he has already been convicted of impiety.

value of thoughtfulness, creativity, and expertise or anything else. This means, of course, that the god's oracle cannot be refuted, but not because the claim it makes has been profoundly and resoundingly proven correct; the god's oracle cannot be refuted because the circumstances have not arisen, despite Socrates' decades-long mission, to even put it to the test. And as such, the god's oracle also cannot be confirmed, nor does Socrates say that he has confirmed it. He *hazards a guess* that the god is correct, that the god is wise, and that the god ordains him to be the paradigm of human wisdom, that the man is wisest who, like Socrates, knows that he has little value with respect to wisdom or none. But while later commentators have taken Socrates' guess here as gospel and run with it, Socrates has not in fact given them or the judges any clear and unambiguous reason to agree.

The central problem here is not simply epistemic. Neither the judges nor Plato's readers are likely to deny that the god speaks truly. Rather, the problem is deeply ethical, deeply consequential. If Socrates' occupation were successful on Socrates' own terms then he would, as he says, "assisting the god, point out [to his interlocutor] that he is not wise;"⁸⁷ he would share his human wisdom and persuade him to care for the greatest excellence of his soul in preference to other things. That there is no one who is possessed of both Socrates' wisdom and some other variety of wisdom implies that Socrates has never succeeded in sharing his wisdom. His interlocutors are not in fact humbled by him; they do not experience the catharsis at which Socrates aims; they may be embarrassed by him, but they do not blame themselves for having been embarrassed: they blame Socrates.⁸⁸ And even the bystanders to Socrates' conversations are not improved by Socrates. "In each case," he says, "those present thought that I am wise in

⁸⁷ Plato, *Apology*, 23b

⁸⁸ Compare Plato, *Theaetetus*, 167e-168c.

the matter about which I refuted the other.”⁸⁹ The effect is ultimately that Socrates turns these men, interlocutor and bystander alike, not towards philosophy, not towards Socratic dialectic, but *away* from it. They become accusers. They insult and demean Socrates and his occupation and contribute ultimately to his trial and to his death. And even those whom Socrates might claim are turned towards his occupation, the sons of the very wealthy, are not even then at the same time possessed of Socrates’ human wisdom. They don’t question others because they know what they do not know.⁹⁰ They question others because they find it enjoyable; it is *entertaining* for them to watch men squirm as their reputations collapse around them and their self-confidence is destroyed. These consequences of Socrates’ occupation, and others still, show that it is not the superlatively valuable service to the god that he claims it is. When the god tells Chaerephon that no one is wiser than Socrates, then, he does not command Socrates to question, refute, and reproach those who have a reputation for wisdom—at least not in the way that he does. The god says that Socrates’ wisdom is truly important, truly worth sharing, but when he says that Socrates is the wisest, the god also says that Socrates has failed to pass on that wisdom to anyone else, such as the craftsmen, who may be possessed of a wisdom also worth sharing. If the oracle is a command then Socrates falls short; rather than vindicate Socrates against the accusations made against him, the oracle *indicts* him.

⁸⁹ Plato, *Apology*, 23a

⁹⁰ Nor is it clear how they *could* question others if they were possessed only of Socrates’ human wisdom. Socrates questions others not because he knows what he does not know, but because the god asserts despite Socrates knowing only what he does not know that no one is nevertheless wiser than he is. The sons of the very wealthy are not in this same position.

4. Towards a More Pious Dialectic

I have attempted throughout this chapter to interpret Socrates' defence speech as Plato's earliest Athenian readers would have interpreted it. Plato gives these readers, free as they are of any prejudice that Socrates should become a hero and paradigm of an idealised philosophical life, plentiful reason to judge themselves that he was *justly* convicted of impiety. I have no doubt, however, that readers of a different predilection—Socratic partisans, I mean—could find in Plato's *Apology of Socrates* a triumphant confirmation of their own reverence; over two millennia of commentary has proven that much. For these readers of Plato, the ambiguities that I have highlighted here do not even appear as ambiguities; their meanings already collapse into their most favourable configuration. Socrates is simultaneously possessed of great power and profound weakness. He is possessed of a wisdom capable of healing the souls of every Athenian, cultivating in them the care for the greatest excellence of their souls and so excellence itself. And he is also *incapable* of cutting through the ignorance or arrogance of even his most familiar and most trusted interlocutors and bystanders. The effects of Socratic dialectic that Socrates himself mentions become therefore inessential trifles—curious little happenings for which Socrates himself is in no way responsible and that have no impact at all on the meaning of Socrates' defence speech—unless, of course, they can be understood as beneficial. One of the central problems of contemporary commentary as I see it is that it is so saturated with these kinds of readers that it has become impossible to even imagine that Plato did not himself stand among them, that Plato was not himself a Socratic partisan who did not or could not attribute to Socrates even the most banal missteps. I do not mean by this that Plato did not admire Socrates or even believe that he was the wisest and justest of the Athenians. I mean

only to deny that Plato believed that Socrates was the wisest and justest *possible*. In this final section of this chapter, then, I want to explain briefly what it means for Plato to recognise Socrates' faults and demonstrate for his readers his guilt and his impiety. I show, in other words, what commentators lose by not interpreting Plato as a critic of Socrates. As far as I am concerned, they lose the beating heart that gives Plato's written dialectic its life.

Plato puts in the mouth of Socrates the foundation of a powerful and important political program, a program that in some way involves provoking, questioning, examining, refuting, and reproaching the Athenians in order that they become possessed of that same wisdom of which Socrates is possessed and care, therefore, preferentially for the greatest excellence of their souls. As the mouthpiece of this political program, Socrates also becomes its avatar. For most commentators, Socrates' role here is unsurprising; it merely reflects the historical circumstances of the *Apology's* composition. Plato is, after all, more than the author of the text: he is a historical person with historical relationships and a historical reputation. One of these relationships is with the historical Socrates, and in the years immediately following his trial and death, it almost certainly put a young Plato in a difficult position. If he wanted to participate in public life in Athens, as he clearly did, if only as an author, Plato had two options: he could either distance himself from Socrates, as he appears to do with his own uncles, Critias and Charmides, or he could attempt to rehabilitate Socrates' reputation among the Athenians. Commentators have held for a long time now that Plato fully and unequivocally chose the latter, at least initially. They argue that Socrates lives the only life and practices the only occupation employing the only method capable of carrying out the political program Plato puts into his mouth. To the extent that Plato promotes it, commentators infer that he promotes the

Socratic life; and they endorse also the converse: that to the extent that he critiques the Socratic life, Plato also critiques his political program. Josiah Ober argues, for example, that Plato deviates from the gadfly ethics, as he calls them, that Socrates defends in the *Apology* and the *Crito* first because he lacks Socrates' determination and courage and, second, because he concludes following Socrates' death that *Socrates is wasting his time*.⁹¹ For Ober's Plato, Socrates is wrong to even try to improve the city because it has been so corrupted by the demotic ideology that it has become impossible to reach it with philosophical reasoning, impossible to provoke it, to question it, and to examine, refute, and reproach it; it has become impossible to share with the Athenians Socrates' wisdom, and impossible therefore to persuade them to care for the greatest excellence of their souls. The true philosopher must therefore free themselves from the corrupting influence of the many and retreat from the public into private spaces to perfect a different kind of city: the *interior* city, the soul.

But we should be careful here not to confuse the map for the territory. As compelling as Ober's interpretation may be, he has apparently not noticed that the gadfly ethics he attributes to Socrates are found within and developed by publicly accessible documents, publicly accessible texts that can be taken up and read by anyone in any place at any time and that circulate under Plato's name.⁹² Ober writes as if the author of the *Apology* is a strict Socratic partisan, an acolyte and devoted disciple of the historical Socrates who faithfully represented the actual, historical speeches he gave before the King Archon's court and who fully endorsed the historical Socrates' arguments, conclusions, and indeed his entire life. But he isn't. In the first place, if Plato really were to fully endorse the Socratic life, he could scarcely have written

⁹¹ Ober, *Political Dissent in Democratic Athens*, 156-247

⁹² This point is developed fruitfully by Steven Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 37-65.

and published a record of Socrates' speeches defending it—and especially the record that survives as the *Apology*. And second, there really is no way of knowing whether the historical Socrates even endorsed or participated in the political project that Plato attributes to him; for as much as it's worth, no other Socratic author represents Socrates in this way. The *Apology* shows by means of its arguments, by means of its images, by means of its drama, and by means of merely existing as a written text that Plato, however much he rehabilitates Socrates, also at the same time distances himself from specific elements of Socrates' occupation. Plato, that is, attempts to sail the narrow pass between rehabilitating Socrates and criticising him.

I have chosen to emphasise the latter in this chapter and in this dissertation more generally in an effort to correct for the broader state of commentary, both past and present. But in doing so, I also want to emphasise here that Plato's criticism of Socrates occurs predominantly from Socratic premises: it is *because* Plato rehabilitates Socrates, in other words, that he critiques him. He represents a Socrates who is indeed the wisest of the Athenians, who is indeed unflinchingly devoted to his divinely inspired philosophical mission, and who indeed does only that which seems best to him. Plato's Socrates truly does *intend* to share his genuinely valuable wisdom and heal the city one soul at a time. No critique that Plato articulates or suggests in the *Apology* or in any other text targets this Socratic core. Rather, Plato suggests that Socrates merely fails to accomplish what he intends to accomplish. He may be possessed of the greatest and most valuable wisdom of which a mortal can be possessed, but he is also possessed of ignorance in other forms; and from this ignorance, Socrates accidentally causes a similar ignorance in others, an ignorance of thoughtfulness, an ignorance of creativity, and an ignorance of expertise, leading then first to Socrates' inability to share his

genuine wisdom and second to the injustice of his interlocutors and bystanders, of the sons of the very wealthy, and particularly of Alcibiades, Critias, and Charmides. By writing and publishing the *Apology*, Plato tells his readers that “whereas Socrates is wise in some ways and ignorant in others, I, Plato, recognise his limitations and have become wise in both the ways that Socrates is and the ways that he is not.”

But this is not even the most crucial message of the *Apology*. Even if Plato never succeeds in surpassing Socrates’ wisdom, there is one element of his occupation that must be established before the Athenians in contradistinction with Socrates’ own. Plato’s Socrates is so confident in his mission and so confident that he correctly interprets the oracle that he speaks contemptuously of the judges and their authority. And it’s not difficult to see how this poses a problem not only for Socrates himself but also for Plato. The judges are not only the legitimate political authorities in Athens; they are also the legitimate *religious* authorities. It is their responsibility to interpret the oracles and the auspices in order that the city maintain its relationships to the gods it acknowledges, and they have the authority to fulfill this responsibility. And yet, by asserting that he shall “obey the god rather than you,”⁹³ asserting despite being convicted that he has “been cleared of Meletus’s charges,”⁹⁴ and by mocking the judges, whom he calls only “men of Athens (ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι),” by proposing that he be rewarded rather than punished for his impiety, Socrates shows the judges not that he explicitly prefers his private judgement to their authoritative, public judgement in a matter of clear public significance, but that he does not even recognise their authority at all. For all his respect for Socrates’ wisdom and for his occupation, then, Plato must show, if he is going to carry the

⁹³ Plato, *Apology*, 29d

⁹⁴ Plato, *Apology*, 36b

torch, so to speak, that he will not make this same mistake. And he does. By representing Socrates in this way, he shows his readers that he acknowledges Socrates' error. And by representing himself as proposing a punishment on Socrates' behalf, he shows that he will not make the same one. Unlike Socrates, Plato respects the legitimate authority of the democratic court. It and the god have decided in a way that is best for them and best for Socrates: they judge Socrates guilty. Plato judges likewise. And so should we.

Chapter 2:

Protreptic and Aporia in Plato's Clitophon

*"But he, a hesitating man and guardian of his secrets, abandoned the
child at birth and didn't raise it for the common benefit."
– Johannes Kepler*

1. A New Approach to Plato's *Clitophon*

Plato's *Clitophon* presents what has become one of the most notorious critiques of Socrates in Plato's corpus. While Clitophon there praises Socrates for his protreptic, he complains that his conversations under Socrates' influence end always in aporia and so critiques him as "nearly an impediment to arriving at the end of excellence: becoming happy."⁹⁵

The value of a critique such as Clitophon's in Plato lies typically in Socrates' response and what it shows or tells Plato's reader about the good life, the philosophical life, and

⁹⁵ Plato, *Clitophon*, 410e

Socrates' own. So it is in the *Apology* and in each other text I consider in this dissertation. The *Clitophon*, however, presents no such response. Clitophon's speech goes unanswered—and this in spite of Clitophon's explicit request for Socrates' answer. Commentators for millennia have read the *Clitophon* as a depiction of an absence, as if the text transparently represents a conversation between Clitophon and Socrates that begins *in mediis rebus* and ends with Socrates refusing or failing to respond to Clitophon's critique. This ending then becomes the *intellegendum* or *explanandum* of the dialogue.⁹⁶ Commentators variously argue then that Socrates does not respond either because Clitophon's critique so misrepresents him that it does not merit response,⁹⁷ for some other reason beyond Clitophon's speech and its merits,⁹⁸ or even because Clitophon's critique is so just and powerful that it is ultimately unanswerable by Socrates.⁹⁹

Recently, however, commentators have challenged this approach to the *Clitophon*.¹⁰⁰ As Christopher Moore emphasises, for example, the dialogue does not so much depict an absence

⁹⁶ See Heinrich Brünneke, "Kleitophon wider Sokrates," *Achiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 26, 1913: 449-478; Karl Heinrich Johannes Geffcken, "Das Rätsel des Kleitophon," *Hermes* 68, 1933: 429-439; George Maximilien Antoine Grube, "The Cleitophon of Plato," *Classical Philology* 26, 1931: 299-306; H. Kester, "De Authenticiteit van der Kleitophon," *Philologische Studien* 6, 1934: 14-20; David Roochnik, "The Riddle of the *Cleitophon*," *Ancient Philosophy* 4, 1984: 132-145; Arlene Saxonhouse, "The Socratic Silence in Plato's *Clitophon*," *Polis* 22, 2005: 128-135; Simon Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.

⁹⁷ See Jenny Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialogue in Plato's *Clitophon*," *The Cambridge Classical Journal* 58, 2012: 1-22; Marrin, "What's Next in Plato's *Clitophon*?" 307-319; Proclus, *Commentary on Plato's Timaeus* [tr. Harrold Tarrant], Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006: 114.

⁹⁸ See Shane Gassaway, "Just Silence in Plato's *Clitophon*," *Polis* 36, 2019: 266-288; Francisco Gonzalez, "The Socratic Elenchus as Constructive Protreptic" in Gary Alan Scott [ed.] *Does Socrates Have a Method: Rethinking the Elenchus in Plato's Dialogues and Beyond*, Pittsburgh, PE: Pennsylvania State University Press. 2002. pp. 161-182; Clifford Orwin, "The Case against Socrates: Plato's *Cleitophon*," *The Canadian Journal of Political Science* 15, 1982: 741-753; Clifford Orwin, "On the *Cleitophon*," in Thomas L. Pangle [ed.], *The Roots of Political Philosophy: Ten Forgotten Socratic Dialogues Translated with Interpretive Studies*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1987: 117-131.

⁹⁹ George Grote, *Plato and the Other Companions of Sokrates*, London: John Murray, 1865/1888: Ch. 34

¹⁰⁰ Christopher Moore, "Clitophon and Socrates in the Platonic *Clitophon*," *Ancient Philosophy* 32, 2012: 257-278

of Socrates' response as it is absent a depiction.¹⁰¹ This is an important distinction. It centres the readers' attention not on Socrates' decision not to respond to Clitophon, but on *Plato's* decision not to represent such a response. The question that the *Clitophon* poses then is this: what does Clitophon's critique, whether Socrates can answer or not, show or tell us about Socrates' occupation and Plato's? I do not mean by this simply its propositional content. Commentators almost universally agree that Clitophon significantly misunderstands Socrates' occupation, and especially the relationship between Socrates' protreptic and the aporia that it exposes.¹⁰² Considering its contribution to a systematic philosophy alone, as Friedrich Schleiermacher says, "it is far from easy to see for what purpose Plato should have introduced generally such an attack upon Socrates—an attack which, in all his writings, is fully repelled, both immediately and by the ironical matter contained in them."¹⁰³ But Plato does not, of course, simply write systematic philosophy. He *dramatises* Clitophon's critique, contextualising it within a defense speech that Clitophon gives against the charge of "criticis[ing] the times he spent with Socrates and greatly prais[ing] the intercourse of Thrasymachus."¹⁰⁴ Clitophon does not deny that he critiqued Socrates, but contends rather that his critique was not unjust. He represents himself as a long-time associate of Socrates, one who is both intimately familiar with his activity and his methods and nevertheless not yet fully initiated into his inner circle. And from this position, he critiques Socrates not as a boastful pretender like Meletus, Callicles, or Thrasymachus, but as a humble suppliant desperate to escape his ignorance. He praises

¹⁰¹ Moore, "Clitophon and Socrates," 258; See also Orwin, "The Case," 752: "... we need not take this ending to imply that Kleitophon has left Socrates speechless. It means merely that Socrates' reply is somehow beside the point, which fact requires interpretation."

¹⁰² Jenny Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialogue," 13-20

¹⁰³ Friedrich Ernst Daniel Schleiermacher, *Introductions to the Dialogues of Plato* [tr. William Dobson], Cambridge: J. and J.J. Deighton, 1836: 347

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *Clitophon*, 406a

Socrates for initially turning him towards the pursuit of justice and says that he devotes his life to that pursuit precisely because he does not know “what comes next” following Socrates’ protreptic or how to become just. But despite his devotion, he argues, he still fails to make any progress in his pursuit of justice under Socrates’ influence. All of his conversations, whether with Socrates’ associates or Socrates himself, end always in the same place: in *aporia*. Clitophon therefore gives up persevering; either Socrates does not in fact know justice or he does not wish to share his knowledge. Whether he correctly understands any particular set of Socratic doctrines or not, Clitophon comes away from his intercourse with Socrates dissatisfied and in despair, illustrating at the very least that Socratic oral dialectic fails to cure him of his injustice. And so while commentators often dismiss Clitophon’s critique on those grounds, I propose in this chapter that Clitophon’s injustice and misunderstanding rather vindicates his critique: Clitophon’s misery, his dissatisfaction, and his injustice show ultimately that Socrates not only fails to heal his soul but that he also in fact does him harm.

This conclusion, I recognise, is quite extraordinary. I defend it in six parts broadly tracking the course of Clitophon’s speech. I begin in Section 2 by analysing Clitophon’s praise of Socrates’ protreptic. He claims to have been truly turned towards justice by Socrates, but only because he treats him as a model of justice to be emulated. And this, I suggest, is Clitophon’s first and most significant mistake; every other error follows from it. In Section 3, then, I follow Clitophon’s attempt to emulate the Socratic life in his pursuit of justice and show precisely how and why this pursuit ended in *aporia*. Next, in Section 4, I show how the failure of Clitophon’s pursuit of justice gives way to his critique through a distinct promise contained within Socrates’ protreptic arguments. The inference from Clitophon’s *aporia* to Socrates’ responsibility for

Clitophon's *aporia* has long been challenged by commentators as Clitophon misunderstanding the nature of Socrates' occupation and his role in it. In Section 5, then, I address those challenges to show that Clitophon's critique follows *even if* he misunderstands Socrates' occupation, as he in fact does. Next, in Section 6, I turn towards the dialogue as a whole and show how Plato ironically guides his reader through the solution of Clitophon's *aporia*. I show there how Plato highlights dialectical moves that Clitophon and his interlocutors overlooked to emphasise an account of justice that better accommodates the claims they make about it. The benefit of this account for Plato, and for the interpretation of the dialogue itself, is that it illustrates quite clearly precisely how Socrates falls short of justice, and so how Clitophon's critique is ultimately justified. Finally, in Section 7, I entertain the meaning of the *Clitophon* as a text and, in response to Schleiermacher, integrate it into the Platonic corpus as a whole. I show there how Plato uses Clitophon's critique to distinguish himself and his philosophical method from that of his mentor, a distinction, I argue, that centres on the practice of dialectic as justice, and so emphasises its importance not only philosophically, but also politically.

2. Turning towards Justice

Clitophon's speech begins in praise of Socrates. "I was often astonished," he says, "by what I heard in your intercourse (συγγινόμενος). You appeared to me to speak most nobly compared to all other men when, like a god upon the tragic machine who instructs mankind (ἐπιτιμῶν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις),¹⁰⁵ you sang, saying: to where are you brought, men? And do you not notice that

¹⁰⁵ The phrase ἐπιτιμῶν τοῖς ἀνθρώποις is difficult to render accurately into English. Translators typically follow the same pattern. They translate ἐπιτιμῶν as "rebuked" or "reproached" or "disparaged," losing the dual sense of the Greek, which means both to increase the value or honour of something and to criticise it. I have tried here to capture this dual sense by extrapolating the concept beyond the literal meaning of the word.

[you are] doing none of the necessary [things]?”¹⁰⁶ Clitophon praises this Socratic song because, he says, it “turns most closely towards [justice] (προτρεπτικωτάτους), is most beneficial, and simply (ἁτεχνῶς) rouses us as if we were sleeping.”¹⁰⁷ But as he goes on to demonstrate, his praise is not unconditional. He later criticises Socrates not only in spite of his praise but because of it. In this section, then, I analyse Clitophon’s assessment of Socrates’ protreptic to lay the groundwork for his subsequent critique. I show how it had such a noticeable effect on Clitophon and illustrate precisely what is at stake in his subsequent pursuit of justice and why, then, he reacts so harshly when his pursuit makes no progress.

Protreptic, as James Henderson Collins II argues, is a composite rhetorical form in which a speaker (or author, as Collins prefers) (1) demonstrates the inadequacy of an auditor’s present activity, (2) proposes a new and better activity in which they might participate, and (3)

¹⁰⁶ Plato, *Clitophon*, 407b; Ancient commentators often used this speech as evidence for the fact that Socrates sometimes speaks to crowds. As Plato depicts him, of course, this is entirely out of character; in the only other public speech Socrates gives in Plato—his own defense speech—Plato has him say that it is not his habit to speak before a crowd and he does so only because the law commands him. While crowds may follow him, he prefers to conduct himself conversationally with only one or a small number of interlocutors. If Clitophon is supposed to report here a speech to a crowd, then, we might reasonably charge him with misinterpreting Socrates’ occupation, as Bryan, “Pseudo-Dialogue,” 6-9, does, for example. However, the style of Clitophon’s version of Socrates’ protreptic speech betrays its origins. Commentators have long noted the “remarkable lack of congruence between [its] expression and content,” as Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 98-99, puts it. But while Slings argues, following both Brünnecke and Kesters, that this is evidence that Clitophon cobbles together three distinct protreptic speeches, this cannot be accepted either. Clitophon reports being often astonished by what he heard in a singular discourse, not three. And if Socrates does not speak to crowds at all, it is no more likely that he speaks thrice to crowds than only once. On my view, the unevenness of the speech reflects rather that he reports only one side of a typically Socratic, dialogical conversation—a single conversation with its own meandering course and line of argument. Clitophon himself confirms this when he, immediately following his report of Socrates’ protreptic, claims to have emulated his method of questioning in a conversation with Socrates’ associates reported in a similar style: with first a directly quoted critical address and then an indirectly quoted dialogue. Clitophon has there as here excerpted only those elements of the conversation that are relevant to his present defense speech. Clitophon does not much care about the arguments of Socrates’ interlocutors, whoever they may be. They neither withstood Socrates’ elenchus nor did they persuade Clitophon, nor indeed can they help Clitophon with his case. His concern is with Socrates alone and what he said in that conversation to turn Clitophon towards the pursuit of justice.

¹⁰⁷ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408c

secures their commitment to abandon their present activity in preference for the proposed.¹⁰⁸ Protreptic is not easy; its elements each pose their own unique challenges not only on their own terms, but in combination with the others. The frequent reader of Plato is of course familiar with the broad outlines of these difficulties and the myriad methods Socrates employs to overcome them. Clitophon, however, representing in his speech only Socrates' contribution to his discourse, does not reflect what specific challenges Socrates faced before him; Plato allows his reader to see Socrates' protreptic only in the negative, by inference from how he attempted to turn his auditors towards justice in the discourse as Clitophon reports it. Plato emphasises that from Clitophon's perspective, Socrates' interlocutors contribute nothing to the discourse of any lasting value.

The bulk of Socrates' discourse is concerned with (1), with demonstrating that his auditors, Clitophon among them, act unjustly, unseriously, and against their own considered interests. He recounts Socrates reproaching his auditors for concerning themselves with wealth without concerning themselves with the quality of the souls who may then use that wealth, either their own or their sons'. Rather, Clitophon's Socrates suggests that his auditors consider a thorough education in "grammar, music, and gymnastic" to be sufficient. It is not: "it is rather because of this dissonance and indifference," he says, "and not being out of step with the lyre that, excessively and disproportionately, brother assaults brother and city assaults city as they revolt and make war, inflicting and suffering the worst evils."¹⁰⁹ If this is true then no one can really do injustice *willingly*; it must rather be the result of ignorance. Insofar as they neglect

¹⁰⁸ James Henderson Collins II, *Exhortations to Philosophy: The Protreptics of Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle*. Oxford University Press: Oxford. 2015; see also Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1358b-1360b.

¹⁰⁹ Plato, *Clitophon*, 407c-d

justice in preference to other things, then, Socrates' auditors neglect that which should rule for the sake of that which should be ruled. Without the knowledge of how to use one's soul, he says, anything one might use becomes not only useless but harmful and shameful. Justice is necessary for living a good life.

If Socrates presents to his auditors some positive alternative to their injustice then he does so at the end of his discourse. Clitophon says that Socrates "concludes nobly" that it is better for someone who does not know how to use their soul to either "keep their soul at rest and not live rather than acting against his own" or, if they must live, "spend their life as a slave, rather than as a free man, having offered the rudder of his thought, like a ship, to another who has learned the expertise of steering men that you, Socrates, often call ... justice."¹¹⁰ But as commentators so often notice, Clitophon does neither in response. Brian Marrin argues for example that

Clitophon claims to have been "woken up" by Socrates's exhortations, but he does not follow the explicit instructions of that exhortation as he reports it. To be "woken up" is to recognize that one does not know the proper use of things, especially the proper "use" of one's own soul, in which case it is best to "give over the rudders of one's thought, like a ship, to another." But instead of submitting himself to the direction of another, Clitophon takes the active role in questioning the followers of Socrates, imitating the role of Socrates, even when he finally comes to speak with Socrates himself.¹¹¹

The truth is, however, that Socrates has not given Clitophon any "explicit instructions" in his discourse at all. He says rather that it is better for those ignorant of justice to *either* keep their souls at rest *or, if they must live*, submit as a slave to another who knows. The condition here is important. It is the difference between Clitophon's life and his death. And ignorant of justice as

¹¹⁰ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408a-b

¹¹¹ Marrin, "What's Next," 311

he is, Clitophon cannot know whether he satisfies it. He cannot know whether he must live, whether he must keep his soul at rest or submit to another as a slave—or indeed to whom he may justly submit if he must submit. And Socrates does not tell him.¹¹² His discourse has a completely different tenor than mere instruction: it raises a problem without clear solution. It would have been better of course for those ignorant of justice to have never existed at all or to have lived as slaves to just men or indeed to have been poor and ugly and stupid, but this is not the hand that fate has dealt.¹¹³ What then shall Clitophon do with his life, his freedom, his wealth, his beauty, and his intelligence? Socrates' protreptic arguments as Clitophon reports them do not and cannot answer this question, nor can Clitophon himself. This is why, as Clitophon earlier says, he is "often astonished" by Socrates' intercourse. The word, in Greek, is "ἐξεπληττόμην" and connotes a sense of alarm or stupefaction, or more literally being struck out of one's senses. Clitophon is not, as Marrin implies, merely impressed by some new and compelling doctrines of which he was not yet convinced and which turn him towards "what comes next"—invariably further and more complete doctrines. There are no new and compelling doctrines that ever could impress Clitophon; he says that he has never contradicted Socrates' arguments, implying, I take it, that he already agreed with them. And because he already agrees with Socrates' arguments, he recognises that they pose a problem not just for Socrates' immediate interlocutors and not just generally but for him and his life specifically. The

¹¹² Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 122, says that "the person to whom Socrates' audience is exhorted to hand over the 'rudder of their souls' should, for artistic reasons, remain a vague figure, not too clearly identifiable with Socrates or any other person or persons." This is important. If Socrates really did instruct Clitophon to submit as a slave to another who knows, he would have presumably suggested someone to submit to. He doesn't.

¹¹³ The argument Clitophon attributes to Socrates here is a slight elaboration of what Emily Austin, "Socrates on Why We Should Not Practice Philosophy," *Ancient Philosophy* 40, 2020: 247-265, calls Socrates' apraxia argument. The main difference between Austin's and Clitophon's version of the argument is that the latter presents a disjunction as the appropriate response. I discuss the implications below.

consequence is the same as elsewhere in Plato: Clitophon recognises his aporia.¹¹⁴ Driven outside himself, he surveys the path he travels, sees with alarm to where it leads, and resolves then to turn around.

Clitophon recognising his aporia is clearly essential to Socrates' protreptic. Precisely how Clitophon does not say, and one might be forgiven for believing that aporia provides no resources at all to guide him towards justice. It is after all nothing more than a state of impasse in which progress becomes impossible—not just in discourse, but generally. And this alone is not only of no great value to Clitophon or to anyone else but is actively harmful. The value of his aporia, like most things in Plato, lies in Clitophon's response. And as Vasilis Politis emphasises, aporia is not a phenomenon whose tendrils infect every aspect of a person's life.¹¹⁵ By recognising his aporia, Clitophon does not, and probably should not, come to the knowledge that he knows nothing at all.¹¹⁶ Aporia is in Plato and elsewhere a much more circumscribed phenomenon. Clitophon experiences aporia in response to a discursive problem Socrates poses just as a sailor experiences aporia equally, for example, when their ship runs aground upon a sandbar or when they become lost in unfamiliar waters. These aporiai are not the same. They

¹¹⁴ Commentators confusingly neglect the possibility that Clitophon's version of Socrates' protreptic involves aporia. It's as if aporia were some uniquely Platonic poltergeist that appears only when it is named. Clitophon does not name it here, and so commentators treat it as if it does not appear. Geoffrey Rowe, "In Defense of Clitophon," *Classical Philology* 102(3), 2007: 245-264, incredibly argues, for example, that the *Clitophon* as a whole should be read as an aporetic dialogue because Clitophon comes to aporia at its end, as if that aporia wasn't the last in a long string of unmentioned aporiai and as if Clitophon comes to that aporia only over the course of making his speech. We must remember that aporia is a decidedly common Greek concept with decidedly common implications, implications that Plato frequently draws upon in his depictions of Socrates' protreptic. Its absence in word does not imply its absence in deed. We can cite the same phenomenon in English, for example, by describing a person confused or as tongue-tied. We don't need to say explicitly that the person or the conversation has reached an impasse in order to convey precisely that idea.

¹¹⁵ Vasilis Politis, "Aporia and Searching in the Early Plato," in Lindsay Judson and Vassilis Karasmanis [eds.], *Remembering Socrates: Philosophical Essays*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006: 88-109

¹¹⁶ Even Socrates, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, does not actually go this far, since he admits that the craftsmen are possessed of knowledge of their kinds of expertise. Socrates rather contends that the expert is ignorant of the most important knowledge, which makes the other kinds of expertise worthwhile.

each have a unique cause that contextualises what is at stake and how they must respond.¹¹⁷ And they appropriately react in four stages, which I call here recognition, examination, exploration, and resolution.

A person may of course never notice that they make no progress towards their destination. They continue on carelessly, irresponsibly, unjustly, and must be awoken to their state by someone or something forcing them out of their complacency. This is what Socrates does for Clitophon and claims to do for the Athenians generally in the *Apology*, and it is also what the Delphic Oracle does for Socrates himself. When Clitophon or the sailor first recognise their *aporia*—when they recognise that progress has become impossible for them—they are astonished, struck out of their senses by pity and fear and forced to reflect upon what led them to their present calamity. They therefore examine the cause of their *aporia* in search of a solution. This cause may take a variety of forms—external or internal, concrete or abstract, direct or indirect, individual or social, *et cetera*—and their search will be shaped in large part by its form. Should the sailor have run aground upon a sandbar, their passage is directly blocked by something quite visible, tractable, and concrete. They may disembark from their ship and examine quite easily where the sandbar begins and ends and where they must move their ship to avoid it. Should the sailor, however, become lost in unfamiliar waters, they may continue to move freely, but moving forward or back, port or starboard implies no progress. The cause of

¹¹⁷ Semantic slippage is common in several important Greek authors, wherein *aporia* comes to refer to the feeling of pity and fear associated with recognising one's *aporia* or its causes. The former is typically associated with Plato (see, for example, Myles Burnyeat, "Socratic Midwifery, Platonic Inspiration," *Bulletin of the Institute of Classical Studies* 24, 1976:7-16, Hugh Benson, *Essays on the Philosophy of Socrates*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992; and Charles Kahn, *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996). The latter sometimes appears in Plato, as Politis, "Aporia and Searching," 90-94, argues (see Plato, *Protagoras*, 324d-e), but is most often associated with Aristotle, who uses ἀπορία and its cognates to refer to specific puzzles that demand resolution. See Gareth Matthews, *Socratic Perplexity and the Nature of Philosophy*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

the sailor's aporia is here much more abstract and indirect than the previous. No similarly visible or tractable obstacle exists for them to examine. In their search, then, the lost sailor examines not the unfamiliar waters themselves, but looks beyond them, to the stars or to the horizon or to their clocks in order to triangulate their location and the best route towards their destination. Should they disembark from their ship as if to examine a sandbar, they would become no less lost. They would drown. Clearly, then, correctly identifying and assessing the cause of their aporia is necessary for them to productively explore the means at their disposal to resolve it. Clitophon identifies the cause of his aporia to be his ignorance of justice. Right or wrong, he questions those of Socrates' "associates and fellow aspirants or companions or whatever such a relationship to [him] must be called ... who are believed by [Socrates] to be the best."¹¹⁸ These men have a reputation for knowledge as far as Clitophon is concerned, and so he hopes to learn from them what justice is and how to begin to practice it. Should Clitophon succeed with Socrates' associates in finding a solution to his aporia, then and only then shall he and they put it into practice. Just as the sailor may then disembark from their ship to push it from the sandbar or rechart their maps and turn their rudders, Clitophon learns justice and lives justly. Only then is Clitophon's aporia resolved.

¹¹⁸ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408c-d; Clitophon is concerned in his report of this conversation 1) to protect the anonymity of Socrates' associates lest Socrates' anger later fall upon them, and 2) to focus, as throughout the rest of his speech, on Socrates' personal contribution to his pursuit of justice. He goes to great lengths to refrain from incriminating Socrates' associates in the failure of their subsequent discussion. They remain anonymous throughout and Clitophon reports their answers to his questions indirectly—even to the point of awkwardness—except, as Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialogue," 10, notes, where they name Socrates explicitly as the source of their view. They cannot be held responsible for the failure of Clitophon's pursuit of justice. Like Clitophon, they can say only what Socrates has taught them. Those such as Bryan who criticise Clitophon for this editorialisation with the expectation that he must present a perfectly transparent representation of his pursuit of justice misunderstand the purpose and genre of Clitophon's speech. Clitophon is not telling Socrates about this conversation because he might be interested in its course and contours for their own sake; he is reporting its contents for the purposes of making his own defense, of which a central claim is Socrates' own responsibility for his continued ignorance of justice.

Clitophon has not, of course, reached this final stage at any point in the *Clitophon*. He still feels the urgency of his aporia in pity and fear and searches desperately with Socrates and his associates for a resolution to it, for the meaning of justice and a means of becoming just. But he does so with his problem in full view: had Socrates not exposed his aporia, he would still be satisfied by his ignorance of justice, inasmuch as one can be, and still walk then the unjust path with all its untoward consequences. By recognising his aporia and identifying its cause, then, he claims to turn towards justice: Socrates has shown him a path he might follow in its pursuit. And so he undertakes that pursuit by adopting the Socratic life: he questions Socrates' associates and then Socrates himself about what justice is and how to become just. And he questions them, he tells Socrates, "according to your way (κατὰ σὲ τρόπον)."¹¹⁹ Clitophon, that is, adopts Socrates as the model he attempts to emulate in his pursuit of justice. And this, I argue, plants the seed of his later critique.

3. Pursuit and Aporia

With this seed now planted, Clitophon now narrates its growth from shoots to stem, branch, and fruit—or, more correctly, lack of fruit. He attempts to demonstrate to Socrates his devotion to him and his occupation. He recounts his conversations with Socrates' inner circle about the nature of justice to show that he employs Socrates' own methods in those conversations—moving from practical and concrete to theoretical and abstract, liberally using analogy, exposing ambiguity and circularity, and asking specifically for definitions of relevant terms. But despite all this, Clitophon shows also the limitations of these methods. His conversations make

¹¹⁹ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408d

no progress towards justice or the resolution of his aporia. And this, he thinks, fully justifies his critique. As such, this is the portion of Clitophon's speech that receives the greatest and most severe scholarly commentary; commentators most often draw from it the conclusion that Clitophon misunderstands Socrates' message and the nature of his occupation. I provide in this section, then, a detailed analysis of Clitophon's report to illustrate not only how he thinks his conversations support his later critique but also what motivates each discursive move to show that he does not, in fact, misunderstand Socrates in the ways commentators so often conclude. Clitophon does misunderstand Socrates—let this be clear—but his misunderstanding is evident only later in his speech. I will discuss it in Section 5. For now, let me focus specifically on Clitophon's conversations with Socrates and his associates.

Clitophon begins his pursuit of justice by first asking Socrates' associates what comes next following Socrates' protreptic:

Dearest men ... how ever do you now receive Socrates' turning us towards excellence? As if this were all there is, is it impossible to discuss the matter and grasp it perfectly, or will this be our whole life's product, to turn those not yet turned towards excellence towards excellence, and that person successively another (καὶ ἐκείνους αὖ ἑτέρους)? Or is it necessary that we ask Socrates and one another what comes next, since we speak as one that this is what a man must do? How do we say we should begin the study of justice?¹²⁰

For Clitophon, Socrates' protreptic suggests at least two possible interpretations of justice: either protreptic is all there is to justice—which I will call simple protreptic—or the just person must practice protreptic and something more. Clitophon rejects simple protreptic as circular. Justice simply cannot mean turning others towards turning others towards turning others towards turning others... *ad infinitum*. The problem here isn't that this is

¹²⁰ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408d-e

absurd. Simon Slings rightly emphasises that Clitophon does not belabour the circularity nor secure its vice.¹²¹ There is no indication that Clitophon thinks the circularity implies logical incoherence. Rather, his objection appears to be that if turning others towards justice is all there is to justice, then justice is inconsistent with Socrates' earlier arguments. First, if justice is nothing more than simple protreptic then it is not possible to pursue justice and grasp it fully. While Clitophon can of course practice justice on this model by turning others towards turning others, it becomes senseless, unanalysable, primitive, forever out of the reach of reason. One is possessed of justice as a matter of luck or fate: it is not learned so much as gifted, whether by Socrates, by the gods, or by nature. Socrates suggests, however, that justice can be taught, learned, pursued, and grasped fully, a claim that Clitophon had just previously celebrated.¹²² Second, Socrates is apparently able to speak sensibly about justice, and what he says about it stands at odds with simple protreptic too. It is the ruling principle, he says; it is the knowledge of how to best use one's soul. Simple protreptic does not provide this knowledge. It is not a guide to acting rightly; it cannot answer even the simplest questions about the use of one's wealth or body or soul. If, for example, justice means nothing more than turning others towards justice, then whom shall Clitophon or anyone else turn? Should he turn all others or only some—the wealthy, for instance, or the poor, the powerful, or the knowledgeable? Should he turn those others, whomever they may be, at all times or just when they are most receptive?

¹²¹ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 51-52. Even so, he misunderstands the form of Clitophon's argument. Slings says that "[h]ere, a circular regress is logically out of place ... a complete regress is not reached unless it is proved (quod non) that the end of an exhortation is exhortation itself." (52) But he argues this only because he skips forward in the conversation to where Clitophon and Socrates' associates distinguish justice and its result, then conforms the regress in the *Clitophon* to the superficially similar circularity of *Euthydemus* 292d-e instead of reading straight what Clitophon reports. The regress here is not about its result, but about what protreptic is protreptic to: namely to further protreptic.

¹²² Plato, *Clitophon*, 408c

And how shall he turn them? Should he turn many at once or only individually? Should he turn others by lying or telling the truth? Should he employ the rhetorical tricks of the law courts or the assemblies? Should he bribe others to pursue justice with wealth or honours? Should he threaten them or use force? And how shall he interact with those who have already been turned towards justice? What shall he do if and when every person over all the Earth has been turned towards justice and no one remains to be turned? Clitophon begins his conversation with Socrates' associates with the conjecture that he and they can sensibly answer these and other questions, perhaps with Socrates' inspiration. Simple protreptic cannot. And it cannot therefore be justice.

Clitophon therefore addresses a more specific question to Socrates' associates. He makes a familiar Socratic analogy between the care of the soul towards which Socrates has turned him and the care of the body. Like justice, the care of the body consists of more than simple protreptic: it involves also the practice of "expertise [or] some device (μηχανήν) by means of which the body will be as good as possible."¹²³ He then asks Socrates' associates: if there are kinds of expertise such as medicine and gymnastic that concern the excellence of the body (health), what is that expertise which concerns the excellence of the soul (justice)? Socrates' "associate appearing to be the most vigorous among them, distinguishing himself (ἀποκρινόμενος)" Clitophon reports, "told me that this expertise is what you hear, he said, of Socrates speaking: nothing other than justice."¹²⁴ Michael Davis notes that this answer is curiously ambiguous: Socrates' first associate could mean either first that justice is not itself the excellence of the soul but rather that expertise which concerns it, or second that justice is *both*

¹²³ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408e

¹²⁴ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409a-b

the excellence of the soul *and*, circularly, the expertise which concerns it.¹²⁵ Whichever he means, he directly contradicts Clitophon's earlier conviction that justice is nothing but the excellence of the soul just as health is the excellence of the body.¹²⁶ He specifically did not consider justice to be an expertise. And yet the expertise analogy has become the *locus classicus* for commentators' opposition to Clitophon's speech. That it is Socrates' associate, and not Clitophon himself, who identifies justice as an expertise seems to pass them by unnoticed.

But suppose, as Davis himself maintains, that Socrates' associate answers the way he does because Clitophon first makes the analogy between the care of the soul and the care of the body, and therefore asks what expertise concerns the excellence of the soul. Whatever the merits of that question, Socrates' associates may answer Clitophon in any of at least five distinct ways. They may answer that there is no expertise that concerns the excellence of the soul. They may appeal to some device, some other means for making the soul as good as possible. They may ask Clitophon for clarification about what he intends to ask. They may suggest a better framework with which Clitophon may understand justice. Or, finally, they may identify the expertise. If, as commentators argue, the expertise analogy is such an egregious misinterpretation of Socrates' account of justice, we should expect Socrates' associates, and

¹²⁵ Michael Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks: An Inquiry*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011: 169, truncates Socrates' associate's reply and therefore misunderstands its sense. He says that "the Greek, *hēnper akoueis su legontos Sōkratous*, could also mean not the content of what Socrates says but something like 'what, when Socrates is speaking, you hear.' Justice would not then be what Socrates says one should pursue; it would be Socrates' speaking that one should pursue." This, of course, is not at all suggested by the sentence as a whole because Socrates' associate still identifies Socrates' speaking as an expertise none other than justice. It is important to note that this expertise is an activity and that there is an ambiguity about how it should be understood, either as both expertise and excellence, or as expertise alone. It would be wrong to conclude, however, that this implies that Clitophon should not be pursuing justice even if justice is nothing other than Socrates' activity, whatever that is. Orwin, "On the *Cleitophon*," 124, recognises this same ambiguity, although somewhat less clearly, without making the same mistake Davis does.

¹²⁶ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 164-165, says that Clitophon uses excellence and justice interchangeably throughout the first half of his speech.

especially those whom Socrates believes to be the best, to correct Clitophon on this matter. But they don't. They rather take the apparently unprecedented step of naming justice itself as that expertise which concerns the excellence of the soul. And not only that, but they additionally leave it ambiguous whether justice is also that very excellence of the soul which it concerns.

To resolve this ambiguity, Clitophon entertains the possibility that justice is in fact the expertise which concerns the excellence of the soul. He complains that Socrates' associate has only named justice as the expertise in question without telling him anything about it and returns therefore to his previous analogy between the care of the body and the care of the soul, and the attendant analogy between medicine and justice. He says that medicine "has two ends:¹²⁷ first, to eternally cultivate physicians in addition to those that already exist, and, second, health. The second is not itself an expertise, but of both teaching and being taught the expertise the product we call health."¹²⁸ If justice is an expertise, as Socrates' associate said, then it too has two results: its teachings (δίδαγμα) and its product (ἔργον). The teachings of justice define the procedural aspects of the expertise, which Clitophon accepts once again to be *at least* simple protreptic. The product, conversely, defines the distinctive activity, work, or consequence of justice, and so that for the sake of which we teach it and are taught. To resolve the ambiguity in his interlocutor's definition of justice, then, Clitophon wishes to focus specifically on what this product is, from which he can reasonably infer then how he should begin to practice it, and hence teach and be taught.

Socrates' associates can resolve the ambiguity by defining the product of justice either circularly as justice itself or as something else which can be defined as the excellence of the

¹²⁷ More literally: "it is twice ending (ταύτης δ' ἐστὶν διττὰ τὰ ἀποτελούμενα)."

¹²⁸ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409b

soul. Both, of course, are sensible replies to Clitophon's question. Socrates' first associate replied that it was "the useful (συμφέρον), another, 'the necessary (δέον), someone else, 'the beneficial (ὠφέλιμον), and yet another, 'the profitable (λυσίτελοῦν)."¹²⁹ Clitophon, however, denies that any of these candidate products are plausible. He replies that "these names belong to each of the kinds of expertise, namely to act rightly (ὀρθῶς), profiting (λυσίτελοῦντα), beneficial (ὠφέλιμα), and others such as these."¹³⁰ By refocusing the answers he is given onto actions (πράττειν) belonging to all of the kinds of expertise, Clitophon shows that Socrates' associates have taken a decisive position on the preceding ambiguity. If they believed that the product of justice were itself justice then they would have said as much. They don't. They introduce other goods for the sake of which one does justice. On their view, then, justice is that expertise which concerns the excellence of the soul *where the excellence of the soul is something other than justice*. Slings, failing to recognise just what is at issue in the conversation, dismisses this argument as clumsy.¹³¹ It is not.¹³²

While Clitophon is now satisfied that the preceding ambiguity has been resolved, there is still the matter of what the product of justice really is. "At last," Clitophon says, "one of [Socrates'] companions (ἐταίρων) distinguished himself—and he did appear most distinguished—to say that the product unique to justice, not shared by any of the other kinds of

¹²⁹ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409c

¹³⁰ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409c

¹³¹ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 311, says that "it had been made clear enough that the products of an art are distinct from the art itself; the repetition of the statement is pointless because neither the pupils' answers nor their refutation by Clitophon had at any moment implied that art and object are identical." He has clearly forgotten the ambiguity that he himself identified only eight pages earlier: Socrates' associate did in fact imply, at least possibly, that justice and its product were identical.

¹³² Although it is somewhat *rhetorically* clumsy. Clitophon could make this point better if he simply transformed each word given into an adverb instead of incompletely citing the previous answers and mixing adverbs, participles, and adjectives.

expertise, is to make friendship (φιλίαν) within cities.”¹³³ Slings argues here that “friendship in the cities’ would not have been absurd as a definition of justice,”¹³⁴ which recalls the preceding ambiguity just as it has been resolved and foreshadows the ultimate outcome of Clitophon’s conversation with Socrates’ associates. For if friendship in cities is itself justice then it is once again its own product. But importantly, friendship in cities does not straightforwardly describe an expertise. It is possible, therefore, that while people often give friendship in cities as a definition of justice, it may be more fruitfully distinguished from justice as its product. Clitophon questions then what Socrates’ associate means by friendship in cities in order to clarify that it may indeed be distinguished from justice in just this way. Socrates’ associate defends his account with three distinct manoeuvres. He first specifies quite naturally that the kinds of friendship justice produces are always good and never bad. This excludes those relationships between children and between animals that are sometimes, on his view, wrongly called friendships. Second, he suggests that those good friendships are distinguished by unity of mind (ὁμόνοια). Finally, Socrates’ associate specifies that unity of mind consists in shared knowledge rather than shared belief, since the latter allows for the possibility that unity of mind is not ultimately good. At this point, it becomes clear to Clitophon and everyone else that Socrates’ associate has once again identified justice as the product of justice; he is not merely trading on an ambiguity as Clitophon’s first respondent did, but clearly returns to that position whence the conversation began: justice on his account is nothing more than its teachings, nothing more than simple protreptic. So follows not only Clitophon’s aporia, but that also of Socrates’ associates.

¹³³ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409d

¹³⁴ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 172

Clitophon tells Socrates that, following this unsatisfactory resolution, he asked Socrates himself to answer the same questions he had asked his associates. Socrates, he says, first “said to [him] of justice that it is to harm enemies (ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν) and to make friends well (φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν).”¹³⁵ In response, commentators broadly argue that Clitophon mistakenly attributes to Socrates a definition of justice that properly belongs, on their view, to Polemarchus in the *Republic*.¹³⁶ Socrates never elsewhere says, of course, that it is just to do harm—and indeed says the opposite in several places.¹³⁷ But this alone is not enough to dismiss Clitophon’s report. He says only that this is what Socrates told him: he does not say whether Socrates committed himself to that definition, whether it was given as a hypothesis, or whether Socrates gave it as an interpretation of what Clitophon himself had said. “Perhaps,” as Davis says, “he is not so much proclaiming a doctrine as scolding Cleitophon for unjust behavior to those whom he ought to have considered friends.”¹³⁸

However Socrates gave this definition of justice, it is importantly different from the definition Polemarchus gives. Polemarchus says (apparently against his own inclination¹³⁹) that

¹³⁵ Plato, *Clitophon*, 410a-b

¹³⁶ For this complaint, see Bryan, “Pseudo-Dialogue,” 16; Roochnik, “The Riddle,” 137; Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 174, 193-198 (although Slings hardly *complains*, since, as he says, “Of course, the Socrates of Republic 1, or for that matter of any Platonic dialogue, would never have said such a thing. But those readers of the Clitophon who were acquainted with Republic 1 knew that the definition was proposed there by Polemarchus and refuted by Socrates—when in the Clitophon they encountered a better refutation than the one given in Republic 1, they must have understood that Socrates (in other words Plato himself) was not attacked.” (174))

¹³⁷ See for example *Euthyphro*, 13b-c; *Apology*, 25c-26a, 33d-34a; *Crito*, 49a-54e; *Laches*, 192d; *Euthydemus*, 280e-281e; *Gorgias*, 468c-d, 477d-481b, 511e-512b, 527b-e; *Meno*, 87e-88e.

¹³⁸ Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks*, 169

¹³⁹ In *Republic* I, Polemarchus and Socrates disagree primarily not on justice but on harm. Polemarchus begins by interpreting Simonides as suggesting that justice means to give another their due. Following Socrates’ continued questioning, he infers that this implies exchanging like for like, and therefore that one should harm those who do harm. The unacknowledged implication here is that Polemarchus includes in justice a theory of punishment. But Socrates, of course, does not understand punishment to be harming others; he understands rather that punishment benefits them, or specifically their soul, by inflicting bodily or financial pain. With this definition of harm in hand, defining justice as benefitting friends and harming enemies stands against the spirit of Polemarchus’s argument without refuting it.

justice “gives to friends and enemies (τοῖς φίλοις τε καὶ ἐχθροῖς) respectively benefits and harms (ὠφελίας τε καὶ βλάβας).”¹⁴⁰ The first half of the definition Clitophon reports may be close enough, but the second half is not. Interpreting φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν as nothing more than “benefitting friends,” while capturing Attic idiom, nevertheless neglects the literal ambiguity of the expression, an ambiguity that recalls the central theme of Clitophon’s preceding conversation with Socrates’ associates. Clitophon had asked what comes next after being turned towards justice. He accepts, again, that the just person ought to turn others toward justice. He wants only to know *what else* belongs to it. Socrates’ answer reflects once again the importance of protreptic while attempting to answer Clitophon’s question: justice is to harm enemies and both at once to make friends competently (φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν) and make them good (φίλους εὖ ποιεῖν). The ambiguity here is that same ambiguity that Socrates’ associates had earlier asserted and struggled with. Socrates says that justice is an expertise (or some other means) of making the soul as good as possible without then specifying whether justice is also the best possible state of the soul.

Clitophon’s brief summary of his conversation with Socrates reveals little about its course and its contours, but it does reveal, at least, that its outcome is the same as Clitophon’s preceding conversation with Socrates’ associates: “but later it became clear,” he says, “that the just person never harms anyone, since they do everything for the benefit of everyone.”¹⁴¹ By contradicting only the first half of Socrates’ earlier definition, Clitophon and Socrates effectively disambiguate the meaning of the second half in favour of its circularity. While Slings argues that the claim that the just person benefits everyone can only disambiguate Socrates’ definition of

¹⁴⁰ Plato, *Republic*, 332d

¹⁴¹ Plato, *Clitophon*, 410b

justice if it were intended to be a definition of the product of justice, this cannot be accepted.¹⁴² Clitophon has already rejected the proposal that the beneficial is a plausible candidate for the product of justice because it belongs also to other kinds of expertise. The addition of “for ... everyone (ἐπ’ ... πάντας)” changes nothing. The medical expertise also has the effect of benefiting everyone; it is not simply the sick man whom the physician benefits, but also anyone who is served by the overall health of the community. But whereas the medical expertise benefits everyone by producing something beyond itself, namely health, the same is apparently not true of justice: Clitophon and Socrates conclude together that the just person makes friends well precisely by making friends well; the just person practices justice by making friends just. Whether we accept this is one thing, but it is another thing altogether whether Clitophon and Socrates do. And it is clear that they do not.¹⁴³ Clitophon reports that this was the end of the conversation, he and Socrates having then reached their own aporia. Clitophon had asked him what else, beyond simple protreptic, there was to justice, and he reports that he and Socrates found that there was nothing else. They therefore conclude that they have failed to achieve a full and correct account of justice.

Despite their failure, however, many commentators notice that Clitophon and his interlocutors achieve at least *something* in their conversations. Davis argues, for example, that Clitophon increasingly elides the distinction between his interlocutors and himself as he reports

¹⁴² Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 173

¹⁴³ Mark Kremer, “Socratic Philosophy and the ‘Cleithron,’” *Review of Politics* 62(3), 2000: 494-501, incredibly claims that Clitophon is wrong to identify a problem in the statement of Socrates’ two definitions. Rather, he claims that there is simply a “fundamental duality” in the nature of justice, where one coherent definition of justice pertains to man as citizen and another pertains to man as natural creature. This is supposed to be what Socrates means on account of some rather tendentious literary references and because that’s all Clitophon reports. Clearly Clitophon is reporting the whole of the conversation, and Socrates doesn’t challenge him, so there remains no other way to hold both claims together. The fact that the second is introduced in opposition to the first, and introduced specifically in the passive voice, passes by unnoticed.

their conversations. He at first distinguishes “the associate appearing to be the most vigorous”¹⁴⁴ and the three additional men who each proposed a candidate for the product of justice. When they are refuted, another of Socrates’ associates is said to “distinguish himself” with his reply (ἀπεκρίνατό) before “those present” (παρόντες) refuted “him,” or more properly “himself” (αὐτῷ). Clitophon from here on no longer distinguishes who says what. He switches to passive voice, records the actions of those present in the infinitive, and uses the ambiguous ἔλεγον to mean both at once equally “they said” and “I said.” Ultimately, Davis says, “[t]he group has become absolutely like-minded”¹⁴⁵ in their collective aporia.¹⁴⁶ The same trend is reproduced also in Clitophon’s subsequent conversation with Socrates. Clitophon distinguishes Socrates as claiming that justice is to both harm enemies and make friends well, but then switches to a passive construction—“it became clear that (ἐφάνη) ...”—when it is refuted. He and Socrates reproduce the same circularity as before and their minds are likewise united in their aporia when it cannot be resolved.

Curiously, the unity of mind that Clitophon and his interlocutors achieve lacks the characteristics that Socrates’ final associate attributes to it. Neither Clitophon nor Socrates nor Socrates’ associates, firstly, ever become possessed of the knowledge of an expertise through their conversations, let alone of justice. Clitophon begins the conversation aware of his own ignorance of justice, and indeed as a consequence of that awareness. Socrates’ associates

¹⁴⁴ Plato, *Clitophon*, 409a

¹⁴⁵ Davis, *The Soul of the Greeks*, 171; by “absolutely like-minded,” Davis refers to the Greek ὁμόνοιά, which I translate as “unity of mind” to better reflect the psychological and dramatic implications of this passage.

¹⁴⁶ Gassaway, “Just Silence,” 280, argues that Clitophon’s word choice betrays rather “a lame attempt to conceal his having been reduced to a passive observer in a discussion that he initiated.” There is thus no enduring significance to the collapse of identity in Clitophon’s reports—none, at least, beyond its contribution to the audience’s grasp of Clitophon’s character. I find this implausible. Clitophon seems to be humbling himself before Socrates, emphasising his own aporia, his own ignorance. It is of course *possible* that Clitophon might still be embarrassed about losing control of the conversation, but I see no conclusive evidence of this in the *Clitophon*.

prove themselves ignorant over the course of the conversation. And Socrates himself is of course famously ignorant of justice. No interlocutor entered the conversation possessed of the knowledge of justice, nor did any interlocutor exit the conversation with this knowledge. The ultimate unity came only when all of those present together recognised their aporia. We might be inclined then, as commentators often are, to deny that *technical* knowledge, knowledge of an expertise, is necessary for justice and that justice may be more accurately characterised by the knowledge of ignorance. But this is not the only asymmetry that Plato displays between Socrates' or his associates' claims about justice and his dramatic representation of Clitophon's pursuit of it. A second is that the unity of mind instantiated between Clitophon and his interlocutors does not constitute friendship. Clitophon always describes Socrates' associates as *Socrates'* associates, and not his own. He apparently doesn't speak to them again, and seeks Socrates himself in their place. And while Socrates says, earnestly or not, that Clitophon intends to help him, it's clear also that Clitophon does not treat him like a friend. He criticises him, of course, not privately to his face but to Lysias and possibly also to others besides, and he threatens to do so again should Socrates not do as he asks and teach him justice. This is unjust. And this threat belies a third asymmetry: that despite achieving unity of mind with his interlocutors, Clitophon becomes no better and certainly no happier for it. Clitophon's speech reflects not the triumph one might expect from one who has fully undertaken the philosophical, dialectical life, but rather his misery and injustice.

Through the irony of Clitophon's speech, then, Plato presents a paradox to his readers: Clitophon is both deeply affected by Socratic discourse, having achieved unity of mind with his interlocutors, and nevertheless no better for it. Should we argue as some commentators do

that Clitophon's critique is misplaced because Socrates has already accomplished what Clitophon asks of him, then we must reckon with his continued injustice in the dialogue itself. Should we argue conversely that Clitophon's critique is misplaced because he misunderstands the nature and promise of Socrates' protreptic, then we must reckon likewise with the profound effects that it has genuinely had on him, effects that he does not appear to consciously notice. The only other option, it seems to me, is what Clitophon himself claims: that there remains at least one further step towards justice that he must take and that he has not yet discovered—or that Socrates has not yet revealed.

4. Socrates as Impediment

At this point in his speech, Clitophon's despair is palpable. "Having endured this disappointment not once or twice, but for a truly long time," as he says, he concludes that he simply cannot become just—not at least under Socrates' influence—and so gives up persevering.¹⁴⁷ Whereas he had undertaken the pursuit of justice in response to an initial aporia, he now faces a second. The cause of the first is his ignorance of justice; the cause of this second aporia, Clitophon argues, is Socrates himself. And for Clitophon, this represents a seismic shift in his relationship with Socrates. He is turned away from him, moved to critique his occupation and to defend his critique, breaking free of his previous devotion. While Socrates and his many later defenders claim that Clitophon's critique is beyond the pale, I argue that it is actually quite modest and well-supported within Clitophon's speech, even if Clitophon ultimately misunderstands Socrates' occupation. Before I turn to Clitophon's critics, then, I

¹⁴⁷ Plato, *Clitophon*, 410b

want to take care in this section to clarify precisely what Clitophon's critique means and how he justifies it. And the key to both, I argue, lies in Socrates' protreptic arguments—or more precisely his *lack* of protreptic arguments.

Commentators generally agree that Socrates' discourse genuinely earns the praise Clitophon heaps upon it.¹⁴⁸ And it does so because it is instrumental in, maybe even essential for, Clitophon recognising his aporia, whence he is powerfully and irrevocably turned towards justice—or at least whence he should be. That Clitophon is not so powerfully and irrevocably turned towards justice poses a significant problem for this view. I want to propose in its place, then, that Clitophon is not turned towards justice by recognising his aporia; he is turned towards justice—if he is turned towards justice—by Socrates speaking. And this makes all the difference in the world.

Clitophon's aporia is supposed to turn him towards justice in one of two ways: it is either cathartic or it is zetetic.¹⁴⁹ If recognising his aporia is cathartic then Clitophon is purged of any pretence he might suffer that he is possessed of the knowledge of justice.¹⁵⁰ He becomes acquainted with his ignorance; he knows that he knows not. In this position, then, Clitophon can do no evil; whereas he might before act with impunity, ignorantly heaping injustice upon injustice, he is now forced to reflect and refrain from acting unjustly.¹⁵¹ This is the heart of what Emily Austin calls the Apraxia Argument: to act in ignorance of justice risks great harm, but justice never risks great harm, so it is best never to act in ignorance of justice.¹⁵² It is, of course,

¹⁴⁸ See Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 175-182 (especially 180-181); Marrin, "What's Next," 313; Orwin, "The Case," 749-752; Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 93-127 (especially 124-125).

¹⁴⁹ Politis, "Aporia and Searching," 88-92

¹⁵⁰ Politis, "Aporia and Searching," 96-97

¹⁵¹ Plato, *Lysis*, 218a-b; Cf. Layne, "In Praise of Ignorance," 259-262

¹⁵² Austin, "Why We Should Not," 247-251

a live question what it means not to act here. And it is worth noting that Socrates' noble conclusion, as Clitophon reports it, presents two distinct interpretations: to not act may imply either to keep one's soul at rest, forfeiting one's life, or, if one must live, to submit as a slave to another who knows justice. One cedes the use of one's soul in either case and becomes a passive object for others. And Clitophon may introduce a third possible interpretation with his actual course of action: he neither, as I've said, lays down his life or submits as a slave to another but undertakes the pursuit of justice by questioning Socrates and his associates about the nature of justice. While it of course *looks like* Clitophon refuses to cede the use of his soul, an image about which commentators ceaselessly complain, a more sensitive theory of action may in fact reveal the opposite. Mario Regali argues, for example, that Socrates does not *act* in the relevant sense in his own pursuit of justice but only *reacts* because he lacks "an autonomous path to knowledge."¹⁵³ Without this autonomous path to knowledge, Socrates can do nothing else than respond always to the most immediate and most pressing concern in any given situation, whether it is a demand made by his interlocutor or an argument, claim, dream, or oracle. These things use his soul; he does not. And if Clitophon pursues justice like Socrates does, as he claims to do, then he too may never actually use his soul—for certainly he does not ever claim to possess an autonomous path to knowledge, but always responds to what Socrates' associates and then Socrates himself claim in their conversations. But regardless of whether Regali is right about Socrates—a question I cannot hope to adequately answer here¹⁵⁴—Clitophon does not testify to his own inactivity in response to recognising his aporia.

¹⁵³ Regali, "Mask of Dialogue," 125

¹⁵⁴ I suspect that Regali's interpretation is largely motivated by a need to protect Socrates from the implications of arguments such as Austin's Apraxia Argument, and that it can't succeed at this unless we interpret Socrates

He says that Socrates' words "simply rouse us as if we were sleeping," provoking us, or at least Clitophon, from inaction to action.¹⁵⁵ Clearly, then, any cathartic product his *aporia* might have cannot alone sufficiently explain his subsequent behaviour and so is not operative in turning him towards justice.

If recognising his *aporia* is zetetic then Clitophon is motivated to search for its resolution.¹⁵⁶ Clearly *this* is operative in Clitophon's reaction to Socrates' discourse. He is not only purged of his pretence but is driven beyond himself to undertake the pursuit of that knowledge he now self-consciously lacks. This much is uncontroversial. But it does not so much answer whether by pursuing justice, Clitophon actually turns towards it. This depends upon the particular *aporia*—and specifically upon its cause. The sailor who runs aground upon a sandbar undertakes a very different search than another lost in unfamiliar waters, as I say above. The former is welcome to safely experiment in their *aporia*; they can rock their ship, push off with their oars, disembark to lift their hull, or any other plausible solution they wish to attempt. The cause of their *aporia* presents clear and unambiguous success criteria that then allow the sailor not only to propose possible solutions to their *aporia* but to evaluate in real time whether any possible solution actually resolves it. The sailor lost at sea does not have this same luxury. In a very broad sense, they too may experiment in their *aporia*. They may sail to their port or to

reacting to whatever is most pressing at any given time as his submitting to the gods, who of course author his fate. There is, however, some tension here between this interpretation and Socrates' interpretation of his *daimonion* as merely preventing him from acting unjustly. Presumably, Socrates would have to be able to act if he were to possibly act unjustly. Regali might respond, however, that Socrates' interpretation of his *daimonion* underscores that Socrates doesn't act and that his *daimonion* intervenes to prevent him from acting when he might otherwise. I don't buy this, myself, but to show why requires both a systematic interpretation of Plato's corpus as a whole and a great deal deeper and more detailed theorising about the nature of human action within and without it. But briefly, I believe that a person acts in Plato when they are ignorant and merely reacts when they are possessed of knowledge, in which case they submit to the will of the gods.

¹⁵⁵ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408c

¹⁵⁶ Politis, "Aporia and Searching," 105-109

their starboard over all the Earth until they land upon the shores of Ithaca, so to speak. But unlike the sailor run aground upon a sandbar, they expose themselves to danger by experimenting. They run always the risk of sailing into hostile waters in their search; and they are exponentially more likely to encounter storms and pirates and sea monsters than they ever are to encounter their destination. And as such, the sailor lost at sea is not possessed of evaluable criteria that they might then use to guide their search; they do not turn towards the resolution of their aporia by searching and may in fact turn further away from it.

The problem for Clitophon here is that his pursuit of justice is more akin to the latter sailor than the former. The problem that first motivates his aporia is immaterial to his later search. Clitophon recognises that he is ignorant of justice and that he must therefore either keep his soul at rest or submit to another as a slave. But ignorant of justice as he is, he can't rightly decide which option is just. He must therefore learn justice. But to learn justice and become just distances Clitophon from any actual stake in the problem; having become just, he need neither any longer keep his soul at rest nor submit as a slave. He cannot therefore be possessed of any evaluable criteria that might guide him towards becoming just and so resolving his aporia. He simply cannot tell whether any given movement moves him closer to or further from becoming just until he at last arrives at his destination and knows justice. And yet by searching, he moves from Socrates' apparently disappointing guidance to Thrasymachus and others who may, who *must*, do him harm. To put this all another way, recognising his aporia does not turn Clitophon towards justice.

Even so, Clitophon recognising his aporia does turn him somewhere: purged of his pretence and provoked to seek justice, he turns away from the life he formerly lived. By

exposing his *aporia*, then, Socrates accomplishes two essential elements of *protreptic* enumerated above: he demonstrates the inadequacy of Clitophon's former life and secures his commitment to adopt a new and better one.¹⁵⁷ Together, these two elements amount to *apotreptic*, or turning *away*.¹⁵⁸ If Socrates is to succeed at *protreptic*, he must also propose that new and better life for Clitophon to live. The problem, however, is that Socrates nowhere depicts such a life in his discourse; he praises justice, but he does not tell Clitophon how to live justly. That Clitophon so confidently undertakes the pursuit of justice, then, looks to many commentators like a misinterpretation of what Socrates tells him. These commentators neglect, however, that there are more ways than one to depict a life.¹⁵⁹ And that Clitophon undertakes not only the pursuit of justice but the *Socratic* pursuit of justice should reveal precisely what's going on here. Socrates need not *describe* the just life in his discourse because, as Francisco Gonzalez notes, he *displays* it;¹⁶⁰ Socrates, that is, appears to Clitophon to live justly and know justice. And by so appearing, he turns Clitophon away from his former life and towards the Socratic one: the life spent every day discussing excellence.

I must caution here that displaying a life is simply another means of depicting it. Socrates is no more sincere and no more competent because he shows rather than tells

¹⁵⁷ Collins, *Exhortations*, 132 n. 13, 166-169

¹⁵⁸ Collins, *Exhortations*, 82-87, illustrates the importance of *apotreptic* arguments in Plato's *protreptic*, there specifically about the *Euthydemus*. When he discusses the *Clitophon*, however, he (168) somewhat confusingly interprets it as an *apotreptic* from *protreptic*. A better interpretation, I think, is as a *protreptic* towards *protreptic*.

¹⁵⁹ Of commentators that complain about Clitophon actively questioning Socrates' associates, only Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialogue," 20, recognises that Clitophon adopts the Socratic life. But her complaint then shifts to the quality of his questioning: "Clitophon approaches Socrates' companions before he engages with Socrates himself. So, although he seems to want to engage with Socrates' beliefs, he approaches them via a perversely circuitous route. Further, his engagement with those beliefs as represented by Socrates' companions is a mere shadow of the kind of testing to which Socrates puts his interlocutors in the *elenctic* dialogues." The problem for Bryan, of course, is that Clitophon is explicitly interested in how Socrates' associates attempt to solve the same problems that he himself faces. He is not interested in Socrates' doctrines *per se* except as they pertain to his *aporia*.

¹⁶⁰ Gonzalez, "Constructive *Protreptic*," 176

Clitophon how to live justly, if this is really what he shows. While description alone is always insufficient because there are aspects of justice, or anything for that matter, that cannot be adequately captured or conveyed in propositions, display suffers an analogous problem insofar as it relies always on appearance and perspective. Clitophon's response to his initial aporia is demonstration enough of this: he remains uncertain about precisely what makes Socrates' activity just. Is it merely that he refutes others' souls and praises justice? Or is there something else that makes his activity just in addition to his protreptic? Without a full account of it, Clitophon can only incompletely understand Socrates' activity—always from the outside and always in snapshots. And as incomplete as his understanding must be, he can always interpret and reinterpret Socrates' activity to be just in quite different ways and for quite different reasons. Even if Clitophon adopts Socrates as his model and his muse, and even if Clitophon enthusiastically pursues the Socratic life, he needs Socrates' guidance to become just; without coherent answers to his questions, he cannot reasonably hope to move beyond appearance to the essence of the Socratic life and so actually live it. So understood, Socrates becomes singularly responsible for Clitophon's fate. Clitophon himself has done all he can to become just and must await Socrates' charity. When Socrates does not answer him, then, Clitophon infers that he withholds his knowledge and so prevents him from discovering the nature of justice and so becoming just. He therefore accuses Socrates of causing a second aporia, a meta-aporia, as it were, that prevents him from resolving the first. This is the meaning of Clitophon's critique of Socrates.

5. In Defense of Clitophon

Commentators broadly see in Clitophon's critique two main errors: Clitophon wrongly assumes, first, that Socrates is possessed of that knowledge he seeks, the knowledge of justice, and, second, that Socrates is therefore responsible for the justice or injustice of Clitophon and others.¹⁶¹ Against these claims, they argue not only that Socrates is famously ignorant of justice, and openly so, but that even if Socrates were possessed of that knowledge, Clitophon is still singularly responsible for his fate. Had Clitophon better understood the target of his critique, he could not have ever criticised him—or at least he *would not* have. Socrates earns his praise, but he does not earn his critique.

By so arguing, however, commentators misunderstand themselves the structure of Clitophon's argument. It is true that Clitophon exaggerates the extent to which Socrates is possessed of the knowledge of justice and the role he actually plays in his occupation, but his critique depends on neither claim. In this section, then, I more precisely analyse Clitophon's critique to show that it follows from straightforwardly *Socratic* premises. And I do this by explaining why Clitophon actually misunderstands Socrates. I show here that the ultimate critique justified by Clitophon's speech is actually much harsher than that which Clitophon explicitly endorses. He misunderstands Socrates as a consequence not of any tyrannical impulse on his part, or even desperate searching for justice; he misunderstands Socrates as a consequence of his interpretive *charity*.

¹⁶¹ Each commentator appears to identify a distinct error to be responsible for Clitophon's speech, but only when one neglects the influence of their own unique approach to Plato. Stripped of that, the basic point is consistent throughout. See Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialogue," 13-20; Gassaway, "Just Silence," 275-277; Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 175-182; "Marrin, "What's Next?" 311-313; Moore, "Clitophon and Socrates," 271-273.

Clitophon appears to believe that his critique is justified by Socrates' knowledge of justice and what he says, or doesn't say, about it. But this is a simply paradoxical argument. If Socrates knows justice, then his interactions with Clitophon must necessarily be just whatever he does, whether he withholds his knowledge or not. Clitophon can reasonably criticise Socrates for withholding justice only if Socrates is not possessed of that knowledge to share, but then there is nothing that he actually withholds. It is no surprise, then, that commentators misread Clitophon's critique; surely Clitophon cannot argue something *this* foolish. And indeed he doesn't, but not because he secretly knows that Socrates is ignorant of justice. On the contrary, his defense speech focuses less on his critique of Socrates or on Socrates' knowledge of justice than on Clitophon's devotion to its pursuit. His critique of Socrates is not simply about Socrates withholding his knowledge; it is about from whom he is withholding it. While Socrates knows justice, Clitophon argues that he had until now wrongly believed that Clitophon was insufficiently prepared to learn it. And so he unjustly withholds his knowledge due to ignorance about some other matter than justice itself. The purpose of Clitophon's critique is then not so much to persuade Socrates or anyone else about Socrates' justice; Clitophon uses his critique rather as a bargaining chip to coerce Socrates into teaching him justice. This was almost certainly a common practice among patrons of the sophists and other teachers, who must of course worry that their wise would-be teachers are getting the better of them in their ignorance. To avoid that fate, these would-be students must preserve some form of leverage of their own by threatening to criticise their teachers for withholding their wisdom—even while they recognise the very real danger of receiving knowledge they are not prepared to use or understand. While Plato's readers are in the privileged position of knowing that this is an

inappropriate reaction to Socrates not teaching justice, we must, so to speak, check our privilege to hear Clitophon's speech from his own perspective in order to actually appreciate the structure of his critique. Clitophon is obviously not a reader of Plato, and, ignorant of justice as he is, he has no reliable way of knowing whether Socrates is actually possessed of that knowledge and willing to take him on as a student. As far as he can tell, Socrates is just another among the wise men that flock to Athens to court the patronage of rich, well-connected men like himself. That he appears to stand far above the others only entrenches Clitophon's certainty that Socrates is possessed of knowledge. And so Clitophon makes his argument with what he can only assume to be Socrates' typically sophistic motives in mind.

Clitophon tells Socrates that once he recognised that his pursuit of justice has repeatedly returned to where it began, he concluded that while Socrates is the best at turning others towards justice, he either isn't actually possessed of that knowledge or does not wish to share it. This must be understood as a dilemma, and Clitophon's critique must follow from both horns. The interpretative puzzle for Plato's readers arises only because Clitophon himself disavows the dilemma as a dilemma. Despite admitting the possibility that Socrates is ignorant of justice, Clitophon does not believe that it is actually plausible: he takes great care to avoid even the appearance of so accusing him.¹⁶² He beats around the bush to avoid saying it and when he finally does, he immediately denies its truth. Clitophon is adamant that Socrates is possessed of the knowledge of justice, perhaps even in the face of all evidence to the contrary. But this is not as perplexing as many commentators have assumed. While we can hardly imagine that Clitophon could have missed Socrates' consistent disavowals of knowledge, he is

¹⁶² See Gassaway, "Just Silence," 276.

far from alone in reinterpreting them. Nearly all of Socrates' interlocutors do, and even many of Plato's readers are inclined still to interpret Socrates' disavowals of knowledge as ironic. But alongside these others, Clitophon has far more conclusive reasons to do so. They believe that Socrates is possessed of knowledge primarily because he wields impressive power in his discourses, as I discussed in Chapter 1. And while Clitophon is of course impressed by Socrates' discourse—he not only says as much, but he also compares Socrates explicitly to a god upon a tragic machine—he is also explicitly aware that even someone ignorant of justice can be capable of wielding impressive rhetorical power concerning it.¹⁶³ But while he recognises this possibility, Clitophon denies that it is actually possible in Socrates' case on account of how the arguments he marshals in praise of justice reflect back upon Socrates' own occupation. That Socrates knows justice, for Clitophon, is simply the most plausible interpretation of his activity in light of the kinds of arguments that he makes.

Clitophon recounts a Socrates harshly critical of ignorance. He reproaches his auditors not only for busying themselves with unnecessary, maybe even unjust matters, but also for not knowing justice. He tells them that anyone who knows what's at stake in their activity, just or unjust, could not possibly live as they do. And he concludes nobly, once again, that those ignorant of justice must either keep their soul at rest or submit as a slave to another who knows justice. Knowledge of justice is the only means of living justly. While commentators readily see that this line of argument condemns Clitophon, they much less readily see that it condemns Socrates too. If it is true, as Socrates says, that it is better for the person ignorant of justice to either keep their soul at rest or submit as a slave to another who knows then it is true not only

¹⁶³ Plato, *Clitophon*, 410c

generally, and not only of Clitophon, but also of *Socrates himself*. That Socrates makes this argument while nevertheless questioning others and refuting them implies either that he knows that his activity is just or that he knowingly, hypocritically, and unreasonably acts unjustly. Charity and good sense demand that Clitophon infer the former in preference to the latter. It would surely be unwise for Socrates to make claims that immediately condemn his own activity, and so Clitophon must conclude that Socrates acts and argues in the full knowledge that his occupation is carried out justly.¹⁶⁴ This inference is the bedrock upon which Clitophon founds the entirety of his subsequent pursuit of justice. It is the reason he questions Socrates' associates and then Socrates himself in place of any others. It is the reason he questions them "according to [Socrates'] way."¹⁶⁵ It is the reason he is so certain that protreptic is at least a part of justice when Socrates' earlier discourse does not mention it even once. And it is the reason that he still even now, after so often failing to make any progress whatsoever in his pursuit, must reinterpret Socrates' professions of ignorance not as genuinely sincere claims but as reflections of his unwillingness to share his knowledge.¹⁶⁶ If Socrates is really ignorant of justice then Clitophon wrongly praises his protreptic and the whole of Clitophon's pursuit of justice is for naught: Socrates does not in fact display the just life at all, and cannot thereby turn Clitophon or anyone else towards it.

Clitophon does not know that Socrates' professions of ignorance are sincere or that Socrates cannot therefore guide him towards justice. He is still convinced not only that Socrates

¹⁶⁴ I owe this insight to a former student of mine, Sela Ross.

¹⁶⁵ Plato, *Clitophon*, 408d

¹⁶⁶ While Bryan, "Pseudo-Dialectic," 20, argues that Clitophon betrays his stupidity and carelessness by failing to recognise the truth and significance of Socrates' professions of ignorance, I interpret Clitophon's dilemma itself as an homage to them. Clitophon raising the possibility of Socrates' ignorance is otherwise anomalous given his steadfast opposition to the claim.

acts justly but that Socrates speaks authoritatively about justice. And given this, Clitophon can only conclude that Socrates must eventually reveal to him the knowledge that he now seeks. For even despite the failure of Clitophon's conversations with Socrates and his associates to land upon a secure account of justice, they are all agreed that the just person makes friends well, that justice begets justice, and that justice is the highest expertise. And those agreements must mean something and point towards a more complete account. However, these agreements also reflect the dark underbelly of Socratic discourse. Justice cannot beget resentment or criticism or injustice. As Socrates says himself in the *Theaetetus*,

If you [engage justly in discourse], those who associate with you will blame themselves for their confusion and their difficulties, not you. They will seek your company and think of you as their friend; but they will loathe themselves, and seek refuge from themselves in philosophy, in the hope that they may thereby become different people and be rid forever of the men that they once were. But if you follow the common practice and do the opposite, you will get the opposite results. Instead of philosophers, you will make your companions grow up to be the enemies of philosophy.¹⁶⁷

This is really the key to Clitophon's critique. It is essentially self-justified—justified, that is, by the very fact of Clitophon criticising Socrates in the first place. It follows not only from Socrates' knowingly, justly refusing to teach Clitophon justice but also from his ignorantly, unjustly discoursing with him at all. In either case, Socrates is an impediment to Clitophon's becoming just; in conversation with Socrates, Clitophon can only become ever more unjust, a tyrannical enemy of philosophy.

¹⁶⁷ Plato, *Theaetetus*, 168a [tr. M.J. Levett, rev. Myles Burnyeat]; while Socrates says this on behalf of Protagoras, he does so because he wishes to use it as a regulative ideal for his discussion with Theodorus and Theaetetus.

6. Apprehending Justice

Commentators on the *Clitophon* understandably hesitate to conclude that Plato agrees with Clitophon's critique, let alone the more damning critique that bubbles up from beneath. Socrates is Plato's hero and mentor, they argue; he cannot seriously accuse him of actively causing harm with his discourse, let alone of impeding the pursuit of justice. That Clitophon criticises Socrates leads them to infer then that he is the villain of the dialogue whose errors the reader must recognise to reveal a brilliant and satisfactory justification of Socrates' occupation.¹⁶⁸ But if the *Clitophon* is meant to justify Socrates' occupation, it does not do so through Clitophon's mistakes. I have shown throughout this chapter so far that Clitophon's mistakes actually reflect poorly on Socrates, motivated as they are by charity towards him. They do not grant us license to dismiss his critique, but rather vindicate it. There is another common interpretation, however, that I have only so far addressed in passing: that Socratic discourse, unbeknownst to Clitophon and despite his critique, actually succeeds at guiding him towards becoming just. Slings argues for example that "[a]s Clitophon is obviously the hero, not the villain, of the dialogue, an allusion that he is not walking towards his doom is necessary."¹⁶⁹ That Clitophon goes to Thrasymachus *and others* shows, he thinks, that "he is not going to be an orthodox disciple"¹⁷⁰ and that therefore "Socratic questioning, even when the outcome is negative, is at any rate a stimulus for independent thought" that inoculates Clitophon against Thrasymachus's corrupting influence.¹⁷¹ Even if Clitophon remains ignorant of justice, Slings emphasises that he does not go to Thrasymachus empty-handed. He knows at least that justice

¹⁶⁸ Paraphrasing Schleiermacher, *Introductions*, 349

¹⁶⁹ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 48

¹⁷⁰ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 48

¹⁷¹ Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 178

must somehow involve knowledge, protreptic, friendship, unity of mind, doing no harm, and therefore benefitting all. “[U]nder the disguise of an aporia reached repeatedly in Clitophon’s sessions with Socrates,” Slings argues, Plato “makes it clear that, seen in its proper light, the result is positive when two and two are put together.”¹⁷² The problem, of course, is that there is more than one way to put two and two together, as any passing player of Tetris well knows, and the result may be neither the useful, the appropriate, the beneficial, the profitable, nor indeed the just. We simply cannot trust that Clitophon will upon reflection put two and two together correctly *beyond the text*. If Socrates is vindicated by the *Clitophon*, he must be vindicated within it. In this penultimate section, I show that this cannot be done. I put two and two together *correctly* to develop the account of justice towards which Plato points his reader and illustrate in so doing precisely how Socrates falls short.

Let us return, then, to the beginning of Clitophon’s conversation with Socrates’ associates. Clitophon agrees with Socrates that no one does injustice willingly, that justice is a form of knowledge, and that it is the ruling principle of the soul. He infers thence that justice is not simple protreptic, turning others towards turning others, and asks Socrates’ associates whether there is some expertise or other means that concerns justice by analogy to gymnastic and medicine, which concern the excellence of the body. One of Socrates’ associates answers that this expertise is nothing other than justice, and so Clitophon, noting the ambiguity, refines his question by distinguishing the teachings and the product of an expertise, here by analogy specifically to medicine. He asks Socrates’ associates whether, since justice is a kind of expertise, it has a product that is entirely distinct from itself like medicine has health. They

¹⁷² Slings, *Plato: Clitophon*, 173

claim that it does and identify several candidates. But as the conversation goes on, it becomes clear that none of these candidate products are the true product of justice and in the absence of any plausible product, Clitophon and Socrates' associates return to their initial aporia.

By and large, commentators agree that Clitophon's conversation with Socrates' associates begins to go wrong when Clitophon makes the analogy between medicine and justice. Unlike medicine, justice simply cannot have a product distinct from itself for the sake of which one teaches and is taught. It is the highest good; its product can be nothing other than justice itself. With this I agree. But even so, we must take care to understand precisely what this means and to identify what the disanalogy between medicine and justice actually implies about justice. We should not simply *assume*, as commentators are frequently wont to do, that justice is not in fact a kind of expertise. Clifford Orwin argues, for example, that Clitophon goes wrong by assuming that "happiness depends on *arriving* at the summit of virtue, with speech serving the ancillary purpose of pointing out the way. The Socratic formulation, however, implies that there can be no end to discussing virtue—and therefore no beginning to practising it. Practically speaking, the search replaces the object sought."¹⁷³ There is, in other words, no firm distinction between the teachings and product of justice; justice just is its pursuit. To the extent, then, that Clitophon pursues justice, he has already climbed to its summit; he already practices justice by questioning Socrates' associates and Socrates himself, and so by returning again and again to the same aporia whence he began, growing ever more miserable and ever more desperate until at last he gives up persevering and feels that he must criticise Socrates to Lysias and others.

¹⁷³ Orwin, "The Case against Socrates," 753

This is clearly absurd; if the pursuit of justice were truly identical to justice itself then we should expect Clitophon to live well and be happy, not poorly and miserable.

Recognising precisely this absurdity, many commentators attempt to escape it by arguing that Clitophon is simply confused about the object of his pursuit.¹⁷⁴ By questioning Socrates and his associates as he does, he pursues something other than justice—self-oblivion, for example, or tyrannical power, or any number of other things. If this strategy is going to succeed, it must be possible to construct a coherent psychological profile for Clitophon that explains everything that occurs in the dialogue—every claim that Clitophon makes, every argument, every complaint, and every insistence that he pursues justice—at the same time as it explains how Clitophon actually pursues something else, whatever it happens to be. This is not impossible in principle, and many of Plato’s dialogues can be fruitfully interpreted along similar lines.¹⁷⁵ The problem in this case, however, is that the *Clitophon* extends over no more than four Stephanus pages; it doesn’t provide the resources necessary for this kind of project to get off the ground. Any interpretation of Clitophon’s pursuit that holds that he actually pursues some end other than justice risks underdetermination, and this is precisely what we find from

¹⁷⁴ See for example Marrin, “What’s Next?”; Kremer, “Socratic Philosophy and the *Cleitophon*.”

¹⁷⁵ Francisco Gonzalez, “Giving Thought to the Good Together: Virtue in Plato’s *Protagoras*,” in John Russon and John Sallis [eds.], *Retracing the Platonic Text*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998: 113-154, fruitfully interprets Hippocrates’ role in the *Protagoras* this way, for example. Possibly, Clitophon’s character may be understood by analogy to others like Hippocrates whose pursuit of excellence is misdirected towards the sophistic “arts” because he, like they, follow some sophist as opposed to engaging in dialectic with Socrates. Gonzalez himself, “Constructive Protreptic,” 164, n. 4, reconstructs Clitophon’s critique in a way that may justify this analogy, especially since Clitophon threatens to leave Socrates for Thrasymachus and others at the end of his speech. But there is also an important disanalogy. Hippocrates, for example, begins by pursuing the teachings of Protagoras and uses Socrates as an intermediary; Clitophon, on the other hand, begins by pursuing justice with Socrates, even if he misunderstands what kind of thing justice is, and only goes to Thrasymachus once he determines that the Socratic pursuit of justice bears no fruit. So while Clitophon’s pursuit may be misdirected in the period following his speech in the *Clitophon*, the analogy between Clitophon and Hippocrates, or any other similar figure, doesn’t establish that Clitophon’s pursuit of justice was misdirected within the *Clitophon* itself or before its dramatic date.

those commentators who employ this strategy; they invariably infer from elements of the dialogue more than is actually justified. Marrin argues, for example, that Clitophon actually pursues his own self-oblivion on the decidedly soft, marshy, and altogether insufficient grounds that “[h]e thinks that the problem of the learning of justice is merely an abstract problem, not a problem for him,”¹⁷⁶ that “he is always impatient to move on to ‘what’s next’”¹⁷⁷ and that Socrates reacts to Clitophon’s impatience with “his own patient abiding.”¹⁷⁸ By doing so, Marrin neglects at minimum Clitophon’s initial aporia, which underscores that his ignorance of justice is in fact a pressing and important problem not abstractly, but for him in particular. And there is no clear indication in the text, moreover, that Socrates actually does patiently abide. Nothing about Clitophon’s character can be inferred hence. And even so, Marrin’s argument is nevertheless among the securest in the literature. Commentators argue more commonly that Clitophon is a relativist or a legal positivist in direct contradiction with what he himself says in his speech and primarily on the basis of his very brief appearance in the *Republic*.¹⁷⁹ It is highly doubtful that anything of great significance can be inferred from Clitophon’s appearance in the *Republic* even if Clitophon there presents his own considered opinion, which is itself far from certain.

The *Clitophon* demands a more plausible explanation for Clitophon’s continued injustice. And Orwin himself actually points us towards it.¹⁸⁰ He recognises an important irony

¹⁷⁶ Marrin, “What’s Next?,” 312

¹⁷⁷ Marrin, “What’s Next?,” 310

¹⁷⁸ Marrin, “What’s Next?,” 308

¹⁷⁹ See Blits, “Socratic Teaching,” 77; Kremer, “Socratic Philosophy,” 479-502; Roochnik, “Riddle of the *Cleitophon*,” 140; Orwin, “The Case,” 741-742; Orwin, “On the *Cleitophon*,” 119-120.

¹⁸⁰ Orwin, “The Case,” 751; Gonzalez, “Constructive Protreptic,” 178-179, n. 28, suggests that Orwin shows by making the analogy between gymnastic and justice just how poorly justice adheres to the structure of the kinds of expertise. But as he notes himself, he also objects to Roochnik’s similar argument by suggesting that Roochnik fails

in Clitophon's distinction between the teachings and product of an expertise. Whereas Clitophon had earlier mentioned *both* medicine and gymnastic as kinds of expertise that concern the excellence of the body, he here only mentions medicine. This choice is important. Medicine is unlike gymnastic in ways that illustrate what we might expect also from justice. To teach medicine does not at the same time heal; the teachings and product of the expertise are distinct. The same is not true of gymnastic; its teachings and product essentially overlap: to teach gymnastic—to cultivate the flexibility, strength, and endurance to perform physical tasks—at the same time also cultivates health, which is itself nothing more than the power to perform physical tasks, i.e. gymnastic. Had Clitophon used gymnastic in place of medicine as an analogy for justice, then he, Socrates, and his associates may have recognised just how to move past their aporia or even prevent it, namely by focusing more specifically on the relevant teachings—how, so to speak, to throw the argument, lift the conclusion, outrun the objection, and so on. The same circularity no longer astonishes: of course lifting weights only improves the body's ability to lift weights; discourse likewise only improves the soul's ability to discourse; the relevant question for Clitophon is only how best to do that. And this is where Orwin goes wrong. He assumes that because there is no clear distinction between justice and the product of justice that it therefore isn't a kind of expertise.¹⁸¹ This is the same mistake that Clitophon and Socrates' associates make: it is wrong to assume that the product of an expertise must be distinct from the expertise itself; sometimes an ἐργον is an ἐνεργον, and this appears to be the

to demonstrate that "the knowledge of how to desire and pursue virtue is itself a knowledge of virtue" (178, n. 27). In my view, Gonzalez is correct that the knowledge of how to pursue justice is also the knowledge of justice, but I deny that this is unlike any expertise. In fact, I think it is common among all the kinds of expertise and illustrates in many cases the need for instructors, or at least the need to understand the product of the expertise, which allows a learner to reflect upon how any given procedure contributes to the overall product towards which they aim. This is after all why Clitophon so intently questioned Socrates' associates about it.

¹⁸¹ Orwin, "The Case," 749-751

case for both gymnastic and justice. But even more importantly, Orwin seems to think that gymnastic is identical to the pursuit of health *simpliciter* as if it is not also an autonomous domain of knowledge.¹⁸² No one can reasonably deny that people sometimes pursue health in decidedly unhealthy ways: they starve themselves, they rely excessively on supplements, they exercise to the point of exhaustion, and so on. To pursue health healthily requires knowledge not only about the needs and capacities of the body, but also about how to satisfy those needs and cultivate those capacities—i.e. the causes of health. And if the analogy between gymnastic and justice holds good, as I think the *Clitophon* suggests, then the same is true also of justice *mutatis mutandis*: to pursue justice justly requires knowledge not only about the needs and capacities of the soul, but also about how to satisfy those needs and cultivate those capacities. Clitophon lacks this knowledge and so pursues justice unjustly. His disappointment and his misery follow as a natural consequence.

It may be objected here, however, that this consequence, though natural, is not necessary. Even if we accept, as I have emphasised throughout this chapter, that Socrates too is ignorant of justice, it does not appear that he likewise gives up persevering after returning again and again to the same aporia. On the contrary, Socrates apparently perseveres quite happily through countless aporiai in countless conversations even in the face, ultimately, of his imminent execution by the state. This is, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, essential to Socrates' explanation of his trial, and, if true, stands too in need of explanation. Even so, we must take care not to overstate the difference between Socrates and Clitophon here. The *Clitophon* itself does not provide any evidence whatever for Socrates' apparent perseverance, let alone his

¹⁸² Orwin, "The Case," 751

happiness. It may even suggest the opposite insofar as Socrates accuses Clitophon of criticising him to Lysias and praising Thrasymachus. A synoptic view of the whole of Plato's corpus beyond the *Clitophon* is not much more conclusive either. Socrates appears to shy away from further discussion in the *Parmenides*, for example, after Parmenides finally brings him to his own aporia about his theory of forms, asking Zeno to take his place instead.¹⁸³ But even if this is true of Socrates only when he was younger, Plato rarely depicts him making conversation with the same interlocutor twice in his dialogues, especially after reaching an aporia. In this sense, Socrates may initially believe that Gorgias, for example, is an excellent teacher of justice only to later conclude that he either does not know justice or is not willing to share his knowledge;¹⁸⁴ like Clitophon, he may go himself therefore to Thrasymachus and others to learn justice only to lead them into their own aporiai and move on to the next person and then the next and so on until he is finally executed by the Athenians. If there is any secure difference between Socrates and Clitophon here, it is that only the latter at least appears to stick with Thrasymachus. While Socrates asserts in the *Republic* that he and Thrasymachus are now friends after refuting him in Book I, he clearly does not persevere in attempting to learn justice from him. Clitophon, however, praises Thrasymachus while criticising Socrates; he has not yet found Thrasymachus to be as disappointing as Socrates and may in fact be persuaded by him. It's much less clear that this difference between Socrates and Clitophon, if it is a real difference, vindicates Socrates or further condemns Clitophon.

¹⁸³ Plato, *Parmenides*, 135c-d

¹⁸⁴ This is not, of course, what Socrates actually believes about Gorgias, as he makes clear enough in the *Gorgias*. See Chapter 4.

Even so, that Socrates is never persuaded by any of his interlocutors but rather consistently leads them towards their own aporiai is a curious fact about him that stands still in need of explanation. And while Plato presents several candidate explanations throughout his corpus, the *Clitophon* itself suggests perhaps the most enduring candidate, one that both illustrates just how Socrates falls short of justice and that Plato himself entertains repeatedly throughout his corpus—and that I return to in Chapters 3 and 4. While Clitophon's analogy between medicine and justice may not be an adequate analogy for understanding the nature of justice, it *is* an adequate analogy for understanding Socrates' occupation. Unlike gymnastic, which concerns the proper functioning of the body, medicine concerns its *dysfunction*, its *aporia*, the instances in which its progress is impeded by some injury or illness. By analogy, Socrates' occupation concerns the same but for the soul. But here then is the problem: while the physician has the power to recognise, examine, explore, and ultimately resolve the aporiai of the body, the procedures by which they do this—by cutting and cauterising and administering bitter potions—carry a curious risk: they cause injury and illness when performed on healthy individuals in just the same way that they heal illness and injury in ailing individuals. The expert physician knows, of course, when a given medical procedure is necessary and when it is unnecessary and will cause harm; but should an ignorant man somehow get hold of physician's tools and potions, his use of them would or could cause great harm. So much the same for Socrates' occupation. Performed expertly, Socrates has the power to turn souls not only away from injustice but towards justice, being truly protreptic rather than merely apotreptic. But if Socrates' occupation is performed ignorantly, he has the power only to turn others around, away not only from injustice but also justice, and so corrupting them. That

Clitophon faces aporia after aporia in his conversations with Socrates and his associates, first motivating him to praise Socrates and then to criticise him, suggests that Socrates is this latter sort of soul physician: the ignorant sort that cannot discern when dialectical procedures are appropriate and that therefore risks causing harm to Clitophon and to others.

There is a sense in which Socrates' occupation represents a great achievement. It is not easy to acquire the power to turn a soul around, whether it marched towards injustice or justice. But even if Socrates acquires this power as a consequence of his human wisdom as he describes it in the *Apology*, and even if he stands still as the wisest among the Greeks, there is a crucial point emphasised by the *Clitophon*: that to be the wisest emphatically does not imply wisdom and the most just does not imply justice.¹⁸⁵ Just as the physician should hand off his patients to the gymnasiarch when he is finished with them, so too should Socrates hand off his interlocutors to someone else who can truly exercise and train their souls. But he doesn't do this. He repeatedly subjects Clitophon at least to the same procedures that at first turned him away from injustice, as if he might learn to run by wearing a cast or learn to lift by drinking potions. Clitophon can do only one thing: turn around again and again until he finally falls down dizzy and gives up persevering. Socrates thus falls short of justice.

7. Plato in the *Clitophon*

Like the *Apology*, Plato uses the *Clitophon* to illustrate both the value and the disvalue of Socrates' occupation. But while the *Apology* considers Socrates' occupation as a whole and

¹⁸⁵ By analogy, being the tallest kindergartener does not imply that a child is tall, nor does being the healthiest cancer patient imply that a person is healthy. If everyone falls short of justice, being the most just does not imply justice.

especially its consequences, the *Clitophon* narrows in on the precise consequences of Socrates' occupation that Plato claims to either emulate—turning others away from injustice—or avoid—turning others away from justice.

Commentators have been comfortable at certain times to recognise that the *Clitophon* serves a function like this for Plato, but they very often overstate in what the distinction between Plato's and Socrates' occupation consists. G.M.A. Grube argues for example that

No one will deny that Plato in his earliest works concentrated on *προτρεπτικοὶ λόγοι* such as *Cleitophon* refers to, or that, at a later period, he became more positive in his teaching. We must then suppose that a time came when he was not satisfied with his earlier method. I suggest that this dissatisfaction is expressed in the *Cleitophon*, and that Plato is here just as much in earnest in his criticism of his earlier Socrates as he is in the *Parmenides*, when, at the close of the middle period of his writings, he criticizes the theory of ideas as thus far expressed by himself.¹⁸⁶

Rather than capturing the more modest psychological aims of Plato's dialogues or even the limitations of Socratic discourse, Grube suggests that the *Clitophon* represents for Plato a turn towards specific doctrine. This isn't true. If it were, Plato might present doctrine in "later" dialogues that convincingly answers *Clitophon's* questions. But as George Grote argues, and Gonzalez too long after him, the apparently more doctrinal dialogues do not in fact answer *Clitophon's* critique.¹⁸⁷ If anything they confirm it, such as in the *Republic*.¹⁸⁸ But whereas Grote

¹⁸⁶ Grube, "The *Cleitophon*," 304.

¹⁸⁷ Grote, *Plato and Other Companions*, vol. 3, 423-426; Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 169-170

¹⁸⁸ Socrates there describes a curious limitation of the use of dialectic:

We hold from childhood certain convictions about just and fine things; we're brought up with them as with our parents, we obey and honour them . . . There are other ways of living, however, opposite to these and full of pleasures that flatter the soul and attract it to themselves but which don't persuade sensible people, who continue to honour and obey the convictions of their fathers ... And then a questioner comes along and asks someone of this sort, "What is the fine?" And when he answers what he has heard from the traditional lawgiver, the argument refutes him, and by refuting him often and in many places shakes him from his convictions, and makes him believe that the fine is no more fine than shameful, and the same with the just, the good, and the things he honoured most ... Then, when he no longer honours and obeys those

argues that Plato composes the *Clitophon* in the Epimethean pursuit of the argument and so accidentally condemns himself along with Socrates, Grube rightly notes that it represents a transition in at least some sense and that by writing it, Plato is signalling his own Promethean power as a master of the expertise of justice. This transition is not between subsets of Plato's dialogues, however; Plato uniformly employs the same general method throughout his corpus, which Gonzalez calls "constructive protreptic."¹⁸⁹ Rather, the transition occurs between Socrates' oral dialectic and his own written dialectic.

The *Clitophon* highlights a tension in Socrates' oral dialectic between Socrates' protreptic aspirations and his tendency to leave his interlocutors without guidance, returning repeatedly to that aporia whence Socrates had initially rescued them. The problem, as I have argued, arises because Socrates, although ignorant of justice, unavoidably positions his own life as the model of justice that others ought to emulate.¹⁹⁰ Socrates, in other words, falsely appears to at least some of his interlocutors to know justice and live justly. When they inevitably live like Socrates, they can only discover that justice remains out of their reach. And so while Socrates may accomplish apotreptic, he systematically fails to accomplish protreptic. To succeed at this, he must be able to guide his interlocutors through the resolution of their aporia towards becoming truly just. He cannot do this, and his interlocutors suffer great harm as a result, being now turned away from justice. Whereas Plato hints in this direction in the

convictions and *can't discover the true ones*, will he be likely to adopt any other way of life than that which flatters him? ... And so, I suppose, from being lawful, he becomes lawless. (538c-539a, emphasis added [tr. Grube, rev. Reeve])

¹⁸⁹ Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 169-170

¹⁹⁰ Collins, *Exhortations*, 25, argues that this occurs specifically because "Socrates essentially ignores the effective unity of generic forms" by using multiple rhetorical modes at the same time, and so confusing his interlocutor. I think this is broadly correct, but there is also a deeper problem concerning not simply Socrates' rhetorical mode, but also oral presentation of his elenctic arguments.

Apology, the *Clitophon* leaves little doubt. And in subsequent chapters, I will show that the *Clitophon* is only the tip of the iceberg. Despite all Plato owes to it, he recognises that Socrates' oral dialectic is beset by deep and devastating problems. In Chapter 3, I return once again to the analogy between justice and gymnastic, to Socrates' deficient occupation, but also to its contrast to other deficient occupations in the *Euthydemus*. In Chapter 4, I revisit the analogy between Socrates' occupation and medicine and the consequences of Socrates' ignorance of justice in the *Gorgias*.

But in addition to demonstrating the faults of Socrates' oral dialectic, the *Clitophon* also asserts the excellence of Plato's written dialectic, at least as Plato himself conceives of it. By writing the *Clitophon*, Plato stakes his claim to avoid the same errors that Socrates fails to avoid. He provides for his readers the building blocks of an account of justice and a key to put them together. While he does not and cannot do the private, psychological work of internalising this account of justice and exploring its implications for any single person's life, he nevertheless pushes the conversation forward and gives his readers the resources and the impetus to avoid their own aporiai.

Chapter 3:

The Intersection of Politics and Philosophy in Plato's Euthydemus

*"Pipe down, young, these some whole other politics...
Don't hit him; he got kids with him—my apologies."
– Kendrick Lamar¹⁹¹*

1. Crito and Socrates' Critic

The *Euthydemus* concludes with a serious, powerful, and yet underexplored critique of Socratic philosophy.

After listening to Socrates recount his conversation with the two pancratist brothers, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Crito reports that one of the bystanders to this conversation told him that if he had heard this conversation, he would have "there heard men conversing

¹⁹¹ Kendrick Lamar, "Squabble Up," *GNX*, Verse 3

who are now the wisest about these [kinds of] speeches” who nevertheless say nothing but “speaking foolishly and making worthless haste about worthless things.”¹⁹² Philosophy, this critic continues, “is truly worthless” and Socrates embarrassed himself through his “atypical willingness to submit to men who care not for what they might say, but cling to everything said.”¹⁹³ Crito hesitantly agrees: “it is not correct,” he says, “to critique the practice, whether this man or anyone else critiques it; however, to be willing to converse before many men seems to me to be blameworthy.”¹⁹⁴

Socrates responds by asking Crito about the sort of man this was who attacked philosophy: “was he either of those marvellous people to contend in the courts, some orator, or of those sending them there, a writer of speeches with which the orators contend?”¹⁹⁵ Crito answers that he is someone who has not ever appeared in court but who understands its affairs and who has the power to compose clever speeches. Socrates replies then that men of this sort can produce only a plausible argument, and not a true one, for they stand at the intersection (μεθόρια) of philosophy and politics. In this position, Socrates argues, they can only be better than either philosophy or politics if both are bad; if both are good, however, or even if just one is good, then the man partaking of both can only be “worse than both with respect to the speech for which both politics and philosophy is valuable.”¹⁹⁶

Socrates’ response faces two immediate and obvious problems. In the first place, he addresses the critic but not the critique, suggesting that he critiques him because he wishes to elevate himself from an inferior evaluation to a superior, without showing how such an inferior

¹⁹² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 304e

¹⁹³ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305a

¹⁹⁴ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305b

¹⁹⁵ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305b

¹⁹⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 306c

person must be wrong in this specific case. Second, Socrates' response is only plausible insofar as his critic is in fact inferior and therefore if philosophy and politics are both good and not in some way limited by their tools and techniques—if, that is, the critic is already wrong about his critique. Socrates cannot overcome these problems and Plato reveals precisely why earlier in the dialogue. He has Socrates himself argue that the knowledge philosophy seeks “is that which brings together at the same time creating and knowing [how] to use what it creates.”¹⁹⁷ If Socrates is right that his critic stands at the intersection of philosophy and politics then he practices that very expertise, that very knowledge that brings together creating and knowing how to use in this way; and while Socrates argues against this insisting that since philosophy and politics are both good, the intersecting practice is worse, Plato shows through the drama of the dialogue first that philosophy is bad insofar as it can only create this knowledge and second that politics is bad likewise because it can only use it; only the expertise that stands at their intersection and partakes of both can both create and use the highest knowledge, the knowledge through which all other goods become good. If Socrates' critic really is possessed of this expertise, then Socrates' response to his critic cannot succeed; he should not then be willing to argue with unserious people such as Euthydemus and Dionysodorus before large crowds and he should take the very same advice that he gave to them: that they “best converse with one another alone, or if not, if before others, single out that person who would give you money. And this same advice, if you are wise, you will give to your students: to never and with no man converse but with you and with themselves.”¹⁹⁸

¹⁹⁷ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 289b

¹⁹⁸ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 304a-b

I develop this argument in three stages. I begin in Section 2 by more thoroughly analysing the critique as Crito relays it to Socrates. I focus there on the kind of people Euthydemus and Dionysodorus are and Socrates' reaction to them in order to show both that the two brothers are in fact unserious and worthless and that Socrates nevertheless takes them seriously in ways that he should not. In Section 3, I concern myself with Socrates' response, showing not only that it fails to refute his critic but also that it fails as a consequence of the claims that Socrates himself, with Clinias, earlier defends and demonstrates in his so-called First and Second Protreptic. While Socrates establishes that philosophy is a good, it is at best a conditional good, a good on par with health and wealth and all the other things that themselves require knowledge to be used well and so become good. As a consequence, I argue, Socrates should in fact *agree* with his critic. Finally, in Section 4, I turn back to Socrates' critic. I argue here that Plato presents him not only as a critic of Socrates but also as a description of a genuinely wise man, a man whom he and others ought to emulate in place of Socrates or the brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Socrates is correct, in other words, that his critic stands at the intersection of philosophy and politics, and as a consequence, he in fact supersedes both of those bad but conditionally good kinds of expertise of which he partakes.

2. Socrates' Responsibility for Worthless Squabbling

Socrates' critic makes three claims in his critique of Socrates: (1) that the practice (τὸ πρᾶγμα) is petty and laughable (φαῦλοί ... καὶ καταγέλαστοι), (2) that those occupying themselves with it are also petty and laughable, and (3) that Socrates wrongfully surrenders to these men, willingly handing himself over to them, and so making himself their instrument. This is, I argue

here, an exceptionally serious critique, and one that Socrates himself confirms. In this section, I illustrate its stakes and the evidence that can be marshalled in its favour.

Socrates' critic trains his ire first and most significantly upon the *practice* exemplified by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. He bemoans that the brothers and others like them are at present among the most powerful even despite (or because of) how ridiculous their practice actually is. The problem is this, he says: that these men care not what they say but cling to or grapple with (ἀντέχονται) everything said. This claim cuts two ways, predicated as it is upon the analogy to wrestling. First, the brothers defend anything they say, however implausible, and, second, attack whatever others say, however plausible. In both cases they are ruthless, holding on to every claim irrespective of its meaning, coherence, or truth in an effort simply to defeat and destroy their interlocutor. And in this effort, they cannot but by accident speak well or truly. There is little doubt that Socrates' critic is correct about what the brothers' practice entails; Socrates himself has already depicted the brothers doing just this before Crito reports to him his critic's argument: viciously attacking every claim that anyone else makes and defending at any cost their own assertions. We may more reasonably doubt, however, that Socrates' critic is correct about the *value* of this practice. While he implies that it is obviously worthless—so obviously worthless, in fact, that he does not even explain *how* it is worthless—, Socrates himself, at least, and others present with him apparently don't recognise this obvious fact and devote themselves to studying with the brothers.

At the outset of Socrates' conversation with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, the latter claims that he and his brother “most beautifully turn [others] towards philosophy and the care

for excellence.”¹⁹⁹ Socrates therefore requests a demonstration from them. He challenges the brothers to do what they say they can do best and turn Clinias towards philosophy and the care for excellence. He explains who Clinias is and why he has issued this challenge: “I and everyone present happen to set our heart upon him becoming the best ... [because] Clinias is young: we are frightened about him, such as is appropriate about [any] young man, in case someone might overtake us, turning his thought towards some other vocation, and corrupt [him].”²⁰⁰ Socrates’ fear here is particularly ironic, as I show below, but whatever Socrates’ motivation, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus accept the challenge on the condition that Clinias is willing to answer them. Socrates said that he is willing, so they begin to question him. As Dionysodorus makes clear to Socrates, however, his and Euthydemus’s questions are simply not answerable: “whichever way the boy answers,” he whispers to Socrates as Clinias attempts his response, “he will be refuted.”²⁰¹ The succeeding discussion proves Dionysodorus correct: Clinias cannot answer any of the questions put to him without ultimately appearing to contradict himself or some generally accepted opinion; the brothers have him in the palm of their hand, so to speak. Of course, it is no significant feat of expertise to trap a young and untutored boy in contradictions; the question we must ask of the brothers is whether by doing this they succeed in persuading Clinias to undertake philosophy and care for excellence. And Socrates himself provides a framework for understanding how the brothers’ method might succeed. When he intervenes to save Clinias from a third bout of questions, he tells him that the brothers

do the very same things as in the Corybantic rites whenever they perform the enthronement of the person they are about to initiate, for there is dancing there

¹⁹⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 275a

²⁰⁰ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 275a, b

²⁰¹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 275e

and games, if, consequently, you were initiated. And now these two do nothing but dance about you and act out gaming in pursuit of initiating you. Now acknowledge that you hear the first of the prayers of the sophists. For first, as Prodicus says, you need to learn about correct words, and this exactly our guests point out to you.²⁰²

If this is right, the brothers' questions serve as a kind of proleptic, and one similar to common descriptions of Socrates' own manner of questioning. As I discuss more thoroughly in Chapter 2, Socrates' oral dialectic is often modeled by commentators as a two-part process: a first part in which Socrates refutes his interlocutor, exposing their *aporia*, and a second part consisting of an attempt by Socrates and/or his interlocutor to resolve the *aporia* previously exposed. There are, as I showed in that aforementioned chapter, significant problems with this model of Socratic dialectic. But if Euthydemus and Dionysodorus attempt to persuade Clinias to practice philosophy and care for excellence in an analogous way, then they may plausibly benefit him yet. Clinias need only, first, recognise his ignorance about the correct use of words, as Socrates says, and then undertake to repair this ignorance in some way. There are two ways in which this could go. First, these two parts could occur sequentially as distinct steps such that the brothers simply pin Clinias or force him to submit and only thereafter illustrate the meaning of his defeat, persuading him by some other, secondary argument to practice philosophy and care for excellence. Second, these two parts could occur simultaneously in a single, repeated step such that the brothers beat up on Clinias until he somehow eventually develops an argument that withstands the brothers' attacks. Given that Dionysodorus seems to believe that Clinias will be refuted whatever he says, we can imagine that the latter is not the brothers' intended strategy, but in either case, by hypothesis, if they can sufficiently refute Clinias, they will arrive

²⁰² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 277d-e

at a point in which Clinias will have been persuaded to practice philosophy and care for excellence.

It is no secret that the brothers do not here or ever arrive at this point, but not clearly through some fault of their own. Socrates' intervention interrupts their process, presumably preventing Clinias from finally recognising his *aporia* and devoting himself to resolve it. Here, then, Socrates displays a markedly ambivalent attitude towards the brothers' method. Whereas he rationalises it and understands how it *could* benefit Clinias, he also recognises more deeply the violence inherent to it. When Clinias is first refuted by Euthydemus, for example, and the brothers' followers burst into laughter and applause, Socrates says that "we," presumably Socrates and Clinias and his admirers, "were struck out of our senses and kept silent."²⁰³ And when Socrates intervenes after a second bout of questions, he says that he does so in order to prevent Clinias from shamefully losing his courage. He clearly does not believe, despite his apparent praise, that throwing, pinning, or submitting Clinias will actually persuade him to practice philosophy and care for excellence. He says as much immediately after his praise, dismissing the brothers' method as mere play and suggesting that "if one were to learn many or even all such things, he would no more know how to command the practice but to play games such as are, through the distinctions of names, both tripping men up and overturning them."²⁰⁴ Socrates' hesitation about the worth of the brothers' practice does not last long, however. He changes his tune immediately thereafter, suggesting once again that the brothers will soon move on to their second, more serious discourse—the greater sophistic mysteries—, if only they be reminded of what Socrates asks them to demonstrate.

²⁰³ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 276d

²⁰⁴ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 278b

As we, Plato's readers, take a step back from Socrates' perspective, however, the worth—or more correctly worthlessness—of the brothers' practice comes more sharply into view. Plato depicts a Socrates that praises the brothers not for what they do but for what they *promise*. The brothers claim that they are capable of doing serious good, and it would be unreasonable to assert without good reason that they are simply lying, especially when they have amassed such a dedicated following. At every stage in the conversation, then, Socrates is interested in discovering how it is that the brothers can fulfill their promise and actually do good. He persistently interprets them, in other words, with the utmost charity. But while he does that, he also implicitly recognises that the most plausible interpretation of what the brothers actually do is not the charitable interpretation. While it is *possible* that the brothers successfully turn Clinias towards philosophy and care for excellence, it is more likely that they merely assault him and beat him up. Plato emphasises the contrast between the brothers' promise and their practice most clearly when he has Socrates himself take on the challenge that he earlier gave to the brothers, invoking a genuine contest between their two distinct types of discourse. While Socrates disparages his own protreptic power as amateur and defers to the greater wisdom of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, Plato shows that the reverse is actually the case. Socrates apparently succeeds in turning Clinias towards philosophy and the care for excellence by adopting a fundamentally different strategy than the brothers employ (and than Socrates himself employs in other dialogues): rather than repeatedly refuting Clinias, he leads him without refuting him even once through a series of argumentative steps from claims in which Clinias already believes toward his intended destination, a claim that he does not already believe: that he ought to practice philosophy and care for excellence. The distinction between

Socrates' practice here and the brothers' could not be clearer. While the brothers hunt Clinias himself, assaulting him with arguments in order to capture and manipulate his soul, Socrates hunts *with* Clinias some other object, some knowledge distinct from Clinias himself. And by doing so, Socrates turns Clinias towards continuing this hunt.

It's worth noting that Socrates does not here decisively defeat the brothers. In the first place, any contest between them was not established explicitly and not invoked fairly. Socrates of course interrupts the brothers' discourse at a point in which they may themselves have come to their desired conclusion. And thereafter, Socrates spends with Clinias twice as much time—or at least twice as many words—as he allows the brothers to spend with him; it is at least possible, however unlikely, that equal opportunity would produce an equal outcome. Second, there is no dramatic indication, no applause or resignation or anything else, that a contest has come to a close. Instead, Socrates hands Clinias back over to Euthydemus and Dionysodorus in order that they themselves either once again but more professionally turn him towards philosophy and the care for excellence or carry on the argument and do what comes next after Clinias has been so turned. The brothers do neither. Instead, they do their best Dick Cheney impression and train their speech not on the object for which Socrates asks them to hunt but upon the hunters themselves, and specifically Socrates. Whereas Socrates had previously intervened to save Clinias from being thrown by the brothers a third time, Dionysodorus now suggests that Socrates' subsequent request amounts to an even more extreme and adverse consequence: that Clinias actually die. Clearly, then, the rules of the contest need to be negotiated. If the brothers are going to participate, they need some assurance that Socrates will not again interrupt them. And while the argument they employ towards this end is obviously

invalid—a parody, indeed, of a Parmenidean argument against the possibility of change—they nevertheless succeed in securing Socrates’ agreement. Dionysodorus argues that since Socrates wishes that Clinias be improved by the brothers and that to be improved implies that he become what he is not—wise rather than ignorant—Socrates must therefore wish that Clinias become what he is not and no longer be what he is now. This apparently means, Dionysodorus says, that Socrates in fact wishes for Clinias to die. Socrates tells Crito that he, “hearing, was confused,”²⁰⁵ but a raging Ctesippus would point out precisely how Dionysodorus’s argument is invalid while nevertheless creating the conditions for Socrates yielding to it nevertheless. Ctesippus points out that the brothers consistently and deceptively equivocate about the meanings of words. Conclusions follow from premises only if the meanings of the relevant terms are preserved from premise to conclusion, and so the relevant claims must be true at the same time and in the same respect as the others in an argument. But the brothers’ arguments consistently confuse the respects in which their claims are true by trading on surface similarities or surface differences in the words that they use. They, in other words, cling to the words of their and their interlocutors’ arguments rather than pressing beyond them to the concepts and the facts. The brothers’ argument is not only logically invalid, Ctesippus argues, but actively deceptive, dishonourable, and characteristic of their practice more generally. But as Ctesippus begins to overwhelm the brothers with this exposition of their practice, Dionysodorus accuses him of abuse. Ctesippus denies this but the accusation is enough for Socrates to intervene once again. “I certainly, hereafter, expecting them to become more savage towards one another,” Socrates says, “joked with Ctesippus and said, ‘Ctesippus, I firmly believe that we should accept

²⁰⁵ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 283d

what the visitors say, if they are willing to forgive and not dispute over a word. For if they know how to destroy a man in this way so as to make from the useless and unthinking the useful and thinking ... then let us come together with them, destroying the boy and making him thoughtful.”²⁰⁶

While Ctesippus agrees and, with Socrates, commits to additionally hand himself over to be destroyed and improved by the brothers, he also emphasises once again that he did not intend to abuse Dionysodorus with his earlier challenge, but meant only to contradict him. Dionysodorus seizes upon this in what can only be understood once again as a point of negotiation. Dionysodorus does not wish to be contradicted, and he goes so far as to argue that it is not even possible that he could be. He reminds Ctesippus that “no one says how [a thing] is not, for no one appeared to say nothing.”²⁰⁷ If Dionysodorus and Ctesippus both say the same things about the same things, however, then they cannot contradict each other, nor if neither says anything about the same things at all. Further, Dionysodorus argues, if he says something about a thing and Ctesippus says nothing about that same thing, then there can also be no contradiction, even if the latter *appears* to say something about the thing. More generally, if there were a contradiction between the two then one of them must speak falsely, and to speak falsely implies that one says nothing at all about the thing in question. Ctesippus cannot ever contradict Dionysodorus, therefore, and the implication is that he should stop trying. Socrates, however, has another idea. He points out that this argument, used also by others such as the followers of Protagoras, ends up overturning also itself. Here, then, Plato begins to show his readers precisely how ridiculous, how petty and laughable, the brothers’ practice actually is,

²⁰⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 285a, 285b

²⁰⁷ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 286a

premised as it is upon a set of claims that ultimately trivialise it. He has Socrates more thoroughly examine the implications of Dionysodorus's argument in light of the very practice he undertakes throughout the conversation. If Dionysodorus is right then there is no such thing as speaking falsely or believing falsely and no such thing therefore as ignorance. What, Socrates then asks, does Dionysodorus claim to teach? If there is no such thing as ignorance then everyone already knows everything and he and Euthydemus cannot add knowledge to the minds of any of their apparent students. But if they do teach something then their students must be somehow mistaken and Dionysodorus is wrong that there is no such thing as ignorance and, therefore, contradiction. In either case, Dionysodorus turns out to have been wrong.

There is no denying at this point that Socrates' critic is correct at least about the brothers themselves. And as Socrates continues narrating the conversation to Crito, they would prove only more ridiculous, employing a method singularly unsuited to the task to which they themselves put it. When Ctesippus reenters the conversation in order to taunt the brothers, however, Socrates backs away from the conclusion he had just reached. Ctesippus does not recognise the brothers' wisdom, he says, and the brothers must simply be joking still, refusing to give a serious demonstration of it. As such, Socrates sets himself to carry on the argument with Clinias to discover the knowledge that Clinias had just now been turned toward seeking. Here again, Plato has Socrates transform an earlier challenge into a genuine contest. Socrates had requested that the brothers' continue on from where he concluded with Clinias in his protreptic argument, and now he undertakes to do this himself and become once again a competitor in the games that he initiates. But unlike in the first case, Euthydemus and Dionysodorus have not yet taken their turn. And this becomes crucial, for despite some early

progress, progress indeed that Crito scarcely believes possible, Socrates and Clinias ultimately fumble the argument, and the brothers receive the turnover.

Socrates and Clinias had been seeking the knowledge through which all other, conditional goods become good and which both acquires and uses the highest good. I analyse different aspects of this search more thoroughly below in Sections 3 and 4. For now, it is important only to mention that Socrates and Clinias tentatively settle upon kingship, or politics, as the best candidate for which they seek because it is that kind of expertise through which a person knows how to use all the other goods. But in arriving here, they arrive also at a puzzle: if kingship is the highest knowledge, then it can only create unconditional goods, and since, if they are right, it is the only unconditional good, it can create only itself; but if this is actually true then kingship is problematically circular. A person is good, then, only by teaching others the kingly expertise to teach yet others the kingly expertise to teach again yet others, and so on. This is, as I discuss in Chapter 2 the same apparent problem that animates Clitophon's critique of Socrates in the dialogue that bears his name. And like in the *Clitophon*, Socrates and Clinias prove unable to resolve the problem set before them. They call upon Euthydemus to rescue them from their aporia, and he arrives offering to either teach them the knowledge they have hitherto sought or demonstrate that they are already possessed of it. Socrates naturally (if somewhat ironically) demands that Euthydemus do the latter. But as Euthydemus carries out this demonstration, it quickly becomes apparent that he argues according to the same fallacious method that his brother employed earlier. If Socrates knows anything, he suggests, then he is knowing, and if he is knowing then he cannot be unknowing, but if he didn't know the knowledge that he and Clinias seek then he would be unknowing, so he must know it if he

knows anything at all. That this argument goes in both directions apparently passes by Euthydemus unnoticed until Socrates points it out. Dionysodorus intervenes to emphasise the point, asserting once again that he and his brother and indeed everyone must know everything if they really know something, and they of course know something, so they must know everything. Putting the conceptual problems aside momentarily, Ctesippus once again breaks into the conversation and demands evidence from the brothers. They cannot simply assert that they know cobbling and carpentry and the number of the stars and sands without being able to somehow demonstrate their knowledge. Ctesippus therefore asks for such a demonstration, starting simply by asking Dionysodorus how many teeth Euthydemus has in his head, a fact that can be verified by nothing more complicated than counting. But Dionysodorus refuses for fear of being laughed at. And yet, he continues to claim, Socrates tells Crito, that he knows how to do anything and everything from the trivial to the absurd. Socrates himself, he says, “would not believe it but for the probability that you are both wise men.”²⁰⁸ As a consequence, Socrates insists that the brothers continue their demonstration, asking them to prove once again that Socrates is already possessed of the knowledge that he and Clinias earlier sought.

As Euthydemus resumes his demonstration, he naturally returns once again to that same fallacious method as before, leading Socrates through an argument founded upon equivocation and chastising him for making distinctions within his answers. When Euthydemus arrives at his conclusion, Socrates remains unsatisfied. He flatters the brothers but asks them now whether he knows also that the good are unjust in addition to all the other things he apparently knows. Dionysodorus confirms at first that he does know this, but quickly pivots to

²⁰⁸ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 295a

asserting that Socrates knows only that the good are just and not that they are unjust. Euthydemus reprimands his brother for ruining the argument and Socrates pounces upon the opportunity, noticing that by reprimanding Dionysodorus, Euthydemus appears to deny what he earlier asserted: that he and his brother know everything and cannot err. Perhaps the brothers should have been ashamed about this or somehow change course, but they aren't and don't. They henceforth continue on as they have been, biting every bullet placed before them and becoming ever more ridiculous with each passing argument until at last Ctesippus forces Dionysodorus to give a directly contradictory answer and taunting Euthydemus with it. But if they were not ashamed earlier, they would not be ashamed now. The brothers press on, pivoting to yet another argument and yet still another until Euthydemus finally succeeds in silencing Socrates by arguing that if he has gods like he has goats then they are both his, and if they are his then he can do what he wishes with them, selling them or giving them away or anything else. Clearly, Euthydemus has not made here or anywhere a sound argument, and neither he nor Dionysodorus succeed therefore in demonstrating what Socrates asks them to demonstrate. And yet, as Socrates says, "even the pillars themselves of the Lyceum applauded the two men and were pleased."²⁰⁹

That Socrates' critic emerges from this very situation only to critique the brothers' practice, however, throws Socrates' (admittedly ambiguous and probably ironic) description into doubt. Socrates may not hear applause but a more terrible and cathartic uproar: the pillars of the Lyceum and all those present about them may not be laughing *with* the brothers but *at* them. And in a way, Socrates himself provides the very reason for this laughter. He praises the

²⁰⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 303b

brothers for three aspects of their practice that turn out to be also the very grounds of their ridiculousness: first that they are uninterested in both the many and men of value and well-repute, but are interested only in those like themselves such that there are few who would not be more ashamed to refute than be refuted by their arguments; second that when they make seemingly ridiculous claims, they are nevertheless able to stitch closed men's mouths as they oppose them, but also their own; and third that they exhibit their expertise so expertly in fact that anyone can quickly master it without much effort, as Ctesippus apparently does. That commentators so often interpret Socrates' praise here as back-handed is suggestive enough, in light of the preceding, of how these features of the brothers' practice vindicate Socrates' critic: the brothers' arguments are in fact shameful, self-refuting, and can quickly corrupt those who hear them and who don't know any better. Whether Socrates himself actually intends this is unclear and interesting, as I discuss shortly, but it is also irrelevant. Whatever Socrates himself intends, Socrates' critic agrees with the back-handed interpretation of Socrates' praise of the brothers' practice. And in this case, he is surely correct that it is petty and laughable—and also dangerous.

We can reasonably ask here, however, whether Socrates' critic can actually prove his case in full. While he suggests that both the practice and the practitioners are petty and laughable, it is at least possible that the practitioners are petty and laughable at the same time as the practice itself is not. And Socrates may suggest precisely this in his final response to Crito at the very end of the dialogue. While Crito bemoans his difficulty deciding what to do about his sons' education and tells Socrates that "whenever I pay attention to those professing to educate men, I am astonished and, it seems to me, each one of them looks to be altogether

uncouth,”²¹⁰ Socrates replies that Crito ought to pay no attention to the practitioners but “examine beautifully and well the practice itself.”²¹¹ As far as he is concerned, we ought always to turn ourselves and others towards good practices even if “in every pursuit the inferior are many and no one values [them], while the serious are few and everyone values [them];”²¹² even a poor gymnast can help a person become stronger, faster, and fitter, after all. Whether the brothers are petty and laughable, therefore, need not imply anything one way or the other about their practice. And yet, as I have emphasised throughout this section already, it is quite difficult to attribute each of the petty and laughable events of the conversation to the brothers alone and not their practice more generally. It is certainly true that the brothers make mistakes, as Euthydemus’s reproach of his brother for ruining the argument makes clear, but the vast majority of their activity appears well conducted by the standards of their practice itself: it is their goal to hunt Socrates, surrounding him with words, as he says, and to do the same with Clinias and Ctesippus and anyone else they happen to speak to, and they prove to be successful at this. Socrates at least describes himself as captured or even enslaved (καταδουλωθεῖς) by the brothers’ wisdom at the close of the conversation, and Ctesippus apparently also declared the brothers invincible (ἀμάχω). Clearly, then, the brothers being petty and laughable doesn’t affect their success. And as such, we can confidently conclude, with Socrates’ critic, that the brothers’ practice itself is also, at the same time as the brothers themselves, petty and laughable—they become successful, but at achieving some aim for which it is better to have failed.

²¹⁰ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 306e

²¹¹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 307a

²¹² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 307a

That the brothers succeed as they do despite their petty and laughable practice reflects poorly upon Socrates, but not in the way that Crito initially assumes. When Socrates' critic first tells Crito that Socrates' conversation with the brothers resulted nothing but worthless squabbling, Crito immediately counters that "philosophy is surely a graceful kind of thing."²¹³ Socrates' critic did not, however, say anything about philosophy. As Georgia Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi emphasises, Socrates' critic refers only to "the practice" in reference to the brothers.²¹⁴ And after Crito mentions philosophy, the critic replies by presenting a distinct and separate critique of Socrates. Whereas the brothers' practice is petty and laughable, Socrates errs by treating seriously the unserious. Crito, however, does not appear to recognise the distinction, and continuously conflates the two all the way to the end of the dialogue. When Socrates tells him to examine the practice itself, then, he may intend to emphasise that Crito himself must more thoroughly and adroitly distinguish the practice he has in mind and evaluate it on its own terms—unless, that is, Socrates too is similarly confused. Whatever the case, Socrates' error does not in any way depend upon and cannot be excused by his understanding or misunderstanding of the relationship between his practice and the brothers'. Socrates' critic critiques Socrates for wrongfully and willingly surrendering to the brothers. It does not matter here whether the brothers themselves or their practice is ultimately the cause of their being petty and laughable; in either case, Socrates should not have taken the conversation with them seriously.

²¹³ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 304e

²¹⁴ Georgia Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi, *Playful Philosophy and Serious Sophistry: A Reading of Plato's Euthydemus*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014: 140-142

Once again, I must note that Socrates' critic does not explain in detail precisely how Socrates does wrong by conversing with the brothers as he does. He seems to suggest nothing more than that it is wrong for Socrates to have surrendered to anyone who, like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, partakes in any practice that is petty and laughable because they are petty and laughable, because they cling to everything said, and because they are among the most powerful at present. So what here is really the problem for Socrates? There are broadly two distinct but complementary justifications that can be given for the critic's critique of Socrates: first, because the brothers' practice is so contagious, to partake of it risks exposing also others to it who may lack immunity to its fallacies and so become themselves petty and laughable; second, since the brothers' practice is so petty and laughable, base, and even unjust, to partake in it in any way is to become also or to be already similarly petty and laughable, base, or unjust.

There is little clear evidence in favour of the first of these in the *Euthydemus* itself. In the first place, while Socrates emphasises and praises the brothers' ability to quickly teach their wisdom to others, it's unclear how serious Socrates actually is about this, whether the brothers are right and everyone is actually always and forever possessed of their wisdom, or whether quickly learning the brothers' practice actually causes any serious harm to those who learn it—for Ctesippus turns out at least well enough to have been a member of the Socratic circle until Socrates' death despite or maybe because of his run-in with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. Either Ctesippus did not in fact learn the brothers' wisdom at all or already knew it or unlearned it as quickly as he learned it. In any case, it is unclear how Socrates is supposed to thus contribute to the corruption of his auditors. Second, Socrates' critic does not in any way mention, let alone belabour, the negative effects of the brothers' practice on other people. He

concerns himself exclusively with its value on its own terms, even while he also tells Crito, apparently, that the conversation was worth hearing—an odd bit of praise for something involving a practice that may easily corrupt an auditor. I suspect that a good case can be made beyond the *Euthydemus* that Socrates' habit of taking seriously unserious interlocutors has a negative effect on his auditors, but the *Euthydemus* itself is largely undecided with respect to this specific avenue of critique.

The second possible justification, however, is well developed within the dialogue while nevertheless being almost entirely unnoticed by commentators. Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi is singular in her recognition of it, and even she merely attempts to deflect an altogether undeveloped and degenerate version away from Socrates. She argues that Socrates' critic "fails to appreciate Socrates' policy of non-confrontation," suggesting that the only appropriate response Socrates' critic could praise is something like Ctesippus's: directly and aggressively contradicting the brothers until they are bested at their own game. This is obviously not what Socrates' critic intends, however. In the first place, Ctesippus too submits to the brothers by the end of the dialogue, even after attacking them throughout. Second, Socrates' critic says that the brothers are "among the wisest" with respect to their practice; it certainly wouldn't do for Socrates to have merely fought back if he were likely to lose in the end anyway, especially since Socrates' critic targets not Socrates merely speaking to the brothers or flattering them but submitting to them. Third, if it really is Socrates' policy to avoid confrontation then Socrates himself does not abide by it in the *Euthydemus*, telling Crito that he himself was swept up in the brothers' martial practice at one point in the dialogue, although proving to be incompetent

with respect to it.²¹⁵ Finally, if this is really what Socrates' critic means then he himself, being present, could have brought the fight to the brothers rather than standing idly by as Socrates and Ctesippus found themselves ultimately beaten by them. That he did not suggests that he has other designs for appropriately reacting to those like Euthydemus and Dionysodorus who are among the most powerful and who nevertheless cling to everything said, partaking in a practice that is petty and laughable. Socrates' critic, again, does not say what he prefers and it cannot be reliably inferred. But the dialogue suggests at least *Plato's* preference by illustrating the dramatic consequences of Socrates' actions. Because the brothers very quickly and explicitly make their discourse with Clinias laughable, Socrates ought to have quickly extricated himself and others from the conversation and ignored the brothers thereafter—and he is wrong insofar as he fails to do so.

I do not mean by this that Socrates should not have conversed with the brothers at all. While, as I mentioned in Chapter 1, it remains unclear to what degree Socrates' private divinity actually does what Socrates says and prevents him personally from committing injustice or what that might even mean, it is clear from the nature of divinities as such that it somehow serves the ultimate good, whatever that happens to be. And in the *Euthydemus*, the intervention of Socrates' private divinity creates the very conditions necessary for the conversation to occur at all:²¹⁶ Socrates had contemplated leaving the dressing room, as he says, but his divinity prevented him just before Euthydemus and Dionysodorus entered. The question remains then why Socrates' divinity prevents him from leaving. A range of answers can be given, but a thorough discussion of all of them stands beyond the scope of this chapter.

²¹⁵ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 301b-c

²¹⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 272e

For my purposes, I need only mention a minimalist interpretation, an interpretation that articulates the minimum good done by Socrates within his conversation with Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. It is this: Socrates' participation in dialogue with the brothers saves Clinias from being hunted down and ultimately destroyed by them. Socrates tells Crito that when Clinias entered the dressing room and sat next to Socrates, the brothers set their sights upon the boy, "again and again glancing at" him, and eventually approached and sat beside him.²¹⁷ The ensuing conversation proves that Clinias at this point did not have the resources or the wherewithal to withstand their attacks. If not for Socrates, he would have been forced to submit to them and so become corrupted, petty, and laughable in the same way that they are. But Socrates intervenes on his behalf and takes upon himself for the remainder of the conversation the threat of their refutations, protecting Clinias and the others from the brothers. This is a genuine, if minimal good.

Nevertheless, Socrates does more in the *Euthydemus* than protect Clinias. He also launders the brothers' practice, emphasising their wisdom and excusing as a jealous reluctance to reveal its full extent the ways in which it is petty and laughable. And this begins from the very outset of the conversation. When the brothers first sit beside Clinias and Socrates, they are introduced to Clinias by Socrates himself, who says that their wisdom concerns "not little things but great,"²¹⁸ and when he subsequently hears that the brothers' work is excellence, Socrates further praises them, claiming that they are greater than the Great King. Now, of course, Socrates may be reasonably excused, for he does not yet know the extent of the brothers' worthlessness. But as the conversation continues, Socrates can no longer be similarly excused. I

²¹⁷ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 273b

²¹⁸ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 273c

have already mentioned that Socrates excuses the brothers when he intervenes to save Clinias by saying that they are merely playing with him as a first step before later sharing with him their wisdom. This is only foreshadowing. Socrates' later interventions into the dialogue occur far beyond what is reasonable for any truly just and responsible dialectic or inquiry. After Ctesippus contradicts Dionysodorus and Socrates himself exposes his argument as self-refuting, Socrates soothes Ctesippus in order that he stop antagonising the brothers and tells him that he fails to understand their wisdom and their reluctance to hold onto it. Socrates may have more reasonably dismissed the brothers as unserious and extricated himself and Ctesippus and everybody else from the conversation, better protecting them from being corrupted. This is surely, at least, what Socrates' critic would prefer.²¹⁹ Nevertheless, Socrates persists, deferring again and again to the brothers until at last he is rewarded by their ultimately defeating him in verbal combat and enslaving him. As far as Socrates' critic is concerned, this consequence is shameful and proves philosophy worthless. Socrates is not only enslaved by the brothers, but

²¹⁹ Socrates' critic therefore stands steadfastly opposed to what Nicholas Baima and Tyler Paytas, *Plato's Pragmatism: Rethinking the Relationship between Ethics and Epistemology*, London: Routledge, 2021: 139, call "the dichotomy of circumspection principle": "The more believable an interlocutor or idea appears, the more caution is needed, while the more ridiculous an interlocutor or idea appears, the less caution is needed." Baima and Paytas appeal to this principle to explain why the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* is much more tolerant of his interlocutors' shenanigans than the Socrates of the *Protagoras*. That Socrates threatens to extricate himself from the conversation because he believes that Protagoras violates reasonable dialectical norms. And yet the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* is willing to overlook and excuse even worse violations of that sort. Baima and Paytas explain this difference by arguing that Socrates takes Protagoras more seriously because he and his argument are more plausible and the brothers and their argument are more ridiculous. But this cannot be right. Socrates directly equates the two when he exposes the Dionysodorus's self-refutation. A better explanation, one that Baima and Paytas approach but do not affirm, is that the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* is simply not the same Socrates as that of the *Protagoras*. In the *Euthydemus*, both Socrates and the brothers represent the pure forms of their respective occupations, respectively philosophy and politics, and as such, that Socrates is both unable and unwilling to use the wisdom for which he hunts. In the *Protagoras*, however, both Socrates and Protagoras represent different mixtures of philosophy and politics. For Socrates' critic, the Socrates of the *Euthydemus* is simply worse than the Socrates of the *Protagoras*, and I argue below that Plato agrees; he need not appeal to some other principle to explain why they both turn out well.

he brings his capture upon himself by continually excusing them and failing to recognise the threat they pose. Genuine wisdom demands a different approach.

3. A Socratic Critique of Socrates' Defence

Plato has Socrates respond to his critic with a decidedly inadequate counterargument. "What sort of man is this," he asks Crito, "coming up to you and attacking philosophy? Was he either of those marvellous people to contend in the courts, some orator, or of those sending them there, a writer of speeches with which the orators contend?"²²⁰ Crito answers that the critic was neither of these: "Not at all, by Zeus, is he an orator, nor has he ever yet gone up to the court, but they say that he understands the practice, by Zeus, and is marvellous and composes marvellous speeches."²²¹ Socrates now offers his reply. These men, he says, are those who Prodicus says stand upon the intersection of philosophy and politics, and they are envious of the practitioners of both. Those concerned with philosophy expose their deficiency in public, harming their reputation,²²² and those concerned with politics, those "about Euthydemus," as Socrates says, expose their deficiency in private.²²³ Despite this, Socrates says, these men believe that they are the wisest because they partake in both philosophy and politics only as much as necessary without danger or conflict. In this position, Socrates argues, their critiques

²²⁰ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305b

²²¹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305c

²²² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305c-d; "They think that they are the wisest of all men but both are and seem quite so among the many inasmuch as no one is an impediment to them being well-reputed among everyone except the men about philosophy."

²²³ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305d; "For they are in truth, on the one hand, the wisest, but on the other, whenever they are taken aside in private speech, they are thwarted by those about Euthydemus."

cannot ever rise to truth but can only ever achieve propriety (εὐπρέπεια).²²⁴ If either philosophy or politics is good then Socrates' critic necessarily practices an occupation that turns out to be worse, and because it is worse, Socrates' critic must talk nonsense.

There is clearly something fishy going on with Socrates' counter-critique. Not only is his argument straightforwardly insufficient to demonstrate its conclusion—at best establishing, as Carrie Swanson notes, that Socrates' critic is merely *unlikely* to be correct,²²⁵ and it doesn't even obviously establish this—but it is also predicated on a conditional whose antecedent Socrates' critic clearly denies. Socrates can disregard his critic, he argues, if either of philosophy or politics turns out to be good. But what if neither turns out to be good? Well, Socrates continues, if neither philosophy nor politics turn out to be good then his critic “speaks truly.”²²⁶ Socrates can only make this argument so confidently because he does not believe, he says, that anyone would agree that both philosophy and politics are bad, or even that one is bad and the other good. He has clearly forgotten what Crito has just told him: Socrates' critic not only critiques Socrates for willingly submitting to the brothers; he also tells Crito that philosophy is worthless. And in this position, Socrates' defence is simply question-begging. It does not turn on any premise that his critic already believes or might believe; nor does Socrates derive his conclusion in opposition to any clear error on the part of his critic. If we are to accept Socrates' argument, we must be able to point then to some external justification, some positive evidence

²²⁴ Translators usually render εὐπρέπεια here as “plausibility.” This misses, I think, what Socrates is trying to tell Crito about *why* those like Socrates' critic do not make true claims: because they practice also politics, the claims they make are bound also by political norms of assertion, such as how a claim polls or whether the claim demeans an important demographic or honours a demographic that one might prefer not to honour. In other words, Socrates' critic cannot speak truly because he can only say what is politically correct or proper.

²²⁵ Carrie Swanson, “Socratic Dialectic between Philosophy and Politics in *Euthydemus* 305e5-306d1,” *Plato Journal* 19, 2019: 43-90

²²⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 306b

of the value of philosophy and its relationship to both politics and Socrates' critic's occupation. Socrates does not provide this evidence in the *Euthydemus*, rather pointing Crito towards conducting his own investigation; the evidence that Crito or anyone else could find within the *Euthydemus*, however, vindicates rather than refutes Socrates' critic. And worse, Plato has Socrates himself provide this vindicating evidence, especially throughout Socrates' two conversations with Clinias. He makes three claims in those conversations—that the only genuine good is unconditional, that an unconditional good is the sort of thing that both creates and uses itself, and that conditional goods are good only insofar as they are practiced in some way alongside this unconditional good—that together, with his activity in the dialogue, demonstrates that philosophy itself, unmixed with politics, is indeed worthless. As a consequence, I argue, Socrates himself should agree with his critic and heed his advice.

Socrates establishes, with Clinias, what he takes to be the basic framework for deciding whether a thing is good in what commentators have come to call the First Protreptic.²²⁷ Socrates there undertakes to show the brothers what he has in mind for what he asks them to do and so attempts to turn Clinias towards philosophy and care for excellence. Naturally, he begins by asking Clinias what sorts of things constitute good practice (εὖ πράττειν). He lists off several goods with Clinias's agreement—wealth, health, noble birth, power, and honour—before arriving finally at wisdom. But Socrates and Clinias nearly forget to mention, Socrates says, the greatest of the goods (μέγιστον τῶν ἀγαθῶν): good fortune (εὐτυχίαν). And yet, no sooner does Socrates remember to mention good fortune that he decides also to dismiss it. He

²²⁷ Properly speaking, this is a misnomer. While it is true that the First Protreptic amounts to Socrates turning Clinias towards philosophy and care for excellence (or wisdom), the Second Protreptic is not in fact a protreptic at all, but the investigation that follows protreptic. I should prefer to call them Socrates first and second interventions, but for my present purposes, I will adopt the convention as it stands.

reconsiders, he says, because he and Clinias had nearly made themselves ridiculous by repeating themselves: he had already named wisdom, and wisdom, he says, “is doubtless good fortune.”²²⁸ Recognising, however, that Clinias does not yet agree with him, despite the identity between wisdom and good fortune being something “even a child would know,”²²⁹ Socrates points out that experts in any given subject, aulos-playing, writing, traveling by sea, and so on, fare better than those without expertise.²³⁰ He infers therefore, and Clinias agrees, that “better fortune practices with wisdom” rather than “practicing with ignorance.”²³¹ This is because wisdom fails not, Socrates continues, for wisdom necessarily practices and fares well such that if it did not then it would not be wisdom. Socrates and Clinias somehow eventually agree, Socrates says, that “with wisdom being present, if it is present, no one additionally needs good fortune.”²³²

Socrates’ argument here is often misunderstood, and primarily because commentators do not generally find it plausible. Benjamin Rider, for example, interprets Socrates’ argument in the light of “conventional wisdom,” as he has it, which implies that good fortune, he says, “refers to a divine favour or random benefit specifically *in contrast with* or *in addition to* what we get by our own efforts.”²³³ As such, Socrates can do no more than develop a merely inductive argument that at best supports, he says, “the inference that wisdom brings εὐτυχία in the sense of (statistical) ‘success’” and “fail[s] ... to support the inference that the kind of

²²⁸ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 279d

²²⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 279d

²³⁰ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 279e

²³¹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 280a

²³² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 280b

²³³ Benjamin Rider, “Wisdom, Eutuchia, and Happiness in the *Euthydemus*,” *Ancient Philosophy* 32, 2012: 6; italics original

εὐτυχία that conventional thinking values is created by or identical to wisdom.”²³⁴ But interpretations such as Rider’s fail to take seriously what Socrates actually says. While Socrates may use apparently inductive examples, he explicitly uses them to lead Clinias to understand and accept a specific deductive conclusion that, he believes, follows from the kind of thing that wisdom is.²³⁵ Socrates argues that a person is wise if and only if they practice and fare well. There is no sense, given this partial definition, to the claim that the “conventional wisdom” is correct about good fortune. Whether or not the average Athenian actually believes that good fortune is essentially distinct from good practice, it is not what Socrates means, and Socrates’ definition implies, he believes, that where there is wisdom there is good fortune.

That Socrates so firmly binds together wisdom and good fortune is essential to his overall protreptic argument. By means of this identity, he can triangulate what Clinias must create if he wishes to achieve good practice, as he says he and all men do. Socrates returns to the claims that he and Clinias earlier agreed upon to determine now the main difference between good practice and bad. Clinias agrees that good practice implies that goods are possessed and that they are put to use. But these alone do not, Socrates claims, fully

²³⁴ Rider, “Wisdom, Eutuchia, and Happiness,” 6-7

²³⁵ Francisco Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue: Plato’s Practice of Philosophical Inquiry*, Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1998: 102-105, argues that Socrates argument here is fallacious in four distinct ways:

1. The terms in Socrates’ premises are not the same as the terms in Socrates’ conclusion (id est, he infers claims about good fortune from claims exclusively about good practice).
2. Socrates infers that wisdom is a sufficient condition for good fortune from claims that at best imply that it is a necessary condition.
3. Socrates moves from wisdom and good fortune in particular to wisdom and good fortune generally.
4. And Socrates infers that wisdom being a necessary and sufficient condition for good fortune implies that wisdom and good fortune are identical.

We should be careful, however, not to exaggerate the problems with Socrates’ argument. He himself is aware that his argument as he gives it is insufficient to fully demonstrate his conclusion, as reflected in his apparent surprise that he and Clinias “somehow” agreed on his conclusion. The important part here is that a sufficient deductive argument can be given for Socrates’ conclusion, sidestepping each of Gonzalez’s objections. This is not the place to develop this argument in detail, but I return to this and related issues in Chapter 4. The important thing to recognise here, as Gonzalez himself recognises (104), is that Socrates’ aim here is not demonstrating the unassailable truth of his conclusion but turning Clinias towards the care for wisdom.

differentiate good practice from bad, for to use a good wrongly, Socrates says, does more harm than not possessing that good at all; “for bad in the first place,” he says, “but in the second, neither bad nor good.”²³⁶ Here then Socrates has established two terms of a three term conditional: he and Clinias start with good fortune and want good practice, so they need to determine the final term, the term which bridges the gap between the two. Given the previously established identity of wisdom and good fortune, this third term can be immediately inferred: right use implies nothing other than wisdom. And so if Clinias really wishes to achieve good practice, he must run from ignorance and pursue wisdom. With this, Socrates apparently achieves his goal and hands Clinias back over to the brothers. But, as Emily Austin recognises, there is a significant problem with Socrates’ protreptic argument as stated: the conclusion that Clinias should do everything he can to become as wise as possible does not in fact follow from the preceding argument. While Socrates may demonstrate that wisdom is the highest good, he needs yet to demonstrate that Clinias ought therefore to employ every means at his disposal to become wise. This is not as trivial as it may seem. If wisdom is the highest good then Clinias surely must become wise. But this is a slightly different consequent than that Clinias must employ every means at his disposal to do so. If Socrates should demonstrate this second consequent, then he must show also that Clinias might wisely employ those means to actually become wise. He should be prepared to argue, in other words, not only that wisdom is the sort of thing that a person can achieve by employing some tool or technique, but also that these means themselves can be employed without being possessed already of that wisdom one seeks. Without this, it remains possible that Clinias actually does more harm by attempting to

²³⁶ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 280e-281a

achieve wisdom than not.²³⁷ The problem then is that Socrates not only establishes neither that wisdom can nor should be pursued in the *Euthydemus* but also makes clear that there are alternatives to the care for or pursuit of wisdom:²³⁸ “And thinking that there is perhaps a need to receive this [wisdom] from one’s father much more than goods, and from one’s guardians and friends both other and claiming to be lovers, and foreigners and fellow citizens, needing and requesting wisdom to offer, there is nothing shameful, Clinias, nor blameworthy on account of this to serve and be a slave to a lover or any man whatsoever willing to serve the beautiful service, being eager to become wise.”²³⁹ Rather than becoming wise by pursuing it, one can also become wise by receiving wisdom from others, one’s father, friends, et cetera, or one may also serve and be a slave to others. And in each of these cases, the relevant course of action is in fact a course of *inaction*, a situation in which one does not oneself use their soul and merely has wisdom happen to them.²⁴⁰ The question, then, is whether action here might be better than inaction. And here there is a corollary to Socrates’ protreptic arguments that Socrates himself recognises but nevertheless does not explore in full: for any conditional good,

²³⁷ Many Classical Chinese philosophers—most clearly Meng Zi, in Ivanhoe and Van Norden [eds.], *Readings in Classical Chinese Philosophy*, New York, NY: Seven Bridges Press, 2001: 2A6/125—argue that the Way both cannot be effectively pursued but by inaction and that attempting to pursue the Way may in fact prevent a person from following it like how pulling on a sprout does not help it grow but rather breaks its stem. There is no clear, agreed-upon analogue in Archaic or Classical Greek philosophy, but many of the elitist poets, such as Pindar, may suggest a similar conclusion in their reaction to those who attempt to achieve excellence through study. See Steven R. Robinson, “The Political Background of the Sophists at Athens,” in Patricia O’Grady [ed.], *The Sophists: An Introduction*, London, UK: Gerald Duckworth & Co., 2008: 21-29.

²³⁸ He sidesteps part of the issue by having Clinias agree that wisdom can be taught. Even if this is true, Socrates and Clinias do not demonstrate that teaching or being taught wisdom is always and everywhere good, and in other dialogues, such as *Republic*, 538c-539a, Socrates suggests that there are in fact significant risks to any effort to become wise. I examine this argument in more detail in Chapter 2.

²³⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 282a-b

²⁴⁰ I do not mean here that a person does nothing in each of these circumstances; I mean only that one’s actions are guided and controlled by others. The apprentice carpenter of course measures and cuts and hammers, but at the direction of the master carpenter; he does not deliberate on his own about the appropriate course of action to build a house until he has already become familiar with the procedures involved in each step of the process, their role in the overall process, and the principles that justify them.

if that good is not possessed alongside wisdom, it is worthless, risks causing more harm than benefit, and must not therefore be used at all.²⁴¹ If philosophy, the means of becoming wise, is a conditional good in this sense, as Austin argues, then it too is worthless, risks causing more harm than benefit, and must therefore not be used at all. And while this is not, of course, a popular view among commentators, there is good reason to agree with Austin here, not only within Socrates' First Protreptic but also in his Second Protreptic and the dialogue as a whole, and not only conceptually but also practically as revealed by the drama of the text. The key, I argue, is that Socrates does not in fact fare well, succeed, or experience good fortune in the *Euthydemus*.

Socrates explicitly describes what he takes wisdom to be like when he intervenes a second time and attempts to lead Clinias through what comes next following his turn towards philosophy and care for excellence. And here Socrates inadvertently exposes the deficiency of his philosophy: that it is neither identical to wisdom nor practiced in conjunction with it. Socrates begins by asking Clinias what philosophy is, suggesting that it is the acquisition of knowledge. Clinias agrees, so Socrates then asks what kind of knowledge philosophy seeks to acquire. It seeks to acquire beneficial knowledge. And beneficial knowledge is knowledge of how to both at the same time acquire good things and rightly use them. If this knowledge only acquires goods then it may also acquire great evils since using a thing wrongly is worse than not having the thing at all, however good we might think the thing to be, whether a lyre, gold, or immortality. If, on the other hand, this knowledge only rightly uses then it may lack any good at

²⁴¹ Properly speaking, Austin infers only that these goods in this situation cause more harm than benefit, but the imperative conclusion is taken to follow trivially thence. Indeed, if not for this imperative conclusion, there would be no sense in naming the argument the Apraxia Argument as she does.

all that can be rightly used, in which case it creates no benefit. If this knowledge is in fact unconditionally good then it cannot lack any good to be used, and it cannot use that good wrongly. Philosophy therefore seeks neither lyre making nor speechwriting, since they do not know how to use the things they make. What knowledge, then, might satisfy philosophy? Clinias tells Socrates that he is not able to pass (οὐκ εὐπορῶ), that he has run out of ideas. Socrates, however, attempts to guide Clinias forward: he suggests that generalship may be the knowledge for which he and Clinias seek. But Clinias rejects this; he tells Socrates that generalship is in fact nothing more than the expertise of hunting men, and no hunting ever does more than hunt and capture. This is a subtle point, or more correctly set of points. First, by identifying generalship as a kind of hunting, Clinias recognises that there are two distinct ways to acquire a good: to hunt and capture it and to create or produce it. Second, Clinias asserts that the former is never associated with anything other than hunting and capturing, which can only here mean that hunting practices never use themselves the goods that they capture. Beyond Crito's amazement that Clinias was able to say this, there is little clear evidence that Clinias does more than merely conjecture that hunting practices are like this, and Clinias himself seems to recognise this uncertainty when he shortly thereafter suggests that he and Socrates seek "expertise that, when it acquires either by creating or hunting, will know [how] to use."²⁴² The broader dialogical context, however, suggests a possible rationale for excluding hunting from the subsequent search in the way that he and Socrates go on to do: they seek a knowledge that both acquires and uses the same supreme, unconditional good. However, as Clinias makes clear, hunting is distinguished by the fact that its good, the object that it hunts,

²⁴² Plato, *Euthydemus*, 290d

exists already and is only newly brought into the hunter's possession. This won't do. If such a practice can only acquire a good that already exists then it can be nothing other than a conditional good—conditional, that is, upon some other circumstance, some other expertise, some other practice, or some other gift, natural or supernatural, for its good; it merely rearranges the goods in the world rather than adding to them, and cannot therefore be the source of all goodness. As such, Clinias implies that the knowledge, the good that philosophy seeks can only be the creative sort.

This poses a problem for Socrates. Philosophy is, as he says, the acquisition of knowledge, and it may then be either the hunting sort or the creative sort. If it should turn out to be an unconditional good then it must also turn out to be the latter. Socrates, however, does not say explicitly which it is; he at best leaves Plato's readers little verbal hints, concluding his first protreptic, for example, by saying that "it is necessary to love wisdom and to have in mind *to create* (ποιεῖν) it yourself."²⁴³ This is a good sign. And yet, when it comes time for Socrates and Clinias to actually create wisdom, Socrates transitions to describing their conversation with a hunting metaphor: "But we were altogether absurd; like children chasing after larks, we always thought that we would at once catch each of the knowledges but they always fled."²⁴⁴ The succeeding conversation follows this same model, hunting and failing to capture wisdom. Clinias and Socrates together recognised, Socrates says, that if generalship hands over its catch to politics then politics, or kingship, may well be the knowledge they seek, since it is alone the cause of right practice in the city. But Socrates and Clinias recognise also that politics only obviously satisfies half of their desiderata: politics is surely the knowledge of how to rightly use

²⁴³ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 282d

²⁴⁴ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 291b

other goods, but it's less clear precisely what good it also *creates*. Socrates and Clinias agree that politics must create something and that this something must be good. But if their preceding reasoning is right, the only good thing is wisdom. Politics cannot therefore produce shoemaking or carpentry or anything less than wisdom, but must create itself. And it does, Socrates suggests. Politics is that very expertise which both concerns the excellence of the soul, wisdom, and is itself that very excellence. And yet, Socrates finds this unsatisfying. If politics creates nothing other than itself then what use can be made of it? In what respect is a person who knows politics actually good? They can do nothing more than make others good, which means that these others make still others good, which means that these others make still others good, and so on. For Socrates, wisdom has been reduced to something that neither uses nor is used because there is nothing *for which* it can use or be used. While Gonzalez claims that "The aporia does not represent a failure to find the highest knowledge, but rather a difficulty inherent in its very nature,"²⁴⁵ the fact that Socrates arrives at this aporia by attempting to hunt rather than create wisdom suggests a different interpretation, one that unfavourably resolves our present issue: Socrates simply doesn't know how to use the wisdom he has now (partially) acquired and so does not fully recognise it as the wisdom he seeks. He must then hand over his catch, if it even is a catch, to another, superior practice. And this means that philosophy itself does not amount to the same wisdom that it seeks; it is not an unconditional good. And if it is not an unconditional good, its good is conditional on its being practiced in conjunction with that wisdom which it seeks. That Socrates fails to recognise wisdom as such, however, is decisive evidence that he is not possessed of it and does not therefore practice philosophy in

²⁴⁵ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 112

conjunction with wisdom. Socrates ought to conclude, then, in light of his protreptic arguments, that philosophy itself is worthless.

4. Plato and Socrates' Critic

It should seem absurd that Plato, author of dialogues ostensibly promoting philosophy, should conclude in this specific dialogue that philosophy is worthless. This apparent absurdity, however, disappears upon a more careful analysis of what Plato and Socrates' critic means by this. To the extent that philosophy is worthless, it is the kind of philosophy practiced by a specific Socrates in a specific dialogue rather unlike what is typical of Plato. This Socrates is a caricature; he practices philosophy completely divorced from politics, from knowledge of how to use philosophy. He chases the wind, as it were, following it wherever it may go, from the just to the unjust, risking the souls of those, such as Clinias, who pursue wisdom alongside him. The brothers Euthydemus and Dionysodorus make the complementary error, practicing politics completely divorced from philosophy (and so the proper end of politics itself: wisdom).²⁴⁶ They use for the sake of using, sucking everything up, to continue the previous metaphor, into a great and vicious tornado that destroys everything in its path. That Plato presents in the *Euthydemus* a critique of Socrates' philosophy no more implies that he believes that philosophy

²⁴⁶ The brothers do not personally practice politics in the same sense as Pericles does, for example, within the institutional framework of a democracy or any other form of government. But they are teachers of the very sort of political discourse that those like Pericles (or even those worse than him) employ in those institutions: what Socrates calls in the *Gorgias* the false politics. While Socrates' focus there is on Pericles' pursuit of pleasure rather than justice, Plato emphasises here that the brothers' politics is nakedly partisan, obsessed not with improving the souls of others but with defeating and dominating their opponents at every opportunity. These two depictions are of course complimentary. But even so, like his Socrates here, Plato's depiction of the brothers is also a caricature; it remains unclear from the historical record whether any Athenian statesman was ever so cynical, although there are of course several possible candidates (Cleon, Meletus, Theramenes, et cetera). But contemporary readers might of course recognise this brand of politics too in our own increasingly polarised and partisan political environments.

practiced correctly is worthless than his critique of the brothers implies that political discourse is similarly worthless. Rather, Plato uses Socrates to illustrate the improper use of philosophy in political discourse and in human life more generally. Should we inquire, as we reasonably must, into the *proper* use of philosophy, we need not look very far. Of course, we may reflect upon Plato's own occupation as author. But even within the dialogue, there is another beyond Socrates himself who practices philosophy: Socrates' critic. And I suggest that Plato represents *him*, not Socrates, as closer to his ideal.

Since at least Schleiermacher, commentators have dismissed this idea, scarcely deigning to even take it seriously. They most often identify Socrates' critic with Isocrates and argue that, if he is Isocrates, Plato can mean nothing more by introducing him than to show why his critique of Socrates, the true Platonic ideal, is ultimately inadequate. And yet, there are good reasons to suggest not only that commentators' identification of Socrates' critic as Isocrates is over-hasty, but also that Plato represents Socrates' critic much more favourably.²⁴⁷ The basic evidence that Socrates' critic is Isocrates consists in the following: that they both explicitly practice philosophy in a different manner than Socrates, that they both oppose eristic like that practiced by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, that they are both concerned with practice and the proper use of things, and that they both compose speeches that they do not themselves deliver.²⁴⁸ This is not the place to thoroughly evaluate this evidence, but I want to highlight

²⁴⁷ This is not to suggest that Plato could not represent Isocrates favourably. While the two were of course competitors, there is little evidence to suggest that they were hostile towards each other or even that their disagreements were especially significant. We get this view only from later commentators; within Plato himself, Isocrates is mentioned and parodied only in the *Phaedrus*, and Plato's target is there the medium of his occupation—syngrammatic speeches as opposed to dialogues—and his critique is somewhat minor as compared to, for example, Plato's many critiques of Socrates, whom Plato nevertheless admired.

²⁴⁸ See Sermamoglou-Soulmaidi, *Playful Philosophy and Serious Sophistry*, 143-151, for a thorough treatment of this evidence and other proposals concerning the identity of Socrates' critic.

something here that is often overlooked: it is not only Isocrates who resembles Socrates' critic in these ways; Plato too so resembles him. Should we argue, then, that Socrates' critic represents Isocrates, we may argue at least as plausibly that he represents also Plato himself, as if Plato covertly inserted himself into his own dialogue. I do not believe that Plato provides for his readers sufficient evidence one way or another to confidently identify Socrates' critic as any specific individual, whether Isocrates or Plato himself or anyone else. Rather, Plato centres Socrates' critic on account of his occupation—an occupation that Plato himself shares—and I argue here that Plato *vindicates* this occupation rather than agreeing with Socrates' objection to it.

I have already briefly explored Socrates' assessment of his critic's occupation: that he stands upon the intersection of philosophy and politics and that this occupation is worse than either of its constituents if they are good but better if they are bad. I have also argued that since philosophy is a conditional good, it is worthless *in itself*, which implies, again, that Socrates' critic actually practices a superior occupation. I have not, however, discussed what it means to stand upon the intersection of philosophy and politics. Let me do that now.

When Socrates asks what kind of person his critic is, he asks Crito whether he is an orator or a speechwriter. Crito answers that Socrates' critic is not an orator but that he “understands the practice (ἐπαΐειν ... περὶ τοῦ πράγματος)” of oratory and the court and “is marvellous and composes marvellous speeches (δεινὸν εἶναι καὶ δεινοὺς λόγους συντιθέναι).”²⁴⁹ Commentators typically take this to mean that Socrates' critic is the latter of the options that Socrates gives Crito: a speechwriter. If it is true, this is an interesting answer

²⁴⁹ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305c

for several reasons, but mainly because Socrates and Clinias had already explored whether the speechwriter (λογοποιός) practices the sort of wisdom for which they seek and found it wanting. As Clinias says there, the speechwriter seems not to know how to use those speeches that they write and at best, therefore, merely acquires their wisdom. There are two reasons to interpret Socrates' critic as something other than a speechwriter, however. First, Socrates himself says upon hearing Crito's answer that he was just going to talk about this kind of person, suggesting that Socrates' critic is something different from the two occupations that Socrates previously mentioned. Second, Crito does not say that Socrates' critic *writes* or *creates* (ποιεῖν) speeches, but that he *composes* (συντιθέναι) them. This is not an insignificant difference. While the meanings of writing and composing obviously overlap, they also diverge. Writing here has strictly productive connotations; composing, however, has connotations aligned both with producing and using.²⁵⁰ To put speeches together of course creates a new thing, a new text or a new discourse or even a new law or constitution; but the new thing that is created here is itself still a speech, written or otherwise, and may once again be placed together with others. This is of course what Plato himself does when he writes dialogues; he not only creates speeches but by placing together distinct speeches by distinct interlocutors into a single text, he also simultaneously uses his creation and animates the text with the power to also use itself, even if by means of its readers. If this is what Crito means when he

²⁵⁰ Perhaps importantly, the root verb τίθημι is cognate with ἔθος, and Plato may well have been aware of this connection on at least some level.

claims that Socrates' critic composes speeches, as Socrates' response suggests, then there is no reason to believe *a priori* that he is incapable of wisdom, as so many commentators assume.²⁵¹

That wisdom remains possible for Socrates' critic, however, does not imply that Socrates' critic is in fact wise. For this, we must turn to what it means for him to stand upon the intersection of philosophy and politics and so to partake in both. This is, of course, no small task and I do not pretend to completely resolve the issue here.²⁵² Rather, I only propose what I take to be the minimal bounds of what a more complete account requires as Socrates understands it within the *Euthydemus*. For some practice to partake in another, it must at least (1) employ at least some of the same procedures employed by the other and (2) aim at the same object or end as the other.²⁵³ To put this more simply, for a practice to partake in another, it must use and create the same kinds of things. As such, for some practice to stand upon the intersection of two other, distinct practices, it must therefore use and create the same kinds of things that both distinct practices use and create. Where those distinct practices overlap, this is of course quite easy. If politics and philosophy both create wisdom, for example, but merely create it in different ways, then the intersection of politics and philosophy creates wisdom by some combination of the distinct practices involved in both. It is notable, however, that Socrates does not ultimately believe that politics and philosophy are like this. When he dismisses the claims of

²⁵¹ Swanson, "Between Philosophy and Politics," 73-82, is alone in taking seriously the possibility that Socrates' critic is capable of attaining partial wisdom but she ultimately argues against the critic's partial wisdom on the grounds that he merely practices rhetoric as a speechwriter.

²⁵² A systematic account requires a synoptic treatment of Plato's physics throughout his entire corpus, and especially the theory of forms. My comments here are limited to the depiction of this relationship in the *Euthydemus* alone.

²⁵³ Swanson, "Between Philosophy and Politics," 74-77 suggests also a third condition: that a partaking practice "is led by a share of the cognitive component" that leads the practice of which it partakes. She means by this essentially that the practitioners of such a practice are possessed of the same sort of knowledge that then guides their practice. I take this to be partly redundant and partly irrelevant, encompassed either by the aim for which a practice is undertaken or accidental to the practice itself.

his critic and others who stand upon the intersection of philosophy of politics, he specifies that these two practices “[aim] each toward different things” (πρὸς ἄλλο ... ἑκάτερά). And if he is right about this then it’s all but obvious how he believes that those practices which partake of both must be inferior where either philosophy or politics are good. They, as he says, partake in both only insofar as it is necessary, failing therefore to reach the furthest extent of the goodness of each. Conversely, however, it is also quite easy to see how this might be better where philosophy and politics are both bad: by partaking in both only insofar as necessary, they “bear the fruit of wisdom” while avoiding the bad, the danger, and the conflict.²⁵⁴

Even so, it’s not immediately clear that Socrates is in fact correct that philosophy and politics aim at different objects. Earlier, in his second protreptic, he and Clinias argue first that philosophy acquires and so aims towards wisdom, the kind of knowledge that both creates and uses itself, and second that politics is that knowledge that creates and uses itself. Philosophy and politics would therefore aim at the same thing: at politics. That Socrates later rejects this conclusion suggests that his later aporia indeed reflects the incoherence of their earlier assumption. Where they had assumed that politics in fact uses *and* creates itself, Socrates at least now rejects this assumption. Whatever the aim of politics turns out to be, it does not aim at itself or at wisdom.

We need not look too far to discover towards what this kind of pure, unmixed politics aims. While Socrates does not tell Crito anything more about his new understanding of politics, Plato has already given his readers a representation of it: the verbal pancratism of Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. For many commentators, this may seem like a strange claim to make. While

²⁵⁴ Plato, *Euthydemus*, 305e

they are not inclined to disagree that the brothers' practice aims at something other than wisdom, they generally attribute this to the fact as they see it that the brothers practice a mere imitation of philosophy, analogous perhaps to the rhetoric of Gorgias.²⁵⁵ If this is the case then there is nothing that the brothers' practice might tell us about politics or its unique aims. There is, however, very little reason to believe this. While Crito conflates their practice with philosophy, no one else in the dialogue does this, and Socrates' critic explicitly differentiates their practice from Socrates'. Indeed, even the best arguments for the claim that the brothers' practice imitates philosophy or Socrates' dialectic illustrate rather that it is *political* rather than philosophical. Gonzalez sees in Socrates' final praise of the brothers, for example, an illustration of the three ways, as he sees it, in which their practice resembles Socrates' own.²⁵⁶ They both disregard the opinion of the many; they both stitch up their own mouths while they stitch up others'; and they both prove to quickly lead their interlocutors "to the recognition of important truths."²⁵⁷ Gonzalez argues, of course, that the brothers do each of these three things through a distinct and utterly deformed set of procedures. Whereas Socrates is supposed to reflect as much as any mortal can the good and true, the brothers can do nothing but please others and produce empty and nonsensical arguments. Socrates disregards the many because he is convinced that the truth stands independently of their opinion. The brothers disregard the many because they are clowns and jesters, or more appropriately something like today's professional wrestlers or battle rappers: they please the many by flouting the very norms to which the many hold fast, shocking and entertaining them by debasing themselves. Socrates

²⁵⁵ Although, of course, Socrates in the *Gorgias* identifies rhetoric as an image not of philosophy but of politics.

²⁵⁶ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 121-125

²⁵⁷ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 123

stitches up his own mouth (or numbs himself, as in the *Meno*) because he butts up against the limits of sensible discourse, trying to say what cannot be captured in words. The brothers stitch up their own mouths, conversely by speaking nonsense, failing to recognise that similar things need not be similar in every respect and different things different in every respect. Finally, Socrates quickly “teaches” his own practice because he and it are concerned with “truths of which everyone in daily life has some awareness,” and whose content is already, therefore, readily available to any interlocutor Socrates happens to come across.²⁵⁸ The brothers quickly teach their practice, on the other hand, because it is essentially empty, concerned as it is with nothing more than the surface properties of words and not the facts and concepts that underwrite them. As plausible as this interpretation is, it faces one central problem: in each case but the last, the Socrates to whom the brothers are compared is not the Socrates of the *Euthydemus*. The Socrates that actually converses with the brothers does not disregard the opinion of the many, rather appealing to it where relevant and joining with it in praising the brothers. Likewise, this Socrates does not stitch up his own mouth when he stitches up others. When Clinias arrives at his aporia, for example, Socrates continues speaking, pushing the conversation forward and suggesting another plausible path. And when he arrives with Clinias at his own aporia too, he continues speaking all the same, repeating himself as he says until he finally calls upon the brothers for aid. A more plausible interpretation, I suggest, emphasises not that Socrates resembles the brothers’ practice but that he *should* resemble them in the way Gonzalez describes. The Socrates of the *Euthydemus* crucially does not resemble them because he practices a philosophy unmixed with politics. The brothers, however, practice a politics

²⁵⁸ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 125

unmixed with philosophy. They don't disregard the opinion of the many because they are clowns; they in fact resent the fact that they are laughable and do what little they can to avoid this, such as when Dionysodorus refuses to count his brother's teeth. Rather, the brothers disregard the opinion of the many because they are uninterested in pursuing wisdom. This too is the reason that they stitch up their own mouths and can quickly teach the wisdom of which they are possessed. And in this regard, they are somewhat unlike the typical sophist, or at least unlike Socrates' description of sophistry in the *Gorgias*: while they do of course please their onlookers, their goal is ultimately a political goal: to defeat and capture their interlocutors.

We should not forget here, however, that victory in verbal contest is a good worth caring for. But like philosophy, it is not an unconditional good. There are times in which it is better and wiser to in fact lose a verbal contest in just the same way that it is sometimes better to lose a fight or a battle, or better yet not to fight or battle at all. And it is the brothers' failure to recognise this, their failure to recognise any good that supersedes victory in verbal contest, that makes them ridiculous. Their practice is entirely consumed by an eternal and unbounded conflict of all against all, exceeding even the brutality of the Hobbesian state of nature.²⁵⁹ Whereas men in the state of nature may struggle and fight for the sake of life, liberty, and happiness, neither Euthydemus nor Dionysodorus have any idea whatever what they fight *for*. Here then Socrates' aporia comes back around once again; politics as the brothers practice it is adept at using itself, as endless conflict and contest, to produce still more endless conflict and contest; they fight only in order to fight, and by doing so, they convert others like Ctesippus to become fighters. But by doing so, they become no better, no wiser, no more just, no more

²⁵⁹ See Mark Sentese, "Community with Nothing in Common?: Plato's Subtler Response to Protagoras," *Epoché* 25(1), 2020: 279-297, for an analysis of this view as expressed by Protagoras in the dialogue that shares his name.

courageous, and so on. There is nothing for which they fight. Their practice is circular and self-reinforcing, but it is a circularity of discord, not harmony, and is rather more like a trap therefore than genuine excellence; while all involved may yet feel pleased by it—for what is more entertaining than, as it were, dunking on Donald Trump or Keir Starmer or Emmanuel Macron or their political opponents?—the conflict alone improves neither interlocutor nor onlooker. On the contrary, the insatiable thirst for victory has the brothers defending the indefensible or assailing the unassailable. And while we are right to laugh at this and at the petty partisanship or dogmatism that empowers it, we should not at the same time neglect what good it actually does. Despite being laughable and petty, the brothers successfully conquer and enslave Socrates and would have done the same to Clinias had Socrates not intervened. The better men here, those who truly seek wisdom and who nearly capture it themselves could do nothing either to defend themselves or improve the brothers. The only man to have come close was Ctesippus, who was apparently able to pick up the brothers' expertise by watching them and wishing to defend Clinias's honour. And yet, Socrates and his utterly toothless philosophy continually prevent Ctesippus from scoring points against the brothers. As a consequence, he too decides that the brothers are invincible. In this position, philosophy is a sitting duck; it must therefore take up the tools of politics and put them to use. It must therefore become conjoined with politics not only to defend itself but also to attack and conquer others, and so to persuade and improve them. There is a philosophy conjoined with politics in this way, and it is the practice of Socrates' critic and of Plato himself.

The *Euthydemus* reveals not only the deficits of Socrates' philosophy—or at least a caricature of it, unmixed as it is with politics—but also what it must become to achieve the

greatest good for a human being. Whereas Socrates says in the *Apology* that the greatest good for a human being is to everyday discuss excellence, the brothers show by silencing him that Socrates has not achieved it. To achieve this greatest good, Socrates must become himself unsilenceable, and he can do this only by undertaking politics alongside philosophy and to stand at the intersection of the two, not only creating wisdom but also putting it to use and so wisely creating wisdom. He does this in other dialogues, even if he still falls fatally short, as I discuss in Chapter 4. But more to the point, the *Euthydemus* shows that Plato too does this, that Plato too undertakes politics alongside philosophy by composing speeches. And he shows his readers, whether correctly or incorrectly, that he will not make the same mistakes that Socrates does.

Chapter 4:

Socrates' Simple Politics in Plato's Gorgias

*"You see, we are losing the war because we can salute too well."
– Stanislaus Katczinsky²⁶⁰*

1. An Ambiguous Explanation

Plato depicts in the *Gorgias* a Callicles that is fiercely critical of Socrates' occupation, and rightly so. While he admits that "philosophy is gratifying if one is engaged in it moderately at the right age," he challenges that

if one spends time beyond the necessary then it is a man's ruin. For if one is both altogether well-born and philosophising beyond the appropriate age then he is forced to become inexperienced (ἄπειρον) in all that in which a man who is

²⁶⁰ Erich Maria Remarque, *All Quiet on the Western Front* [tr. A.W. Wheen], London: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1929: 49

destined to be beautiful and good and well-reputed will need to be experienced (ἐμπειρον). For those people become inexperienced in the laws of the city and in the speeches needed to be used to join with men in contracts, both in private and in public, and in human pleasures and desires, and, in sum, they become inexperienced in [human] affairs (τῶν ἡθῶν) altogether.²⁶¹

As far as Callicles is concerned, philosophy is appropriate only for children; serious, adult men have better things to do with their time in order that they become truly excellent. The philosopher, by refusing to spend his time in these more valuable pursuits, lacks the experience and therefore the power to accomplish even the most basic tasks expected of a good Athenian man, and none is more serious and more essential than to protect himself against injustice. Callicles imagines just such a scenario:²⁶² should some violent and unjust man bring Socrates himself before a court and seek the death penalty, the inexperienced Socrates could say nothing in his defence; he would be found guilty and executed, and there is nothing good or admirable about that.²⁶³

Plato's readers cannot fail to recognise the seriousness of Callicles' critique. His imagined scenario is of course precisely what happens to Socrates, which Socrates himself emphasises by agreeing with Callicles that he cannot say anything in his defence before the court.²⁶⁴ Should Socrates successfully defend himself, then he must minimally accomplish the following: to show, first, that his ability or inability to persuade judges is not itself a sign, as Callicles alleges, of the deficiency or even worthlessness of philosophy; and second to show that philosophy somehow provides the means for a man to become truly excellent. I argue in this chapter that Socrates fails on both grounds, but not for lack of trying. Socrates develops a

²⁶¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 484c-d

²⁶² Plato, *Gorgias*, 521b-c

²⁶³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 522c

²⁶⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d-522c

defence consisting of two distinct parts, a negative and a positive part. He argues first that experience in the pursuits that Callicles recommends—rhetoric, chiefly—is insufficient for political expertise and moves a person, therefore, no closer to excellence. As such, Callicles too is vulnerable to his own critique. Second, Socrates claims that *he*, not the orators or the sophists, practices true political expertise; and while he agrees with Callicles that he could not persuade a court if he were brought before it, this power is not necessary for political expertise or human excellence. In fact, Socrates argues, it is precisely *because* Socrates practices true political expertise that he could not persuade a court;²⁶⁵ he would be judged, he says, like a physician would be judged should he be brought before a court of children by a cook: the children, failing to understand the genuine benefit that the physician provides, mistake the appearance of evil—bitterness, pain, et cetera—for genuine evil and convict him accordingly. As a practitioner of political expertise, Socrates claims that he would suffer this same fate for this same reason. And as such, Socrates apparently turns Callicles’ critique around: whereas Callicles argues that Socrates’ inability to defend himself against injustice is a sign that he falls short of excellence, Socrates argues that his excellence is the very reason for his inability to defend himself against injustice.

If Socrates’ explanation for his trial and execution were plausible then his defence against Callicles’ critique might be persuasive, but it is not. It trades on an ambiguity, only one interpretation of which—the false interpretation—vindicates Socrates and his occupation.²⁶⁶

²⁶⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d-522a

²⁶⁶ This ambiguity has been long recognised by commentators. See Terence Irwin, *Plato: Gorgias*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1979: 240, Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 240, n. 21, and J. Clerk Shaw, “Socrates and the True Political Craft,” *Classical Philology* 106(3), 2011: 187-207. Previous to Irwin and Vlastos, it appears that commentators debated the meaning of Socrates’ claim to practice true political expertise without

Whereas Socrates claims to practice (ἐπιχειρεῖν) political expertise, “practice” can mean in Greek as in English two very different things: Socrates could first mean that he practices political expertise in the same sense that a physician practices medicine: by expertly employing procedures to achieve their proper end: the excellence of the soul; second, Socrates could also mean that he practices political expertise in the same sense that a *novice* or a *quack* practices medicine: by simply, as it were, trying his hand at the procedures of politics, whether to become more adept at eventually achieving their proper end or because he is ignorant altogether of how to properly achieve it. The problem for Socrates is that while only the former vindicates his occupation, only the latter adequately explains his trial and execution, and Socrates himself provides, like in other dialogues, the argument that defeats his own defence.

I develop this argument in four stages. In Sections 2 and 3, I analyse Socrates’ defence, both its negative part (Section 2) and its positive (Section 3). Next, in Section 4, I show just how Socrates’ defence falls short, arguing that his positive defence remains vulnerable to the same sorts of arguments that he deploys against Callicles in the earlier negative part. I conclude in Section 5 by reflecting on Plato’s place in the *Gorgias* as an implied practitioner of political expertise himself, one that overcomes the problems that plague his mentor.

2. Political Experience Is Not Political Expertise

Socrates’ eventual defence against Callicles’ critique is prefigured from the very beginning of the *Gorgias*. Whether Socrates foresees it or not, he lays the foundation for his response to Callicles’ later critique by arguing not only that rhetoric does not amount to *political* expertise

explicit recognition of the ambiguity. See for example E.R. Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1959: 330, 368-369.

but that it does not amount to expertise at all. Socrates' argument is straightforward but unintuitive to his and Plato's Greek audience; whereas Polus suggests that "experience (ἐμπειρία) makes our destiny proceed in accord with expertise, but inexperience in accord with fortune,"²⁶⁷ Socrates later claims that rhetoric cannot be fully fledged expertise because it is nothing but experience.²⁶⁸ For this to be intelligible to Socrates' interlocutors, Plato has him develop a new, revisionary account of expertise that not only underscores the limitations of rhetoric as an occupation but also articulates the form that political expertise must take as the best and most valuable expertise. Simply put, expertise requires an account of that for the sake of which it is practiced in the first place; rhetoric lacks this account while genuine political expertise understands that it is practiced for the sake of the excellence of the soul, which is political expertise itself. In this section, then, I analyse Socrates' account of expertise and show how Gorgias and his rhetoric fall short, even and especially as it is elaborated and developed by Polus and Callicles.

Socrates develops his account of expertise here in quite typical fashion not by lecturing on it directly but indirectly in response to and through the questions he asks of his interlocutors and the answers he gives to them. Many of these questions are of course straightforward; they amount to little more than asking what rhetoric is, who practices it, and when, where, why, and how they do so. But as his interlocutors answer these more basic questions, Socrates narrows in on what he takes to be the more essential issues that demarcate rhetoric as a kind of expertise or not. In his questioning of Gorgias, for example, Socrates is chiefly interested in the

²⁶⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 448c

²⁶⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 462b-c

concern of rhetoric, its *subject*, the thing that rhetoric is *about*.²⁶⁹ As he understands it, it has two parts: the thing that rhetoric works *with*, its material or substance, and the thing that rhetoric works *for*, its product or good. Gorgias answers what rhetoric works with by saying that it concerns speech. This gives Socrates the opportunity to make a further distinction: since every kind of expertise consists also at least partly in speech, he distinguishes within this speech the practice of an expertise and its account.²⁷⁰ This distinction poses a minor problem for Gorgias's account of rhetoric. Typically, the practice and the account of any given expertise are distinguished by their material; whereas the practice of medicine works with sick bodies, for example, its account works with speech. But for rhetoric, both the practice and the account occur through the same material: speech.²⁷¹ This apparent duplication leads Socrates to believe—rightly, it turns out—that there is something crucial missing from Gorgias's rhetoric: its account.²⁷² He focuses his subsequent questioning here, therefore, and especially on what he takes to be its most important aspect, which Gorgias has hitherto neglected: a description of the good that rhetoric creates and for the sake of which it is practiced.

Since speech is the kind of thing that can be about other things, Socrates asks Gorgias what the orator speaks about. When Gorgias answers that rhetoric concerns the persuasion of crowds in law courts and assemblies about the just and the unjust, it becomes clear that Gorgias imagines rhetoric as something at least approaching political expertise. He tells

²⁶⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 449c-d

²⁷⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 450a; this is the same distinction that Clitophon makes in the dialogue that bears his name and that I discuss in Chapter 2. The practice of some expertise creates the thing for the sake of which the expertise is practiced, whereas the account of that expertise, its teachings, creates practitioners of the expertise in question. While Clitophon describes these both as results of the practice, Socrates here is less concerned for their temporal aspect and focuses instead on their conceptual links.

²⁷¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 450b-c

²⁷² Plato, *Gorgias*, 451d-452d

Socrates that “it subordinates to itself, to speak loosely, all the powers collected together.”²⁷³ And yet, recognising the seriousness of this claim, Gorgias also walks it back to some extent, telling Socrates that it should be used “like any other competitive activity (ἀγωνία)” in order that it not be used unjustly.²⁷⁴ Importantly, Gorgias attempts to sidestep his and others’ responsibility as teachers of rhetoric for the conduct of their students. He believes that he has given these students immense power over the affairs of others while nevertheless not teaching them how to justly use that power. As Socrates points out, however, Gorgias’s claims here “are neither altogether consistent nor harmonious with what you were first saying about rhetoric”:²⁷⁵ if rhetoric concerns persuasion about the just and the unjust, it should not be possible to use it unjustly. How, then, can the orator speak about justice without knowing about justice? The answer lies in the specific procedures that rhetoric employs. When Socrates asks Gorgias about what kind of persuasion rhetoric consists in—*id est*, how or by what means rhetoric achieves persuasion—he distinguishes two different kinds: teaching and convincing.²⁷⁶ The former, Socrates says, works by imparting knowledge; the latter by imparting mere belief. If rhetoric consists in the former then it must consist also in knowledge of the just and the unjust, but if it consists in the latter, it need not consist in that knowledge. Not foreseeing the problem, Gorgias answers that rhetoric consists in the latter, which Socrates immediately recognises as implying that rhetoric is the practice by which an ignorant person can be more persuasive among ignorant people than a knowledgeable person, which further implies then that it is not a

²⁷³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 456a-b

²⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 456c-d

²⁷⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 457e

²⁷⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 454c

kind of expertise.²⁷⁷ Gorgias tries to resist this conclusion by suggesting that he does in fact teach justice alongside or as a part of teaching rhetoric.²⁷⁸ But there is no escape for him at this point. If Gorgias is correct initially then he is incorrect now since it should be impossible for anyone who has been taught justice to use rhetoric unjustly, and if Gorgias is correct now then he is incorrect initially since the teacher of rhetoric should have taught his students justice as part of their studies, quite unlike wrestling or any other competitive expertise. In either case, Gorgias's account is inconsistent.

When Polus comes to Gorgias's aid, he suggests that Gorgias was simply too ashamed to claim not to teach justice.²⁷⁹ It's not clear, of course, that this is actually true or that Gorgias is ashamed of not teaching justice rather than contradicting himself, but Polus's intervention provides Socrates the opportunity now to more clearly and directly articulate what he takes rhetoric to be, and specifically that it is the thing that Polus says creates expertise: experience.²⁸⁰ Unlike Polus, Socrates argues that experience is a mere imitation of expertise and not its cause. And he develops this argument by providing a kind of taxonomy of rhetoric parallel to a taxonomy of politics. Rhetoric stands alongside sophistry, cooking, and cosmetics, Socrates says, as the four parts of a single occupation: flattery.²⁸¹ These four parts are differentiated by their distinct procedures, but each shares the same product: gratification and pleasure. While Polus may believe that they are each a kind of expertise, Socrates argues that they are not. Rhetoric and each of the other parts, he says, "has no account, not one, of that to which it contributes what it contributes [or] of what kind it is by nature so that the cause of

²⁷⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 459a-b

²⁷⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 460a

²⁷⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 461b-c

²⁸⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 462b-c

²⁸¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 464b-d

each [thing] is not said” and therefore aims to create the *image* of some genuine good created by some genuine expertise rather than the actual thing.²⁸² Whereas justice, for example, creates the just, rhetoric only creates the image of the just: gratification or pleasure. And the same pattern holds for the other parts of flattery: each of the four parts correspond to a unique kind of expertise. Rhetoric is an image of justice, sophistry an image of legislation, cooking medicine, and cosmetics gymnastic. The consequence is this: the practitioner of any given kind of experience, here one of the four parts of flattery, works without consideration for the relevant good, possibly or even probably creating evil in its place. Socrates concludes then that rhetoric and the other parts of flattery are shameful.²⁸³

Polus bucks against Socrates’ argument here, developing after a few ill-formed questions what turns out also to be an ill-formed argument: he insists that since power is good, since anyone who can do what he wants is possessed of power, and since the orator can do what he wants, the orator is therefore good.²⁸⁴ Socrates immediately points out where Polus goes wrong: he does not challenge that power is good or that anyone who can do what he wants is possessed of power; rather, Socrates challenges that the orator can do what he wants. As far as he is concerned, the orator is possessed only of the power to create images, to create only what *seems* best rather than what *actually is* best. The power that Polus attributes to the orator is illusory, no more real than a painted cornucopia is nourishing. This is not to say that it is impossible for the orator to act justly, to create some good, should what seems best coincide with what really is best; but because the orator does not practice expertise and is therefore

²⁸² Plato, *Gorgias*, 465a

²⁸³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 463d

²⁸⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 466b-e

ignorant of the good, they not only risk causing more harm than benefit but prove also to be powerless to reliably create some good. Power, for Socrates, arises out of an account of the good for the sake of which an occupation is performed, and since a mere experience like rhetoric lacks such an account, it lacks also such a power; anyone who acts without expertise, then, such as the orator or the tyrant can be nothing other than powerless, miserable, and pitiable.²⁸⁵

Polus follows Socrates' logic here but nevertheless protests that if Socrates were right, it would be better to suffer injustice oneself than unjustly inflict suffering on another, and that, he claims, is simply ridiculous.²⁸⁶ Socrates not only bites this bullet but argues that Polus too agrees with him. Whereas Polus argues that the tyrant is possessed of the greatest power because he can kill or banish anyone if it seems best to him, Socrates provides Polus a thought experiment to emphasise just what he has neglected:²⁸⁷ he tells him that if he were to have a dagger hidden under his arm then he would have just acquired a terrible tyrannical power and could put to death anyone in the marketplace if it seemed best to him. Polus objects, quite rightly as far as Socrates is concerned, that this dagger-wielding Socrates is no better killing others with a dagger because he would inevitably be punished. But while Socrates and Polus agree on this, they do not quite agree on *why* punishment indicates that killing others is bad. Whereas Polus recognises that punishment is painful, he does not recognise that there must be some reason why the dagger-wielding Socrates faces punishment in the first place. There is something about unwarranted killing that invites punishment, and if Polus can't recognise what

²⁸⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 467a-468e

²⁸⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 469b

²⁸⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 469d-e

it is then he can't recognise why it is that the dagger-wielding Socrates does wrong. For Socrates, this something is the shamefulness of unwarranted killing.²⁸⁸ While Polus agrees that that sort of unjust action is shameful, he argues that its being shameful need not imply its being bad, and certainly not its being worse than suffering injustice.²⁸⁹ But once again, Socrates insists that Polus does not actually believe this and raises once again an analogy to other kinds of expertise to prove his point. Whereas Polus claims that neither the good and the admirable nor the bad and the shameful are one and the same with respect to politics, he readily admits that the good colours and the good music and even the good laws are at the same time admirable, and likewise also that the bad colours and music and laws are at the same time shameful.²⁹⁰ And since the product of any other art is more admirable because it is either more pleasurable or better and more shameful because it is either more painful or worse, so it must be also for politics. And yet, Polus seems to reject this: whereas he believes that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering it, he nevertheless believes that suffering injustice is worse despite and indeed because it is more painful. This cannot be. Socrates argues, and Polus agrees, that committing injustice is more shameful than suffering injustice, but since something can only be more shameful if it is either more painful or worse and since suffering injustice is more painful than committing it, committing injustice must therefore be worse, and not only worse but overwhelmingly worse.²⁹¹ It is always best, therefore, to avoid injustice altogether, even at the cost of pain and suffering.

²⁸⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 470e-471a

²⁸⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 471a-d

²⁹⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 474a-475b

²⁹¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 475b-e

Having secured Polus's (somewhat hesitant) agreement that committing injustice is worse than suffering it, Socrates moves on to a second point and asks Polus whether an unjust person paying a penalty is the greatest of evils, as Polus earlier argued, or whether getting away with their injustice is a greater evil yet, as Socrates had said. Polus agrees at first that paying a just penalty and being justly punished are one and the same and that they are admirable insofar as they are just, but as Socrates continues, Polus's confidence begins to waver. Socrates asserts that acting and being acted upon share a kind of symmetry insofar as acting justly implies being acted upon justly, and likewise for other qualities. Polus agrees. Next, Socrates asks whether paying a penalty is acting or being acted upon. Polus answers that it is being acted upon by someone acting. If the person acting here, the person administering punishment, punishes justly then the person being acted upon, the person paying the penalty, pays justly. If they pay justly then they pay admirably, and if they pay admirably then they pay well, and if they pay well, then paying is either pleasant or beneficial. Paying a penalty is clearly not pleasant, so it must therefore be beneficial, and once again overwhelmingly so. The benefit here, Socrates says, consists in the person paying a penalty becoming a better soul, and this implies that the person paying a penalty is freed from the evil of their soul. The evil here could be, as Polus agrees, either poverty or illness or injustice. But only one of these—injustice, the corruption of the soul—is the most shameful, and once again, if it is the most shameful then it is the worst. To pay a penalty, then, removes not simply an evil, but the greatest of evils. As Socrates goes on to argue, then, the happiest person has nothing bad in his soul, and the second happiest is the person who pays a penalty to remove the evil in their soul, whereas the least happy person avoids paying a penalty and preserves the evil of their soul. But these least

happy people are the tyrants whom Polus earlier said were in fact the happiest. They use rhetoric and other means to escape punishment and not in order to escape committing injustice. As far as Socrates is concerned, this ought to be reversed: the unjust person ought to accuse themselves, their friends, and their kin in order that they might pay their due and so have their injustice removed from their soul, becoming just.

Polus emphatically rejects Socrates' argument here; he attempts to argue his case, but ultimately cannot say anything against Socrates' argument; in the end, he tells Socrates that his arguments seem to him out of place (ἄτοπα) and then all but removes himself from the conversation.²⁹² Callicles takes up the argument in his place, asking Chaerephon at first whether Socrates is serious or kidding.²⁹³ For Callicles, of course, it is ridiculous for a person to accuse themselves and those about whom they care and to refuse to accuse their enemies in order that they live on forever suffering an unjust soul. If this is what Socrates actually believes then he must, as Callicles says, overturn our lives because everything we do is like the opposite of what is necessary.²⁹⁴ Unlike Polus, Callicles is unwilling to simply defer to Socrates or even to the crowd about what kinds of activities are shameful or admirable. He distinguishes between legal norms and natural norms and argues that Socrates has deceptively mixed them up in his refutation of Polus, attacking his claims about the law with claims about nature and vice versa.²⁹⁵ Polus's claims cannot be refuted within their specific domain, Callicles argues; no one, he says, would ever tolerate suffering injustice but the slave, who is better dead than alive and who cannot defend himself against injustice. By nature, then, suffering injustice is both worse

²⁹² Plato, *Gorgias*, 480e

²⁹³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 481b

²⁹⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 481c

²⁹⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 482c-485e

and more shameful than committing it. The opposite is true by law and committing injustice is both worse and more shameful within that domain. But, Callicles argues, legal norms are not worth taking seriously for anyone like himself or any other powerful person. They are instituted, he says, in opposition to natural norms by the weak and the many for their own advantage over and against the powerful. It is only because the powerful have been for so long captured and indoctrinated by the weak and the many that they do not readily assert their own superiority and their own right to a greater share of property and other goods.

Callicles employs in this argument a framework that both corresponds to and cuts across Socrates' own. Whereas he distinguishes between law and nature, Socrates distinguishes between seeming and being; whereas Callicles privileges natural goods over legal goods, Socrates privileges genuine goods over apparent goods; and whereas Callicles holds that experience is the appropriate means for acquiring his preferred goods, Socrates believes that expertise is the appropriate means for acquiring his preferred goods. The disagreement between Callicles and Socrates is not simply about the truth of some set of claims but about the meaning of those very claims. And this is most clear in how Socrates responds to Callicles' initial argument. He is broadly faced with two options: he could attempt to persuade Callicles either that his expressed opinion is inconsistent with his own framework or that his framework generally is inadequate. If Vlastos is right that Socrates' method consists of nothing more than what he calls "the elenchus," or refutation, then we should expect Socrates to opt for some version of the former and so question him in the following four steps:

- (1) Requesting until he receives from Callicles some clear and evaluable definition of the relevant terms within his claim that suffering injustice is worse and more shameful than committing it.
- (2) Securing Callicles' agreement to some set of further, related claims.
- (3) Arguing until Callicles agrees that this set of further claims contradicts his initial claim.
- (4) Concluding that Callicles has been refuted.²⁹⁶

Socrates employs this same method with varying success earlier in his conversations with Gorgias and Polus and at first glance shows signs of continuing with Callicles. He questions him carefully about whom he says are the better and superior, those whom Callicles claims to deserve the greater portion of goods.²⁹⁷ And once Callicles answers, Socrates easily exposes some apparent contradiction in Callicles' beliefs. But it's worth noting that Socrates is not as careful with Callicles as he is with Gorgias earlier or even with Polus. While he questions Callicles about what he means by the "stronger" (ἰσχυρότερον), for example, he passes over the connotative flexibility of the word, which naturally overlaps with the terms to which it is being apposed, κρείττον and βέλτιον, and in this sense the contradiction he exposes is premature at best. When Callicles elaborates, suggesting that he means the better (ἀμείνους), Socrates

²⁹⁶ Vlastos, "The Socratic Elenchus," 39; Vlastos argues that Socrates claims to refute the *claim* of his interlocutor and not his interlocutor itself. This is true sometimes, but Socrates regularly has independent reasons for believing that the refuted claim is untrue—and typically that it contradicts his own claim, that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice, which has never been refuted. By focusing on Socrates' elenchus as an *epistemic* method rather than a political one, Vlastos neglects not only its etymology but the role it actually plays in the drama of the dialogue, as noted by, for example, Charles Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic in Plato's *Gorgias*," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 1: 1983: 75-121 and Hugh Benson, "The Priority of Definition and the Socratic Elenchus," *Oxford Studies in Ancient Philosophy* 8, 1990: 45-46, n. 44. In general, Socrates employs ad hominem argument specifically because he is, as it were, treating his interlocutors' souls, refuting them and their pretensions, and not precisely the claims they make. For these purposes, a mere consistency test is more than sufficient. It just so happens that Socrates also stakes his own claim in the *Gorgias*, and so argues beyond merely what his interlocutors say and towards his own account of the soul and of expertise.

²⁹⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 488b-d

dismisses that answer as unclear and himself suggests that Callicles intends to say the more thoughtful (φρονιμωτέρους).²⁹⁸ While Callicles agrees, he almost certainly does not understand “more thoughtful” in the same way that Socrates does. Socrates immediately appeals to a variety of experts who are, as experts, more thoughtful about their proper concern but Callicles means “more thoughtful” in a more general sense such that the more thoughtful person is better able, all else being equal, to actually acquire the greater share and so deserve it by nature.²⁹⁹ That Callicles continually elaborates and shifts what he calls the better may well imply that he doesn’t have a full account of the good or of the proper means of acquiring it—a claim that Callicles himself would not deny³⁰⁰—but the slight methodological shift between Socrates’ questioning of Gorgias and his questioning of Callicles indicates that Socrates has adopted also a different aim. Socrates is no longer practicing refutation in the sense that Vlastos interprets him; rather, his questioning demonstrates that Socrates attempts to subtly pull Callicles into his own dialogical framework, the framework defined by expertise and not mere experience, and so to refute him against an alien standard. Whatever the epistemic and political implications of this procedure—an issue I take up in Section 4—Socrates’ effort ultimately succeeds, and he demonstrates with some ease that Callicles, like his two companions before him, is not possessed of any kind of expertise, let alone the best and most valuable expertise, political expertise.

Socrates begins to chip away at Callicles’ dialogical framework by first demonstrating that there is an unresolved tension between his account of power and his stated preference for

²⁹⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 489e

²⁹⁹ Callicles conceives of the more thoughtful here in a similar way to Gorgias earlier (456a-b): they are those who are possessed of a general ability to persuade anyone about anything irrespective of their actual expertise.

³⁰⁰ Callicles says (484d-e) that those like Socrates are ridiculous speaking about politics before public men in just the same way as those public men would be ridiculous speaking before those like Socrates about philosophy.

natural goods. The weak and the many are of course physically stronger, and they are more thoughtful about the most essential kinds of expertise for living a life away from law—medicine, tailoring, cobbling, farming, *et cetera*.³⁰¹ When Callicles clarifies that he means that the powerful are those who are more thoughtful about the affairs of the city, he must at the same time admit that the goods that most concern him and those whom he considers the better and more powerful are predominantly legal, not natural.³⁰² The powerful for Callicles are those who are better able to use the law for their own advantage. But this is clearly inconsistent with Callicles' complaints about the legal subjugation of the powerful in his earlier etiology. Socrates gives Callicles a way out of this tension by asking him whether the powerful also rule themselves, the only people around who can be ruled by nature and not by law.³⁰³ In asking him this, however, Socrates carefully also poisons the question, polarising Callicles against what should be his own opinion. When Callicles asks Socrates what he means, Socrates replies that he means "nothing abstruse, but just as the many [intend]: being sensible and oneself having mastery of oneself, ruling the pleasures and desires in oneself."³⁰⁴ Callicles reacts as might be expected: by endorsing the opposite of whatever the weak and the many endorse.³⁰⁵ His powerful can only be understood as ruling others, acquiring by means of the law the kinds of goods that can be acquired in that way. The question that Socrates must then ask Callicles is what goods he has in mind. And here Callicles more fully embraces Socrates'

³⁰¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 490b-e

³⁰² Plato, *Gorgias*, 491a-b

³⁰³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491d

³⁰⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491d-e

³⁰⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491e

dialogical framework, emphasising those things that merely appear good rather than those that genuinely are: the same pleasures and desires that the many say must be mastered.³⁰⁶

Callicles' full endorsement of pleasure-seeking marks the beginning of the end for his argument. He is now arguing on Socrates' terms and must find some way of managing Socrates' counterarguments. He argues that any life dedicated to mastering one's appetites is less than human, no more than a stone or a corpse, as he says.³⁰⁷ But even if that were true, his own conclusion—that it is best to maximise one's appetites—does not follow either. Socrates compares this life to that of an especially greedy bird and points out that while pleasure may be a kind of good, it is preceded and succeeded also by pains, by hunger and thirst and other forms of lack, that only become more magnified and intolerable the more a person lives through them.³⁰⁸ It follows, Socrates argues, that the paradigm of Callicles' image of happiness is the catamite (κιναίδων), the passive, receptive participant in homosexual sex.³⁰⁹ While Callicles initially hesitates to accept this and chastises Socrates for introducing such shameful men into the conversation, he eventually bites this bullet, accepting therefore that there be no difference between the good and the pleasant, the bad and the painful in order that his argument not be inconsistent.³¹⁰ Little does Callicles know, however, but Socrates should point out only more and further inconsistencies in this now more settled opinion. Callicles does not assert, for example, that the good and the bad occur simultaneously, and yet pleasure and pain

³⁰⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 491e-492c

³⁰⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 492e

³⁰⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 494b-d

³⁰⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 494e

³¹⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 495a; Plato has Callicles employ here a term, ἀνομολογούμενος, that emphasises Callicles' desire that his speech remain not only consistent but lawful. As I show later in Section 4, this is important, for Callicles does not believe here that Socrates, while his speech is consistent, speaks lawfully.

occur simultaneously insofar as the thirsty person is satisfied in virtue of his being thirsty.³¹¹ Similarly, Callicles does not assert that the cowards and the courageous are both equally good or bad, and yet he asserts that cowards and the courageous both equally feel pleasure and pain—or even that the cowards feel *more* pleasure and pain. In whatever way Callicles tries to spin it, the good and the pleasant are not identical, nor likewise are the bad and the painful. And he changes his tune accordingly. But once Callicles admits that there are good and bad pleasures and pains, he must provide some account of what they are good for, and that, Callicles now agrees, requires an expert.³¹² At this point, then, Socrates need only lead Callicles along the same path tread before him by Gorgias and by Polus, proving ultimately that experience is a fruitless guide to expertise.

Socrates begins by asking Callicles whom he considers to be an expert, whether the practitioners of rhetoric or of some other occupation. Callicles agrees with Socrates that the expert for whom they now seek does not stand among the musicians or the playwrights but among those who speak before the Athenians. Of these, Callicles recognises two types: those, he says, who say what they do because they care for the Athenians and those who do not but who speak rather to flatter them.³¹³ The former are the excellent, those who practice genuine political expertise. The latter speak only to please and gratify the Athenians, which does them no good. As such, Callicles attempts to name those whom he believes to genuinely care for the Athenians. These true politicians do not include any of those practicing today, he says, but

³¹¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 496a-497d

³¹² Plato, *Gorgias*, 500a

³¹³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 502d-503a

include only great men such as Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and, most recently, Pericles.³¹⁴ Socrates disagrees. And he proceeds to show precisely why he disagrees by leading Callicles through an analysis once again of expertise. The problem that Socrates seeks to overcome is this: while Callicles rightly distinguishes between those politicians who are possessed of expertise and those who are not, he nevertheless knows not how to identify who belongs among the former and who belongs among the latter. Callicles, in other words, knows not what political expertise is or even what it is like, and for just the same reason as Gorgias and Polus before him: he and they each believe that expertise has its source in experience alone and do not therefore have an account of the good for which they practice rhetoric or how their practice causes and creates this good. Socrates must therefore provide for Callicles a more direct and complete account not of expertise generally, like that provided before to Gorgias, but specifically of *political* expertise, the expertise of which any good and excellent man is possessed.

Just as he does earlier, Socrates distinguishes political expertise into its practice and its product, and like other forms of expertise, the good man, the political expert, has always his product in view such that nothing he does is arbitrary (εἰκῆ). Appropriately, then, Socrates distinguishes political expertise from other kinds of expertise on the grounds of its unique product. For Socrates, this product is the form of the soul, by which he means that the good man “arranges [the soul] into a certain arrangement and forces one with another to be fitting and to harmonise until the whole affair is set together regulating and ordering.”³¹⁵ In less general terms, the good man makes the soul lawful, and therefore just and sensible, and by

³¹⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 503c

³¹⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 503e-504a

doing so ensures that the soul acts appropriately whatever may come. This is true both of one's own soul and the souls of others: in both cases, the political expert is bound by necessity to improve the soul and to act rightly. This is the sense in which I intend the admittedly somewhat odd expression "possessed of" that I use throughout this dissertation: whereas the expert of course possesses knowledge and excellence, they are at the same time possessed *by* it, akin to divine possession, insofar as they cannot act in any other way than in accord with their knowledge. The political expert does not differ in this respect from any other kind of expert; the smith and the carpenter and the shipbuilder all likewise possess their respective knowledge and are possessed by it. Political expertise does differ from these other kinds of expertise, however, insofar as its product is fully recursive. Whereas the smith might create metal implements—objects that are not themselves smithing—, the political expert creates the form and excellence of the soul, which is itself political expertise, the very same knowledge and power that the expert uses to create it. By means of their expertise, then, the political expert becomes ever more expert, ever more excellent, ever more lawful, just, and good; and at the same time, they also make others ever more expert, excellent, lawful, just, and good.

That political expertise improves both one's own soul and others' is crucial to Socrates' ultimate argument against Callicles and against rhetoric. This argument naturally turns on the question Socrates raises again and again before Polus and now Callicles of whether it is worse to commit or to suffer injustice. If Socrates is right, political expertise is a means of protecting oneself and others from committing injustice. But he asks Callicles whether there is also some expertise that protects a person from suffering injustice.³¹⁶ He suggests to Callicles, and

³¹⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 509c-d

Callicles agrees, that this expertise is that by which one is either a ruler in the city, a tyrant, or a companion of those governing. It is, in other words, political expertise, the expertise that also protects *others* from committing injustice.³¹⁷ However, Socrates does not yet reveal this; his primary interest here is refuting Callicles, who still believes that this expertise must be somehow opposed to that expertise which protects a person from committing injustice oneself. As such, Socrates focuses primarily upon how a person becomes a friend of the tyrant. Such a friend, he says, cannot be too much better or too much worse than the tyrant, since a friend, he says, is “the like to the like” (ὁ ὅμοιος τῷ ὁμῳ).³¹⁸ If the tyrant is unjust, as Callicles suggests he ought to be, then the friend of the tyrant must be also unjust, and if the friend is also unjust then there is no sense in which he succeeds in protecting himself against suffering injustice, even if no other person were to harm him. While Callicles does not yet agree with Socrates here, he has finally been subsumed fully into Socrates’ dialogical framework. The problem is now only that the good he seeks is an image: the power to inflict pain or death, or to, on the other hand, please and gratify. Should Socrates finally refute him, then he need only compare the fruits of his politics to Callicles’ politics. And here, then, we come to the keystone of Socrates’ refutation of Callicles: the so-called Pericles Argument.

Socrates begins his Pericles Argument by asking Callicles a seemingly straightforward question: “So *if* [Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles] are good [politicians] then evidently each of them was making the citizens better rather than worse; were they or not?”³¹⁹ Callicles answers that they were. But if Callicles is right and they improved the Athenians then

³¹⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 510a

³¹⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 510b

³¹⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 515d

the Athenians must have been worse at the beginning of Pericles' and the others' careers than at the end, and this doesn't seem to be the case. Socrates hears, he says, that Pericles in fact corrupted rather than improved the Athenians because he instituted wages for them.³²⁰ And when Callicles challenges this claim, Socrates reminds him about the facts of Pericles' life: "But I know clearly—both I and you—that Pericles was at first well reputed and no Athenian voted against him in any shameful deposition when they were worse. But when they became beautiful and good because of him, upon the end of Pericles' life, they voted against him for theft, and almost condemned him to death, evidently being worthless."³²¹ As Callicles immediately recognises, there are several possible interpretations of these events, and not all reflect poorly upon Pericles.³²² At any given time the Athenians may either be just or unjust, and Pericles himself may likewise be either just or unjust; there arise then four possible combinations: either (1) Pericles and the Athenians are both just, (2) Pericles and the Athenians are both unjust, (3) Pericles is just and the Athenians are unjust, or (4) Pericles is unjust and the Athenians are just. Callicles' opinion of Pericles is consistent with and can be vindicated by only (1) and (3). By the end of Pericles' life, however, (1) is clearly impossible. If Pericles were just then he would not ever do anything that warrants punishment, and if the Athenians were just then they would never punish anyone without warrant. This leaves (3). But as Socrates goes on

³²⁰ Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 355-356, alleges that Socrates here does not fairly represent Pericles' situation or those of the other three apparently false politicians: "Plato says nothing about the strategy of evacuation which both Themistocles and Pericles imposed on their fellow citizens (ἐπὶ τὸ βελτίστων) at the risk of immediate unpopularity; he ignores the subsequent repentance of the Athenians in the cases of Cimon and Pericles; and in regard to Miltiades and Pericles he seems to be guilty of some exaggeration" (356). Dodds' argument, however, mistakes what Plato has Socrates argue here. It doesn't matter that any of the statesmen sometimes take actions that don't merely please or flatter the Athenians or that the Athenians repented of their outrage towards them; as far as Socrates is concerned, these events in fact vindicate his point: that despite being the best and most able of their generation and subsequent generations, they nevertheless failed to make the Athenians any better than they were before.

³²¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 515e-516a

³²² Plato, *Gorgias*, 516a

to argue, (3) is just as incoherent as (1) is. He makes an analogy between Pericles and a caretaker of asses and horses and cattle.³²³ It would look bad, Socrates says, if these animals were kicking and butting and biting after having been taken into a caretaker's care when they were tame before. The change from animals being tame and gentle to animals being wild and violent indicates that a caretaker has not in fact cared for the animals in the way that he ought. The expert caretaker improves the animals in his care, changing them from wild and violent to tame and gentle, and not the reverse. Likewise, since Pericles is a caretaker of men and men are animals, the transition of the Athenians from being tame and gentle at the dawn of Pericles' career to being wild and violent at its twilight indicates that it is not possible for Pericles to have been just, to have been good, or to have exercised political expertise throughout his career; the expert politician improves the citizens in his care, changing them from unjust to just and not the reverse.³²⁴

Socrates' Pericles Argument brings his refutation of Callicles around full circle to his earlier refutation of Gorgias. Whereas Gorgias argues that the teacher of rhetoric cannot be blamed for the unjust conduct of their students, Callicles likewise argues that the orator cannot be blamed for the unjust conduct of the Athenians. Socrates shows, however, that neither the teacher of rhetoric nor the orator can reasonably accuse respectively their students or the Athenians of injustice without at the same time accusing also themselves. In each case, they occupy the position of experts purporting to improve those in their care; but if those in their care not only are not improved but are rather corrupted by them then they themselves are guilty of not having acted rightly, which implies of course that they cannot be possessed of true

³²³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 516a-b

³²⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 516e-517a

political expertise. Finally, since they claim to be—and almost certainly are—experienced in politics, political expertise must amount to something more or something other than political experience.

3. Socrates' Practice of Political Expertise

However successful Socrates' refutation of Callicles might be, he cannot defend his occupation by means of a negative argument alone. Even if Socrates is right that rhetoric is not a kind of expertise or that it is better to suffer than commit injustice, Callicles rightly emphasises that suffering injustice is worse than not suffering injustice, and philosophy warrants at least some blame if it needlessly leaves Socrates or anyone else vulnerable to suffering injustice.³²⁵

Socrates argues in response that while his occupation does in fact leave him and others vulnerable to suffering injustice, it does not do so *needlessly*; there is, in other words, no way to protect oneself against suffering injustice while at the same time protecting oneself and others from committing it. For Callicles, of course, this is reason enough to reject Socrates' occupation. But Socrates goes even further: not only does his occupation leave its practitioners vulnerable to suffering injustice, but it does so precisely *because* it protects them from committing it. He tells Callicles that

I expect that I am among few Athenians, so that I don't say that I am alone, to practice true political expertise and, of those now, to do politics alone. Since I certainly don't speak on each occasion speeches speaking for the sake of gratification, but for the sake of the best, not for the sake of the most pleasant, and am unable to make those that you recommend, the nice ones, I certainly don't know how to speak in court. But the same speech comes back to me that I

³²⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521b-c

said to Polus, for I will be judged how a physician is judged by children if a cook were accusing him.³²⁶

Socrates' argument here is akin to that he developed earlier concerning the friends of tyrants.³²⁷ The tyrant tolerates only his friends, those who are not too much better or too much worse than himself. Since Socrates practices political expertise, he believes that he is too much better than the tyrant he faces—the Athenian people—and naturally infers that they would not tolerate him, doing him harm precisely because he is better than them, protecting himself and others from committing injustice. Should Socrates then be harmed by anyone, it only confirms for him that he is in fact better, vindicating his occupation in the face of Callicles' critique.

But this is a risky strategy. While Socrates' being too much better than the Athenians may well explain his trial and execution, there is also another possible explanation: that he is too much *worse* than the Athenians, that he ignorantly employs political power, leads the Athenians astray, and does them harm. Socrates is of course aware of this second explanation—it being the central theme of his negative argument against rhetoric—and attempts to show therefore that where rhetoric is shameful and bad, his occupation is admirable and good. In this section, then, I analyse Socrates' positive argument to show how he believes that his trial and execution vindicates rather than undermines his occupation. I begin with the explanatory story that Socrates tells before turning successively to how the analogy he draws between himself and the physician vindicates his occupation, the power he attributes to it, and the account he gives of the good for the sake of which he practices politics and that underwrites its power.

³²⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521d-e

³²⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 510b-c

Socrates attempts to explain his trial and execution by analogy to a physician brought before a court of children by a cook on charges of cutting and burning and giving them bitter potions to drink.³²⁸ These children, ignorant as they are, don't understand that the physician performs these unpleasant procedures for their benefit; they don't understand health; they don't understand disease; and they don't understand medicine. The children understand only the *appearance* of these: the pleasure or pain that medical procedures cause. And since medical procedures are unpleasant, the children believe that they are bad despite the good they actually create. As such, the physician can say nothing in his defence were he to end up in such a predicament; if he were to tell the children that he performs medical procedures on them for their own benefit and in order to create health, the children can only become outraged. If the physician were correct then their diet, at least, would be turned upside down and everything they eat is the opposite of what is necessary. And Socrates himself, he tells Callicles, faces the same trouble with his own occupation. Like the children, the Athenians do not understand the benefit that Socrates creates and resent the unpleasant procedures that he performs: his questions, refutations, and reproaches. And likewise, too, the Athenians can only become outraged when Socrates explains to them that he performs these procedures for their benefit. They therefore judge him guilty even though he does them only good.

For Vlastos and others, the analogy that Socrates draws between himself and the physician is evidence enough that he believes that their respective occupations are vindicated in the same way.³²⁹ The physician benefits the children because he is an expert, because he

³²⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 521e-522a

³²⁹ Vlastos, *Socrates, Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, 240, n. 21; See also David Levy, "Techne and the Problem of Socratic Philosophy in the *Gorgias*," *Apeiron* 38, 2005: 225

knows health and its causes; Socrates then likewise benefits the Athenians in the same way: because he is an expert, because he knows justice and its causes. Socrates not only tries his hand at political expertise but believes that he performs it in full. This is right, I argue, but in a radically different way than Vlastos imagines. While he infers that Socrates asserts his own expertise on the strength alone of the analogy that he makes between himself and the physician, we should attend more carefully to what Socrates' analogy actually implies—or more correctly *does not* imply. No analogy proves by itself, after all, that the analogues are similar in every respect, lest we conclude that Socrates is also a physician and possessed of medical expertise; we must therefore determine the *relevant* similarity or similarities between Socrates and the physician, and it's not obvious that these include expertise, especially since Socrates consistently claims throughout the *Gorgias* to be ignorant of the matter under discussion. Along these lines, J. Clerk Shaw argues for a minimalist interpretation of Socrates' analogy according to which the relevant similarities between Socrates and the physician include no more than: (A) that they both employ unpleasant procedures for the sake of some good, (B) that others do not or cannot recognise the benefit of their unpleasant procedures, and (C) that their accusers, the orator and the cook, concern themselves only with pleasure and not with the genuine good.³³⁰ The purpose of Shaw's minimalist analogy is to emphasise that Socrates need not assert that he resembles the physician in terms of his knowledge or expertise. And to underscore this, Shaw asks us to imagine a third analogue: someone who practices medicine while being nevertheless ignorant of its goods and its practices, its account and its procedures. This ignorant physician does all the things that an expert physician does, and for the same reason: he cuts and

³³⁰ Shaw, "True Political Craft," 189-190

cauterises, administers bitter potions, and applies salves, all for the sake of creating health in the children. And as a consequence, those children judge him in just the same way that they judge the expert physician: as guilty of causing pain, which they believe to be evil. As far as Shaw is concerned, then, the actual expertise of the physician is irrelevant to his fate; his fate is the same whether the physician truly benefits the children or not. And likewise also for Socrates: whether he is or is not truly an expert, whether he actually performs true political expertise or merely tries his hand at it, the Athenians shall judge him guilty all the same. Shaw does not believe therefore that the analogy between Socrates and the physician itself implies that Socrates is possessed of expertise.

But Shaw neglects something important with this argument. Socrates does not make the analogy between himself and the physician simply to trace the possible lines of causation through his occupation, as if Callicles were interested in it as a merely theoretical fascination. He is concerned also to show that only one possible causal story is true: that he is tried and executed because he is too much *better* than the Athenians. He cannot accept here that he is too much worse. And this is important. The vindicating function of Socrates' analogy is crucial to interpreting its meaning: it defines its relevance criteria as including not only those aspects of his occupation and of medicine that explain why he and the physician are judged guilty but that also at the same time demonstrate that they are judged guilty *unjustly*. The ignorant physician falls short of this last criterion: he is not too much better than the children; he is too much worse, whatever his intention, because he misuses the power of medicine to create not health but injury and illness. And as such, he is justly convicted, even if the children know

nothing about health. Unlike Socrates (by hypothesis) and the expert physician, his fate undermines his occupation and he is not therefore relevantly analogous to them.

The disanalogy between Socrates and the ignorant physician tells us something important about Socrates' understanding of his own ignorance. Whereas the physician's ignorance makes his occupation shameful, Socrates does not believe that the same is true of himself, and in fact quite the opposite. We might be tempted to tell here the same story as Socrates tells in the *Apology*,³³¹ and while this may well be ultimately appropriate, the *Gorgias* represents Socrates' ignorance in a slightly different way. At a crucial moment in the dialogue, after going through by himself his argument for the superiority of self-mastery over pleasure-seeking, Socrates tells Callicles that

These [conclusions] revealed to us in the preceding account in this way, as I say, are held down and bound, in case it is rather boorish to say, by iron and adamant arguments—as, at least, it would seem thus—which, if you will not loose, or someone more vigorous than you, then anyone saying anything else than what I say now cannot speak well, since my account is forever the same: that I do not know these things however it stands, but that of those I have happened upon, even now, no one can be saying anything else and not be ridiculous.³³²

At first blush, this is an odd juxtaposition. Dodds, for his part, suggests of this passage that “This Socratic profession of ignorance comes in oddly after the confident assertion in the preceding sentence ... as if Plato had belatedly remembered to make his hero speak in character.”³³³ But as David Levy rightly emphasises, Socrates says here not only *that* he doesn't know, but *why* he doesn't know: “Socrates is not claiming not to know the answer to a ‘what is it’ question,” Levy says, “nor is he claiming in this specific context not to know that committing an injustice is both

³³¹ See Chapter 1, pg. 67-69 above.

³³² Plato, *Gorgias*, 508e-509a

³³³ Dodds, *Plato: Gorgias*, 341

more evil and more shameful for the agent who does it than for the victim. Instead, he is claiming not to know how it is that this proposition survives all attempted refutations.”³³⁴ Socrates professes ignorance, in other words, not because the things he says are untrue or even uncertain; he is in fact quite certain that his claims are true. Rather, Socrates professes ignorance because he does not know how the claims of which he is certain are ultimately *justified*. He may believe that he has developed firm arguments to secure them—forged as he says of iron and adamant—but he nevertheless hedges his bets: these arguments only *seem* secure to him, and they seem so only because even the most youthful, vigorous, headstrong people whom Socrates has met have proven powerless to loose them. Whereas those such as Vlastos interpret Socrates as coming to his conclusions by asserting the negation of those claims of others that he himself refutes, Socrates suggests here something different: a version of Popperian falsificationism.³³⁵ Socrates conjectures some claim that he then subjects to the refutation of others (and presumably also himself); he then continues the conjecture insofar as it continues to withstand such scrutiny—and with more and more certainty as Socrates’ opinion withstands again and again the attempts to refute it. But even so, Socrates recognises that his certainty is never complete. He recognises that some yet unknown and brilliant man (*id est*, Plato) may someday come along and finally refute his opinion. And until he can somehow ensure that this does not happen, until he can somehow ensure by some other means that his arguments are in fact forged of iron and adamant, he continues to profess his ignorance.

³³⁴ Levy, “Techne and the Problem,” 211-212

³³⁵ Notably, Popper himself argues persuasively that this was the self-conscious practice of Greek cosmologists in the centuries before and even after Socrates. See his *The World of Parmenides: Essays on the Presocratic Enlightenment* [ed. Arne F. Petersen], London, UK: Routledge, 1998.

If this is right then Socrates' particular brand of ignorance need not undermine his occupation so long as he still asserts true claims about it, about the good for which he practices his occupation, and about the causes of that good. Curiously, however, Levy argues that Socrates asserts the opposite consequence from the very same profession of ignorance.³³⁶ As he reads him, Socrates' profession of ignorance in the *Gorgias* amounts to the explicit profession of *methodological* ignorance: ignorance concerning the appropriate procedures to employ in order to examine, refute, and persuade others. For Levy, the things about which Socrates claims ignorance are generalisable beyond the specific arguments to which he refers and the extent to which they survive refutation. Socrates apparently claims "not to know how any of his *logoi* are successful (i.e., how any of them produce the results he intends, or how any of his elenctic examinations are capable of reducing his interlocutor to a state worthy of ridicule)."³³⁷ Levy moves smoothly here from, in his words, "the logic of Socrates' arguments" to "Socrates' characterizations of the elenchus as a method for testing lives," a move that of course demands that Socrates attend beyond the mere truth of his arguments also to their psychological consequences.³³⁸ There is good sense in speaking generally about Socrates' occupation and the demand that the practitioner of oral dialectic know not only the truth of a claim but also its psychological effect on those who might hear it, and I make an argument to this effect myself below, but Levy provides such weak evidence for Socrates himself actually doing this that he may well do better to provide none at all. In the first place, it is simply not appropriate to generalise from "these things" about which Socrates claims not to know to *any*

³³⁶ Levy, "Techne and the Problem," 211-214

³³⁷ Levy, "Techne and the Problem," 212

³³⁸ Levy, "Techne and the Problem," 212, n. 55

of his arguments just because the term is plural. It is clear enough contextually to what “these things” refer, and they are the arguments that Socrates had just gone through: the arguments concerning the superiority of self-mastery over pleasure-seeking. Those are the arguments the standing of which Socrates claims not to know. And because Plato puts these arguments in their dramatic context, we as readers can also immediately see their psychological effect: simply put, Socrates’ arguments here have no psychological effect at all on Callicles because Callicles has altogether refused to participate in the conversation at this point, and surely Socrates recognises this. Second, and more to the point, Levy recognises that his interpretation of Socrates’ profession of ignorance stands in tension with his later claim to practice true political expertise. While this is in fact a severe liability for his interpretation, he suggests that it is rather a virtue because the *Gorgias* as a whole, he says, “seems to call attention to the problematic nature of Socrates’ practice as a philosopher,” which apparently demands that the more favourable interpretations of Socrates’ argument be treated with greater suspicion.³³⁹ It is worth emphasising, however, that Levy’s search for problems is just that; it is not a search for the best or most defensible interpretation of what Socrates says or what the dialogue shows, and risks therefore discovering problems and tensions that simply aren’t there. This is what happens here: Levy has simply invented from whole cloth a tension within Socrates’ self-conception, and this is simply unacceptable. We need not interpret Socrates as so utterly incompetent and foolish that he apparently intentionally both vindicates and undermines his occupation. A more charitable—and I think more straightforward—interpretation of Socrates’ professions of ignorance in the *Gorgias* holds that while Socrates lacks a final certainty about

³³⁹ Levy, “Techne and the Problem,” 217

the claims he makes, he nevertheless believes that he practices true political expertise by means of a true account of justice and its causes, or even, as the *Apology* suggests, because he knows his ignorance. It may still turn out, as I argue that it does, that Socrates is wrong about this and that he does not in fact perform true political expertise in any way that might vindicate his occupation. But this argument must be developed carefully and with the recognition of the fact that Socrates himself disagrees.

We might make here a distinction similar to that which Socrates makes in the *Meno*: Socrates tells Meno there that a person need not *know* how to get to Larissa so long as they have a true belief about how to get there.³⁴⁰ The same is presumably true also here: Socrates must believe that he is possessed at least of the power associated with political expertise, even if that power is not bound and secured by chains of iron and adamant like Daedalus's statues. And this is indeed what he says: when Callicles questions whether Socrates actually believes that he lives an admirable life leaving himself vulnerable to suffering injustice in the way he describes, Socrates answers that a man such as himself is admirable only insofar as he is possessed of the power to protect himself and others against, "with respect to men and gods, both unjust speaking and acting."³⁴¹ Naturally, while Socrates aspires to this power, he of course emphasises once again his ignorance, telling Callicles that "if, however, someone were to refute me [with respect to] this protection being powerless to protect myself or someone else, then I would be ashamed ... and if through this powerlessness I were to die, then I would be displeased."³⁴² Socrates remains confident, however, because he is possessed also, he

³⁴⁰ Plato, *Meno*, 96e-98a

³⁴¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 522c-d

³⁴² Plato, *Gorgias*, 522d

thinks, of a true account of the judgement of the soul in the afterlife from which he infers its proper care. It is worth noting before turning to this account, however, that the power to which Socrates aspires is distinct from the power that he earlier sets before Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles as the criterion of their goodness. While Socrates argues that these men are at least not good because they do not create justice—a positive power—, Socrates here claims that he himself is admirable insofar as he protects himself and others against committing injustice—a negative power. One might be tempted to conclude that Socrates simply holds himself to a different and inferior standard than that to which he holds others, but that is not quite what's going on here. The first clue, I suggest, is that Socrates draws the analogy specifically between himself and the *physician*, an analogy further emphasised by Socrates' word choice, with the word “to protect (βοηθεῖν)” being associated especially with medical protection or aid. This choice is significant; he very well could have made the analogy between himself and the physical trainer, the builder, the mathematician, or any other of the dozen ordinary experts whom he has hitherto mentioned throughout the *Gorgias*; each one, like the physician, resembles Socrates' occupation insofar as they are liable to be resented by those who do not understand the benefit they provide because their procedures nevertheless cause pain. That Socrates chooses the physician for his analogy is important for two reasons. First, only the physician among those other experts exercises a similarly negative power: while Socrates removes injustice from a person in order to restore them to a justice already established, so too does the physician remove illness and injury from a person to restore them to a health already established. Second, Socrates has already made an analogy involving the physician. He tells Gorgias and Polus that the expertise concerning the soul is analogous to the

expertise concerning the body insofar as each is composed of two corresponding parts: legislation and judgement for the soul and gymnastic and medicine for the body.³⁴³ When Socrates examines Pericles and the others, he holds them to the standard of legislators, those responsible for exercising the positive power to create justice. Conversely, if Socrates more closely resembles the physician, he need only exercise himself the negative power to remove injustice. In this sense, Socrates lays explicit claim to practice not political expertise as a whole, but only one part of it: judgement. But as he shortly makes clear, his occupation is not so limited.

Socrates gives to Callicles an “exceedingly beautiful account (μάλα καλοῦ λόγου)” to show that the reasonable person fears injustice more than death.³⁴⁴ Despite its form, Socrates insists that this account is not a mere story (μῦθον) because, he says, “I will say to you what I am about to say as being true.”³⁴⁵ He tells Callicles that there was a law concerning mortals in the age of Cronus that the gods still observe: that the just and pious go to the Isle of the Blessed upon death and the unjust and impious go to Tartarus for payment and retribution.³⁴⁶ But, Socrates continues, the early cases both under Cronus and under Zeus were badly decided. Zeus therefore sought to rectify the situation. He recognised that the cases were badly decided because people were judged fully adorned, and “many ... having wicked souls are dressed in beautiful bodies, pedigrees, and wealth, and, when they are judged, many witnesses come with them witnessing how they lived justly,” while others whose souls are good are dressed in ugly

³⁴³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 464b-e

³⁴⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 523a

³⁴⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 523a

³⁴⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 523b

bodies, poor pedigrees, and poverty, with many witnesses witnessing their injustice.³⁴⁷ Zeus ordered therefore that people be judged naked, stripped of the adornments of body, pedigree, wealth, and reputation and that the judges judge also in the same state, soul to soul, both naked and unadorned. He therefore charged his sons Minos, Rhadamanthus, and Aeacus with the task of judging mortals—Aeacus to judge those from Europe, Rhadamanthus to judge those from Asia, and Minos to serve as senior judge for more difficult cases.³⁴⁸ If, rare as it may be, these judges examine a soul and find that it is good and admirable, they send it off to the Isle of the Blessed; but if they examine a soul and find that it is scarred by a life of injustice and impiety, they send it to Tartarus in order that it undergo the appropriate punishment to either serve as an example for the other souls, if it is incurable, or be cured of its injustice.

Socrates' account here has two key features that, Socrates says, signify "this excellent way of life and justice and the other excellence exercising both to live and to have died."³⁴⁹ In the first place, Socrates attempts to emulate as closely as possible the judgement practiced by Zeus's three sons. While they examine souls naked and unadorned, Socrates attempts to have his interlocutors lay aside their adornments and to see through those that remain. He waves Polus away at the beginning of the dialogue, for example, when he begins to make long, complicated speeches that don't directly answer Socrates' questions, obscuring therefore the true quality of his soul.³⁵⁰ He requests therefore that Gorgias himself take over from Polus and give him a demonstration of his ability to answer briefly. Once Gorgias agrees, Socrates does nothing short of prosecute him, questioning him concerning who he is, the nature of his

³⁴⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 523c-d

³⁴⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 524a

³⁴⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 527e

³⁵⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 448c-e

occupation, and ultimately his and its goodness. While Socrates obviously cannot sentence Gorgias to Tartarus if his soul is found wanting, he can, if Polus is to be believed, cause him to feel shame—and Socrates must believe that this is at least adequate, restoring a person to a justice already established.³⁵¹ This brings us then to the second, subtler feature of Socrates' account: in addition to a model of judgement, Socrates presents also a model of legislation. He tells Callicles that Zeus, upon receiving testimony from Pluto and the keepers of the Isle of the Blessed, examines the problem, identifies its cause, and effects a solution—all while having already anticipated it.³⁵² While Socrates does not explicitly claim to practice legislation in this way before he goes through this account, he stakes this claim soon thereafter. He tells Callicles, for example, that he contemplates, he says, “about how I will be revealed to the judge as a most healthy soul.”³⁵³ And he continues, telling Callicles that if he were to follow “being persuaded by me,” then, “having arrived, [he] will be happy both living and coming to an end” because he “will suffer nothing terrible if, with respect to being (τῷ ὄντι), [he is] beautiful and good, exercising (ἀσκῶν) excellence.”³⁵⁴ Socrates' transition at the very end of the dialogue to gymnastic language indicates precisely what Socrates believes that he does: he not only protects himself and others from committing injustice, but he also actually creates justice, arriving at its summit.

Despite this ambitious claim, Socrates does not explain precisely how he and his occupation actually create justice. He leaves it to Callicles and to the bystanders (Plato's readers

³⁵¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 461b-c

³⁵² Zeus apparently says (523d-e) that Prometheus had already been commanded to ensure that mortals not know the day of their death, and Zeus also already installed his sons as judges “recognising this before you.” (523e) While Zeus is solving a problem, he also not only foresees the problem, but also its solution, emphasising his expertise.

³⁵³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 526d

³⁵⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 527c, d

included) to infer how to follow him from what he has said already: from his analogy between the soul and the body and from his account of the judgement of souls in the afterlife. Let me begin then with the analogy between the soul and the body.

As I mentioned above, Socrates says that both expertise concerning the soul and expertise concerning the body are constituted by two distinct parts: legislation and judgement for the soul and gymnastic and medicine for the body.³⁵⁵ The analogy between the two kinds of expertise holds also within their parts: legislation to gymnastic and judgement to medicine. I also said above that these analogies hold primarily due to the form of their respective powers: legislation and gymnastic are both characterised by the positive power to create respectively justice and health; judgement and medicine, conversely, are both characterised by the negative power to remove respectively injustice and injury. Here then is where the rubber meets the road. These powers are exercised by a set of procedures, and these procedures can be determined therefore with reference to the powers to which they contribute. Gymnastic, for example, exercising the aforementioned positive power, acts with and upon bodies that are already at least minimally healthy; a body must be capable of lifting or running or stretching, after all, in order that it can even participate in gymnastic and so become stronger, faster, or more flexible. The same should also be true therefore of legislation: the unjust soul, powerless

³⁵⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 464b-465c; Christopher Rowe, *Philosophical Writing*, 151, n. 20, suggests that because sophistic and rhetoric are so often muddled Socrates may consider that legislation and justice too are muddled: the same expertise with two distinct functions. This makes some sense of Socrates' implicit belief that he practices political expertise as a whole, but it does not recognise the dramatic context of those elements of the dialogue. Rowe's concern is strictly theoretical: he argues that since legislation and justice involve the same knowledge, they must therefore be muddled together and overlap. But this is not a reasonable inference. Both gymnastic and medicine involve knowledge of health, but their procedures are quite distinct. The distinction between them lies with their specific subject—healthy bodies and unhealthy bodies, respectively—and the procedures appropriate to each. The same must be true also of legislation and justice. Sophistic and rhetoric are muddled because neither has an account of the good for the sake of which they are practiced, and so cannot actually distinguish themselves as occupations. What Rowe does not recognise is that this muddle prefigures Socrates' own confusion between legislation and justice, and his use of the procedures of the latter in pursuit of the former.

as it is to deliberate, could only legislate unjustly. This introduces an important criterion for the procedures involved. As I mention in Chapter 2, gymnastic is nearly recursive: the good for the sake of which one practices gymnastic—health—is itself (nearly) identical to gymnastic, the expertise that creates health. At minimum, then, all gymnastic procedures are consistent with the continued exercise of all other gymnastic procedures; they do not cause injury. If legislation is relevantly similar, the same must be true also of it: the procedures of legislation must be also consistent with the continued exercise of all other legislative procedures; they do not cause injustice.

There is an obvious resemblance here to the power to which Socrates aspires—the power to protect oneself and others against committing injustice—, but we should be careful here about what this resemblance actually implies. That gymnastic and legislative procedures do not cause respectively injury or injustice is a *minimal* requirement, a necessary but not sufficient criterion; gymnastic procedures involve more than mere consistency with one another to create health, after all, since they require also an account of the causes of health *for a specific body*.³⁵⁶ Likewise, again, for legislation *mutatis mutandis*. The resemblance between this necessary criterion for gymnastic procedures, in this case, and the power to which Socrates aspires reflects the fact that gymnastic and medicine genuinely overlap and harmonise, sharing as they do a subject: the baseline health achieved by protecting a body against injury is the touchstone upon which the powers and procedures of one occupation meet the powers and procedures of the other. But while gymnastic and medicine meet here, this is their only point of

³⁵⁶ I say that gymnastic requires an account of the causes of health for a specific body because different bodies have different parts and powers; in the extreme case, gymnastic for a human must of course differ from gymnastic for a dog or a crow or an octopus, but Classical Greeks were also aware of course that even different human bodies required different treatment. See for example Aristotle's comments on the food appropriate to Milo as compared to others at *Nicomachean Ethics* II.6.1106a29-1106b15.

overlap, reflecting two key differences between them. First, gymnastic begins where medicine ends. Gymnastic procedures are additive, contributing to a positive power, creating more and new health for an already minimally healthy body. Medical procedures, on the other hand, are *transformative*: they completely alter the quality of the body upon which they are performed; by acting on an unhealthy body, they make it healthy; but by acting on a healthy body, they make it unhealthy.³⁵⁷ This property of medical procedures demands then that the physician know precisely when and how to employ them. The physician must recognise health and disease in their patients and know the generic causes of both; without this knowledge, the physician may be liable to administer carboplatin to a healthy person or to treat leukemia with an appendectomy. Second, and consequently, while expertise concerning gymnastic necessarily implies the maximal health of the expert, the same is not true of medicine. Medicine is not recursive in the same way that gymnastic is; while the physician recognises health insofar as he has an account of the healthy body and the unhealthy body, his knowledge of health is merely propositional; he at best accomplishes the minimal criterion mentioned above.³⁵⁸ The physician

³⁵⁷ Jacques Derrida, "Plato's Pharmacy," 97-98, notes for example that the Greek φάρμακον means both medicine and poison. The Greeks were painfully aware that taking medication as a healthy person would actually harm one's body. While we are today aware that medication has side-effects and appreciate much better than the Greeks precisely how and why medication accomplishes the desired processes, that medical knowledge often mediates our appreciation of the actual dangers that improper dosage or use of pharmaceuticals present. See also G.E.R. Lloyd, *Magic, Reason, and Experience: Studies in the Origin and Development of Greek Science*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1979: 43-44.

³⁵⁸ While it might be strange to suggest that the physician, knowing health though he does, can nevertheless remain unhealthy, there are perfectly good reasons for this: the physician may understand that their health is worth sacrificing in some cases for the sake of some aspect of justice. Subjecting oneself to great personal risk to heal people during a plague, for example, is honourable and praiseworthy but not strictly demanded by knowledge of health. Contrarily, gymnastic is not the kind of thing that is compatible with similar sacrifice: to help another become healthier through gymnastic at the same time improves a gymnast's health since they too must necessarily participate in gymnastic at the same time. Because political expertise is the highest expertise, a similar distinction does not hold between legislation and justice: "healing" a person (id est, punishing them) does not risk a judge's justice in the way that physicians risk their health, and justice is not the kind of thing that can be subordinated to greater concerns either. But as we shall see, the procedures of justice do have deleterious effects

is clearly in a better position than any layman with respect to the body, but he nevertheless falls short, if he does not also practice gymnastic, of the physical excellence exercised by the gymnast, as Socrates himself emphasises with respect to legislation.³⁵⁹ As such, if Socrates' occupation is analogous in this way to medicine, then it is not obvious that Socrates actually will reveal to Aeacus a maximally healthy soul upon his death; insofar as procuring the propositional knowledge of justice gets in the way of actually performing it, Socrates may well end up with a pale and feeble soul like the bodies of the Socratic students in the Phrontisterion in Aristophanes' *Clouds*. And this is really what Callicles' critique boils down to.

However, Socrates implies at the end of the dialogue, once again, that he practices more than mere judgement and is possessed therefore of something more than mere propositions. It is important to keep in mind here that when medicine removes injury and illness from a body, it restores it to a health previously established. In general, this health is previously established by gymnastic, but it may also be previously established *by nature* through the ordinary, simple processes of growth and development; there is, in other words, a baseline health that is essential to a body as such, and merely protecting the body against illness and injury ensures that it remains genuinely healthy, with all the powers and procedures that this entails. As far as Socrates is concerned, the same is true also of the soul. By practicing judgement, he protects the soul from committing injustice in order that the soul remain genuinely just. But here there is a crucial disanalogy between the body and the soul emphasised by Socrates' account of the afterlife that, he believes, further vindicates his

on individuals in the same way that medical procedures have deleterious effects on healthy individuals. I provide a more detailed analysis of how this is in Chapter 2.

³⁵⁹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 520b

occupation. Because gymnastic concerns the excellence of the *body*, its limitations reflect the limitations of that body. Of these, one is chief amongst all: the body dies. It lacks in itself some kind of activating principle and is essentially passive. The body cannot by itself exercise its powers, lest we find corpses running laps. Rather, the body must be piloted, like a ship, by some activating principle. And that activating principle is the soul, the part of a person that survives death and separates from the body.³⁶⁰ Gymnastic, therefore, consists not merely of health, but also of the quality of the soul that appropriately exercises health: knowledge of gymnastic. This is what I mean when I say that gymnastic is only *nearly* recursive. Legislation, however, does not face this same limitation. Since the soul is active, using and being used by the soul itself, legislation is fully recursive: it creates justice, and justice is fully and completely identical to legislation. This then is the key: by protecting the soul from committing injustice, Socrates allows it to exercise the powers essential to it and so become ever more just. To put this another way, Socrates and Callicles and every other soul already practices legislation simply and essentially; they need only be allowed to continue, and this is what Socrates claims to do by protecting the soul from committing injustice.

Due largely to the preëminence of the *Apology*, commentators typically argue that Socrates actually protects the soul from injustice by means of the elenchus, or refutation. This is of course a mere synecdoche: Socrates' activity even as he describes it in the *Apology* and as I discuss in Chapter 1, consists of at least provoking, questioning, examining, refuting, and reproaching a person, and each of these of course consists of its own parts too. Whatever these parts happen to be—and I discuss them, if briefly, in Section 4—it is important for now only to

³⁶⁰ Plato, *Gorgias*, 524b

understand how Socrates believes these procedures to come together to protect himself and others from committing injustice. Both Danielle Layne and Francisco Gonzalez provide complimentary accounts of Socrates' occupation to explain exactly this.³⁶¹

Layne's Socrates recognises that the source of evil and injustice is ignorance. But where other commentators argue that Socrates somehow overcomes ignorance and achieves some semblance of knowledge and expertise—against everything that Socrates actually says about himself—, Layne argues that Socrates merely neutralises his ignorance by recognising it for what it is. Unlike Callicles, by hypothesis, who embraces and acts upon his ignorance, multiplying evil upon evil, Socrates mediates its harmful consequences through, Layne says, “the expulsion of one's likeness from the ignorance of the bad merely present.”³⁶² To put this in more straightforward terms: the person who knows what they do not know is prompted always to reflect upon the justice or wisdom or courage or what-have-you of any possible act that they might imagine; they refuse to be ruled by their ignorance and instead accomplish self-mastery in and through their desire for the good. As a consequence, Socrates or anyone else who recognises their ignorance can do only what they can be certain is excellent.

Gonzalez develops a substantively similar account to Layne's, if more complete, that extends the same basic insight beyond Socrates as a unique individual to his relationships with others. Socrates is concerned, after all, not only about whether *he* is protected against committing injustice, but also about whether *others* are so protected. This concern for the

³⁶¹ Layne, “Presence of Ignorance,” 253-267; Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, especially Chs. 2, 6 and 7. See also Francisco Gonzalez, “Non-Propositional Knowledge in Plato,” *Apeiron* 31(3), 1998: 235-284; Francisco Gonzalez, “The Virtue of Dialogue, Dialogue as Virtue in Plato's *Protagoras*,” *Philosophical Papers* 43(1), 2014: 33-66, Francisco Gonzalez, “Is There an Art of Living?,” *Salmagundi* 126/127, 2000: 253-275, and Danielle Layne, “From Irony to Enigma: Discovering Double Ignorance and Socrates' Divine Knowledge,” *Methexis* 23, 2010: 73-90.

³⁶² Layne, “Presence of Ignorance,” 261

justice of others is the centrepiece of Gonzalez's account.³⁶³ He recognises that Socrates does not merely desire the good in a vacuum, but rather recognises his ignorance and so his need for the good by questioning and refuting others in conversations concerning it. This is the essence of Socrates' oral dialectic, and for Gonzalez, dialectic is essentially *protreptic*: through his oral dialectic, in other words, Socrates exposes to his interlocutors their ignorance, turning them away from it and towards the wisdom they now self-consciously lack. Socrates' self-conscious ignorance becomes therefore something more than merely a means of making *his own* political decisions: it propagates and transmits from person to person the power to protect themselves from committing injustice. In this sense, then, Socrates is possessed not only of the power to protect himself from committing injustice, but the power also to protect others.

I have already challenged Gonzalez's account of Socrates' oral dialectic in earlier chapters of this dissertation, and I will challenge it again in Section 4 of this chapter. Here, however, I want to emphasise that it provides not only an adequate description of at least Socrates' understanding of the power proper to political expertise, but also an elegant solution to the overarching question of this section: whether Socrates intends that he merely tries his hand at political expertise or performs it in full. Put simply, if Gonzalez's account of his dialectic is correct, then Socrates intends *both*. He not only reveals to the judges a soul that is maximally

³⁶³ See especially Gonzalez, "Constructive Protreptic," 175-182. There is, however, a crucial difference between Layne's and Gonzalez's account of human wisdom: Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 30-41, so emphasises the distinction between expertise and Socrates' human wisdom (here manifest as courage) that he insists that the latter requires that Socrates not have the means to protect himself or others from committing injustice. While Gonzalez rightly rejects as anachronistic and meta-textual clever distinctions such as between fact and value that promise to cleanly define how courage involves risk in some ways but not in the most important ways, I cannot help but conclude that he nevertheless inflates precisely what is at risk in acting courageously. A complete interpretation of the *Laches* is of course beyond what is appropriate here, but I suspect that the kind of risk depicted in that dialogue involves only conditional and not unconditional goods—that it is courageous to risk one's wealth or health or reputation but not the excellence of one's soul, which we might instead call reckless.

healthy, as he says,³⁶⁴ but recognises also that he stands in need of becoming better at deliberating, and so creating an even healthier soul.³⁶⁵ This is, as Gonzalez recognises, essentially and unavoidably paradoxical; Socrates can only grasp his own excellence asymptotically as something approached but never arrived at. Justice is identical to its pursuit; it always both creates and is created by justice; and in this condition, the soul both uses and is used by the soul for the sake of the soul using and being used by the soul. This recursion becomes nothing other than circularity, leaving every description and account of justice wanting. And this is the reason then that Socrates remains ignorant in the way that he does: if justice is only ever actually justified by justice then no one can ever be certain therefore that they are possessed of it; and yet, they are possessed of it precisely because they are uncertain. The ambiguity with which I am concerned in this chapter, if Gonzalez is right, all but disappears: there is no distinction to be found between merely trying one's hand at political expertise and actually performing it; to practice is to practice is to practice. Gonzalez thus neatly resolves our hermeneutic problem—if, again, he and Socrates are correct about Socrates' oral dialectic. In the next section, I show that they are not.

4. Socrates' Simple Politics

While Socrates may not recognise the distinction between trying his hand at true political expertise and performing it, I argue that Plato does; and not only does Plato recognise this distinction, but he uses it to emphasise precisely how and why Socrates falls short of justice. While Plato's Socrates of course tries his hand at political expertise, this is precisely the

³⁶⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 526d

³⁶⁵ Plato, *Gorgias*, 527d

problem; the consequences of his practice do not corroborate his excellence, as Socrates might have Callicles or the bystanders believe. Rather, Plato himself becomes that someone about whom Socrates worries will refute him and prove that he lacks the power to protect himself and others from committing injustice. He does this in broadly two ways: first by emphasising through several lacunae in Socrates' account of the afterlife that Socrates is ignorant of the most crucial element of justice: its procedures; and second by apposing Socrates' explanation of his trial and execution to his argument against Pericles and the other famous statesmen. Let me begin then with the first, with the procedures of political expertise.

Socrates says extraordinarily little in the *Gorgias* about the procedures involved in political expertise. While he exhorts Callicles to follow him and use the account he just gave as a guide to the exercise of justice in life and in death, Socrates has simply not said enough in order for Callicles or anyone else to actually infer how to exercise justice. While he models his refutation after the kind of examination to which Zeus's sons subject the soul, he does not explore in what this examination consists. There are three main problems here. First, Socrates uses strictly visual metaphors to explain what the judges do—that Rhadamanthus notices that a soul of some Great King is whipped and covered in scars, for example—which clearly cannot help Socrates himself, who cannot literally see or hear or touch or taste another person's soul. He can only infer the quality of a soul by some indirect means such as questioning and conversing with a person. Second, those marks that the judges see, Socrates says, are etched upon (ἐξωμόρξατο) the soul by each action (πρᾶξις), becoming the evidence of injustice past. Zeus's sons are at a remove already from the actual causes of a soul's injustice, even when it is stripped naked, which is why Zeus sets Minos over Aeacus and Rhadamanthus for difficult

cases. But Socrates, not being able to see the soul at all, is at a remove even from that. He must therefore find some other way to infer the quality of the soul. This then leads to the final and most significant problem. Even if Socrates somehow finds some way to test the quality of a soul, his account neglects to say what to do about those souls that are found fit for punishment. Those souls are of course sent to Tartarus and subjected to pain and suffering—apparently the only way to remove injustice from a soul—, but Socrates does not say how pain and suffering ought to be inflicted upon them, let alone how *he* could inflict pain and suffering upon them.

Plato shows through the drama of the dialogue that Socrates both must and yet cannot solve these problems. But that is not to say that commentators have not proposed ingenious solutions to them. Robert Metcalf argues, for example, that Socrates' refutation constitutes a kind of contest (ἀγών) between Socrates and his interlocutors that not only provides the occasion and the means to test a soul but that effects also its own punishment.³⁶⁶ For Metcalf, the model here is of course gymnastic contest such as the Olympic or Panathenaic games; in these contests, the victor is the healthiest man, the man with the most powerful body, who is fastest, strongest, most agile, et cetera; there is no way in such a contest to disguise an injury or an illness: if a man were to pull a muscle or even to suffer influenza, they would not be able to compete at the level necessary to win. A judge in this case cannot help but notice an injury or illness whether a man runs in armour or in the nude; the actual exercise of the task at hand reveals each of their relevant bodily inadequacies.³⁶⁷ But this is the most important consequence of contest: any given contest reveals not only to the judges but also to the

³⁶⁶ Robert Metcalf, *Philosophy as Agon: A Study of Plato's Gorgias and Related Texts*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2018. Andrea Wilson Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue: Plato and the Construct of Philosophy*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995: 70-71 makes a similar claim on very different grounds, namely the dramatic comparisons to the contest between Zethus and Amphion in Euripides' *Antiope*.

³⁶⁷ Of course, a wrist injury may not be revealed by a sprint, but it would be revealed by a javelin throwing contest.

contestants themselves their inadequacies. Since every contestant is given equal opportunity to complete the same task, their loss in an event can only be due to their own physical deficiency, and since losing is unpleasant, contestants are immediately motivated to heal and train their bodies in order that they perform better in the next contest—and that is not even to mention any actual pains that an injury or illness might cause when the body is strained by the physical demands of the task. The typical consequence of contest is, as Metcalf notes, a general tendency towards mutual respect and fellow-feeling.³⁶⁸ And this could only be amplified for contests of the soul. If Socrates actually invokes and participates in a contest such as this then he has reason to believe that he is in fact possessed of justice and the power to protect himself and others from injustice—at least until he loses such a contest. The problem is of course not that Socrates loses such a contest but that he doesn't invoke one at all.

In the first place, the steps through which refutation occurs do not easily conform to any plausible account of contest more generally, let alone a contest that actually results in mutual respect or fellow-feeling. As far as Metcalf is concerned, any conflict that especially concerns itself with the relative value of the conflicting parties is a contest, and the *Gorgias*, he argues, expresses just such a conflict, prefigured by its first words, “of war and battle (πολέμου καὶ μάχης).” The early stages of the conversation then reveal the parties, the stakes, and the battle lines. Metcalf argues that the contest of the *Gorgias* consists primarily of the conflict between Socrates' and Gorgias's superficially similar occupations, occupations that both concern themselves in different ways with the same subject, with the care of the soul. As such, one of these occupations must be somehow superior with respect to its subject, and representatives

³⁶⁸ Metcalf, *Philosophy as Agon*, 13

of both parties argue that the other is worthless at various times throughout the conversation, hence Callicles' critique. The problem for Metcalf, however, is that contest consists of more than mere conflict. Contest implies the equal opportunity of the contestants to perform the same tasks in the same ways, as I said, and this involves a set of values and rules by which the contestants abide that as much as possible remove the influence of other mediating circumstances over the outcome.³⁶⁹ It would not be much of a wrestling match, after all, if one of the contestants were blindfolded or bound while the other was not. Socrates can establish a contest such as this; as I mention in Chapter 3, Plato has Socrates set out a genuine, if still informal, contest in this sense in the *Euthydemus* when he clarifies for the brothers by performing himself the task he wants them to perform (even if he does not participate himself in that contest as such). In the *Gorgias*, however, he does no such thing. There is no Clinias whose soul Gorgias and Socrates can take turns improving; neither man, indeed, performs the same task, for while Gorgias demonstrates the method of short answers, bearing his soul naked and alone, Socrates demonstrates the method of short *questions*, examining and judging the souls of others; while Gorgias plays the role of defendant, in other words, Socrates plays the role of prosecutor.³⁷⁰ Naked and alone or not, this is a significant difference. And while Socrates

³⁶⁹ See for example G.E.R. Lloyd, *Revolutions in Wisdom: Studies in the Claims and Practice of Ancient Greek Science*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1989: 83-102; although, as Lloyd emphasises (89-90), the rules of any given contest are not generally established by some external authority, but by the participants themselves. Here we might imagine that Callicles consents to a contest of this sort, but it is clear early on either that he does not aim to actually participate in good faith or that he believes that Socrates does not aim to participate in good faith, which suggests that he does not in fact consent to a contest as such. Compare this especially to the methodological digression in the *Protagoras* (334e-338e): Socrates and Protagoras there certainly consent to explicit rules for a contest.

³⁷⁰ Nightingale, *Genres in Dialogue*, 70, neglects this quite different dramatic relationship: while Socrates and Callicles explicitly compare themselves to Zethus and Amphion, their actual behaviour does not so much match, and it is notable that Socrates explicitly claims to have not yet returned "Amphion's speech for Zethus's" (506b). If he does ever return it, it comes immediately after that remark, after Callicles has completely bowed out of the conversation and so the contest.

occasionally invites his interlocutor to question and refute him, it is clear that he never stands in any other position than prosecutor even then; Polus and Callicles are specifically invited to question him concerning the accounts he gives of the worthlessness of rhetoric, and not concerning the account he gives of his own excellence. It's not difficult to see what's going on here: Socrates does not attempt to demonstrate the superiority of his occupation; that much is already assumed. Rather, Socrates attempts to improve his interlocutors, to heal their souls by prosecuting them before themselves and the bystanders. We do not call receiving medical treatment a contest even when we express deep-seated disagreements with a physician about our own health, for we and the physician each stand nevertheless in a different position—one as patient, another as agent. This is the same relationship that Socrates instantiates between himself and his three interlocutors in the *Gorgias*; the very logic of refutation, far from constituting a contest between Socrates and his interlocutors, actually precludes it.

Metcalf's error lies in subsuming conflict generally to contest. There is of course a conflict in the *Gorgias*, but it does not occur on a level playing field, and this severely alters not only the relevant procedures but also their possible effects. We should not imagine that a street fight has the same effect as a wrestling match, for example. It may be true that losing a street fight reflects one's own bodily deficiency; one might not be sufficiently strong or fast or coordinated and so fail to emerge as the victor. But one can never know this for certain. There are no rules in a street fight that ensure that the fighters fight honourably or fairly; one might lose the fight not because one's opponent is too much better, but because one's opponent is too much worse: because they fought dishonourably, surprising an opponent or using weapons or other means of causing injury in order to incapacitate the other fighter. They may, in other

words, exercise the same terrible tyrannical power that Socrates himself mentions to Polus. For Socrates, however, the cloud of unknowing that surrounds this kind of conflict poses a serious problem for his occupation. Even if we should interpret him as a kind of testing stone—which is closer to Gonzalez’s interpretation—Callicles clearly doesn’t interpret Socrates this way. He complains of Socrates’ questioning, accusing him, for example, of introducing shameful examples,³⁷¹ always wanting to win,³⁷² and complaining later that he allows himself to make long speeches.³⁷³ While Callicles readily admits that he finds Socrates convincing, he clearly doesn’t believe that Socrates has argued his case fairly and does not therefore take Socrates’ conclusion to heart.³⁷⁴ Instead, he retreats from the conversation as much as possible, participating now more defensively and insincerely for the sole purpose of satisfying Gorgias. And if Ober is right, Callicles ultimately threatens Socrates with legal prosecution, manifesting the very same evil against which he warns Socrates.³⁷⁵ It’s safe to say then that Socrates’ questioning of Callicles does not produce mutual respect or fellow-feeling. On the contrary, the end of Callicles’ conversation with Socrates reveals a dominant Socrates, a Socrates who has won the street fight and has not so much cured Callicles but secured his submission; he accomplishes the very good that Callicles initially promoted, and Polus before him, but he has not accomplished genuine justice.

³⁷¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 494e

³⁷² Plato, *Gorgias*, 515b

³⁷³ Plato, *Gorgias*, 519d

³⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 513c

³⁷⁵ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 202-203, 205-206; Ober reads Callicles’ apparent concern for Socrates’ fate ironically, somewhat akin to the stereotypical Mafioso shaking down business owners for protection money. This is obviously not the only way to interpret Callicles here—he may indeed be sincerely concerned—but it is possible, and I think most likely.

But Socrates' inability to benefit his interlocutors in the *Gorgias* doesn't stop there. Even his apparent successes do not testify to his justice. At the outset, Gorgias answers Socrates willingly, complimenting him occasionally for adequately interpreting or understanding what he says.³⁷⁶ But as Socrates' questions become more pointed and approach the limits of Gorgias's expertise, Gorgias at first begins to make excuses to stop the discussion³⁷⁷ and then, when Socrates exposes at last an unavoidable contradiction in his claims, he ceases to answer at all, turning the conversation over to Polus.³⁷⁸ The consequence—that Gorgias is ashamed about his answers—does not obviously vindicate Socrates, as commentators typically assume. It may be the case, again, that Gorgias's defeat reflects the actual deficiency of his soul, but this is not how at least Polus interprets it. Polus tells Socrates that Gorgias' shame was the *cause* of his contradiction, not the *consequence*; he may have contradicted himself because he claimed that rhetoric was an expertise like fighting that can be practiced unjustly at the same time as claiming to teach justice, but Polus claims that Gorgias made this second claim only because he was ashamed. The implication is that Socrates hit Gorgias with a psychological low blow, as it were, a line of questioning that isn't fair or honourable. As such, Polus does not believe that Socrates is a testing stone either for Gorgias or for himself, and his own response to Socrates' questioning—to ultimately dismiss Socrates' arguments as ridiculous—only corroborates this. Even so, Socrates is not discouraged. In his explanation of his trial and execution, he recognises that those whom he benefits do not recognise that he benefits them. Charles Kahn argues along these same lines that while Socrates cannot and does not say anything to affect a person's

³⁷⁶ Plato, *Gorgias*, 450d, 451a, 453a

³⁷⁷ Plato, *Gorgias*, 458b-c

³⁷⁸ Plato, *Gorgias*, 461b; although it is notable that Gorgias reenters the conversation in a couple places (463d-464b, 497b, 506b). In each of these subsequent places, Gorgias enters the conversation just to push it along, acting somewhat like the physician's helper that he describes himself as at the outset of the dialogue (456a-b).

apparent desires, he does address and affect his interlocutor more deeply by addressing their soul without mediation or ornament;³⁷⁹ Socrates does not therefore fail to practice politics correctly, for Kahn, but in fact successfully persuades Gorgias and Polus and maybe even Callicles that it is better to suffer than to commit injustice, that they ought to abandon rhetoric and undertake oral dialectic alongside Socrates, and also everything else essential to ultimately improving their souls. But there is a problem here. Shaw notes that there is a crucial disanalogy between Socrates and the physician: whereas the physician can benefit a body without a person recognising it, the same is not true of a soul.³⁸⁰ To improve a soul is to in some way cause it to know or truly believe justice; but it is not possible for a person who now knows or truly believes justice to believe at the same time that Socrates does them harm unless Socrates is not in fact just and does not in fact practice true political expertise. The power to protect others from committing injustice must include also those others who might unjustly execute Socrates. That Socrates is executed by the Athenians testifies therefore to Socrates' inability to benefit his interlocutors. He does not perform true political expertise.

In this position, Socrates stands not opposite Pericles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Themistocles, but apposite or alongside them. Just as they are proved not to practice true political expertise, so also is Socrates. But while it is rather easy to see how Pericles and the others fall short of political expertise, lacking as they do an account of politics, it is less clear how Socrates falls short. He possesses an account of the good created by politics, after all, and there is no good reason to doubt that his account is true. Rather, the problem seems to arise from the inferences that Socrates makes from his account to the actual procedures that he

³⁷⁹ Kahn, "Drama and Dialectic," 84-97

³⁸⁰ Shaw, "True Political Craft," 190

employs. Even if Zeus's sons judge souls in the way that they do, for example, need Socrates also emulate them as closely as possible? Need he also emulate Zeus as closely as possible? Or should Socrates do something else entirely? The straightforward implication of Socrates' account of the judgement of the souls in the afterlife is no more than this: that one ought to reveal to the judges the kind of soul that they admire and not the kind of soul that they might judge fit for punishment. Any more than this requires an account not only of this judgement but also of the nature of the soul and its activity or, as Socrates tells Polus, the nature of whatever political expertise contributes to whatever it contributes.³⁸¹ Socrates does not ever provide such an account in the *Gorgias*, and he himself says why: because he does not know how these things stand.³⁸² Socrates is ignorant of justice because he lacks the justification for his account of it, however true it may be, and he lacks this justification because he lacks also an account of the causes of justice *for a specific soul*. And this is exactly that for which Callicles critiques Socrates. His critique is two-dimensional, concerning first the subject of political expertise, and second the kind of knowledge of which a political expert is possessed. Callicles charges, firstly, that Socrates neglects the full range of human affairs, the kinds of things that a soul does and needs to do. Even if Callicles is wrong to suggest that pleasure is the proper good of the soul—and he is—, Callicles mentions also other elements of human affairs about which Socrates is ignorant: desires, the laws of the city, and the speech needed to be used to join with men in contracts both in private and in public; and this list is certainly not complete, as Callicles himself implies by summing up with “human affairs altogether.” But this is not the most important part of Callicles' critique. That is the second dimension: that Callicles identifies the cause of Socrates'

³⁸¹ Plato, *Gorgias*, 465a

³⁸² Plato, *Gorgias*, 509a

ignorance: that he is *inexperienced* (ἄπειρον) with respect to human affairs altogether. This allows that Socrates have a true and compelling account of human affairs but not that he be able to put that account into practice and actually be of use to himself and others. For all Callicles could guess, Socrates knows many fine propositions, but even if he does, Callicles suggests that this knowledge is insufficient: he may be able to easily refute Gorgias and Polus, but without experience in human affairs, Socrates cannot know the many fine *procedures* involved in political expertise and cannot therefore be possessed of it. The genuine expert adapts to the needs of a given circumstance. A physician does not treat every ailment by manipulating the spine; a general does not win every battle with a cavalry charge; a pilot does not arrive at every destination by sailing west. But Socrates, as he says himself, only ever says the same thing. His politics are not expert: they are simple.

By itself, Socrates' simple politics need not be terribly bad, and certainly not bad enough to warrant his execution. As Socrates suggests, it is appropriate for any budding expert to concern himself first with his own excellence, with his own private affairs before undertaking to participate in the affairs of the city. If Layne is right, this is what Socrates himself does: he recognises his ignorance and turns away from it, not allowing himself to be in any way bound to or governed by it. If Layne is right, in other words, Socrates internalises the lesson of the apraxia argument that I discuss in Chapter 3: that it is better not to act at all than to act ignorantly. But she is not. Despite his ignorance, despite lacking the power to protect himself or others from committing injustice, Socrates nevertheless tries his hand at political expertise. The consequences are enormous: he risks causing immense harm to the Athenians and to himself

and proves therefore not to be too much better than the Athenians but to be too much worse. When he is eventually tried and convicted, then, Socrates shall be convicted justly.

5. Plato's Political Expertise

The *Gorgias* more than any other dialogue diagnoses just how Socrates goes wrong. And by doing so, Plato firmly distinguishes himself from him; he shows his readers that neither they nor he should in fact emulate oral dialectic in just the way that Socrates does. But the *Gorgias*, like Plato's other dialogues, is also not simply a critique of Socrates: it intends to demonstrate also Plato's own political expertise through the very act of his having written it. In this sense, the dialogue becomes Plato's masterpiece, akin to those works that Socrates himself seeks from Pericles and other pretenders.³⁸³ In this final section, then, let me briefly analyse Plato's own positive argument in the *Gorgias*.

Like Plato's other dialogues, once again, the *Gorgias* expresses the justice of Plato's own occupation on the grounds both of the failure and limitations of the occupations it examines and, most importantly, their *successes*. I have already discussed the former, the limits of both Gorgias's rhetoric and Socrates' oral dialectic, but let me briefly reiterate. Gorgias and Polus and Callicles all lack an account of the good for the sake of which they practice rhetoric. As a consequence, they practice rhetoric for the sake of nothing more than *apparent* goods—pleasure and the avoidance of pain chiefly, but presumably also all those things that Zeus strips from a soul upon death—and cannot therefore create genuine goods, risking evil in their place.

³⁸³ I do not mean "masterpiece" here as a judgement of its unparalleled artistic merit; I mean "masterpiece" only in the traditional sense of a product that demonstrates the minimal attainment of expertise—like (hopefully) this very dissertation.

Socrates, by contrast, has an account of the good for the sake of which he practices his occupation but lacks an account of the *causes* of that good and therefore the procedures appropriate to political expertise; while he may have a good idea about the end of politics, therefore, he knows not how to actually arrive at and achieve that end. And this, I suggest, corresponds to Callicles' critique of Socrates: that he is inexperienced with respect to human affairs. By presenting to his readers both critiques in the *Gorgias*, Plato shows just how and why he and they should not undertake either Gorgias's rhetoric or Socrates' oral dialectic. But he also shows what from both should be preserved and emulated. Socrates, as I said, has an account of the soul and its excellence; Gorgias and Polus and Callicles, while they lack this account, are at least experienced with respect to the procedures that can create the excellent and just soul. These are complimentary contributions: Plato suggests therefore that he and his readers need only therefore put these together, becoming experienced in achieving the good of the soul, using rhetoric "for justice always (ἐπὶ τὸ δίκαιον ἀεί)," as Socrates says near the end of the dialogue.³⁸⁴ Through the *Gorgias*, Plato implicitly asserts that he himself does precisely this.

It is important to recognise, however, that Plato's case here is and *must be* implicit in the *Gorgias*. While he has Socrates assert throughout the dialogue several true propositions about justice and political expertise—from its structure as a kind of expertise to its end as the soul worthy of the Isle of the Blessed—Plato does not anywhere provide a thorough and irrefutable account of the practices, procedures, and causes of justice. Had he done so, he could not explain Socrates' trial and death; had Socrates an account of the causes of justice, in other words, then he could not, first, be justly convicted or, second, allow the Athenians to

³⁸⁴ Plato, *Gorgias*, 527c

unjustly convict him. While Socrates himself is content to believe that he will be convicted because he is too much better than the Athenians, he does not fully reckon with what it actually means to be too much better than the Athenians. Plato does. But as a consequence, he can only suggest that political expertise consists of the pieces that he leaves for his readers unassembled in the text.

One might expect that this leaves Plato himself vulnerable to a similar critique to that which Callicles levels at Socrates: that he does not in fact put his political expertise into practice. But there are two aspects of the *Gorgias* that defend against a critique such as this. First, the dialogue is itself only an instrument of Plato's political expertise. It is a masterpiece in just the same way that the carpenter displays a chair or a house that he has built or the mathematician displays his geometrical diagrams or the physician displays sick people whom he has protected and saved or the physical trainer displays his own and others' beautiful and good bodies, and so on. Plato's reader is not finally informed by the *Gorgias* as if achieving justice were like reaching the summit of some mountain. Rather, they are turned by the dialogue towards the just care for justice: to reading other of Plato's dialogues or to conversing with Plato himself in the just and safe environment of the Academy—which, I must emphasise, became for Plato a gymnasium for both the body and the soul. The main thing here is only that the *Gorgias* improves Plato's readers, not that it conclusively answers each of their many questions. Indeed, it serves its purpose more by raising questions than answering them. Second, and consequently, the *Gorgias* makes explicit mention of evaluable, experiential criteria for deciding whether a person—Plato included—actually creates justice. If Plato creates justice, he does so not only by composing his dialogues, but by actually improving those in his

care, those who read his dialogues. We cannot know with certainty but from our own experience as readers of Plato whether he actually succeeds in this mission. But rightly or wrongly, he at least suggests that he does.

If I shall be permitted here another momentary venture into history and if there really is some deeper personal connection between Plato the author and Plato the living human being, his biography may provide at least some evidence for his justice. Unlike Socrates, Plato lived a long life unmolested by malicious prosecutors and judges. And this is not because, as Ober argues, Plato simply retreats from public life and Socrates' gadfly politics.³⁸⁵ As Steven Robinson rightly emphasises, Plato's dialogues themselves demonstrate that he lived still in the public eye.³⁸⁶ But he was also a prominent Athenian even beyond his literary activity; while he did not take up politics in the assembly, he was still experienced in human affairs in the city. He was mentioned in as many as thirteen comedies in his lifetime, for example, and not merely as a wealthy and visible man but as a philosopher.³⁸⁷ For Robinson, Plato escapes the ire to which Socrates succumbs by explicitly articulating in his dialogues that he is no threat to any individual or any institution; while he, like Socrates, seeks to publicly examine, question, and refute the opinions and values of the Athenians, he, unlike Socrates, recognises just how to do this in a way that does not at the same time cause harm.

While Robinson's focus lies with the *Apology* and the *Crito*, he could speak just as well about the *Gorgias*. Whereas Ober reads the dialogue primarily as a parting critique of the democracy as an institution which irreparably corrupts excellent men like Callicles, it is more

³⁸⁵ Ober, *Political Dissent*, 214-247

³⁸⁶ Robinson, "Plato in the *Crito*," 45-51, 55-56

³⁸⁷ See Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, 5-6, 163, n.18, for a more thorough analysis of Plato's depiction in the comedies of the time.

reasonably interpreted as a defence rather of a Platonic politics that mitigates harm *within* the democracy. If Ober were right, or even if Plato's contemporaries were to agree with Ober's interpretation, then Plato might face the same sorts of charges that Socrates did, the *Gorgias* being at least minimally available as it was to any literate man in Athens or any illiterate man with literate friends or even literate slaves. But Plato escaping these charges shows that he at least did not make the Athenians wilder and more violent; and by participating in public discourse with such minimal risk while coming from such a notorious family, Plato may reasonably declare victory in this contest of wisdom.

Conclusion:

Everyday Discussing Excellence

*“Now all of my friends are missing again...
And I don’t get along with anyone
Maybe I’m the problem
Maybe I’m the problem
Maybe I, maybe I, maybe I’m the problem.”
– Billie Eilish³⁸⁸*

1. The Core of Plato’s Criticism of Socrates

I have argued in this dissertation that Plato has a much more complicated relationship to his Socrates—or more correctly to his many Socrateses—than commentators commonly appreciate. It is no mystery, of course, that commentators hold Socrates up as Plato’s ideal, as the living and dying embodiment of wisdom and courage and temperance and justice. I have sought in this dissertation to temper this favourable assessment; I do not doubt that Plato

³⁸⁸ Billie Eilish, “TV,” *Guitar Songs EP*, 2022

represents a Socrates for whom there is no one wiser (except perhaps himself), but I emphasise throughout this dissertation that there is an appreciable distance between being truly wise and being merely the wisest. The latter, of course, may remain foolish when the accounts are balanced and the audit is completed, and so it is for Socrates. Plato shows that Socrates and his occupation face a series of problems that Socrates does not resolve until it is too late and that ultimately contribute to his injustice and his consequent trial and execution. While these problems are many and interrelated, they can be loosely grouped into the following three categories:

1. Problems of procedure
2. Problems of reception
3. Problems of knowledge

Each of these categories of problems cut across the critiques I have analysed in the preceding chapters, so let me briefly describe them in more general terms, beginning with the first.

Problems of procedure refer to the ways in which the tools and techniques that Socrates employs throughout the course of his occupation produce an effect opposite of that which Socrates intends or should intend. This is far and away the largest category of problem that Socrates faces and is typically downstream of the other two categories. It is the category of problem that Socrates faces by discoursing before the sons of the wealthy or by repeatedly exposing Clitophon's *aporia* or allowing himself and Clinias to be conquered and enslaved by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus. And this category of problem underwrites the significance of the many critiques that Socrates' interlocutors make of him, from Clitophon's complaint that Socrates does not teach him justice to Callicles' critique of Socrates as inexperienced with respect to human affairs, and ultimately, of course, the indictment that Meletus files on behalf

of the Athenians in Socrates' trial. In each case, these are not so much complaints about who Socrates is or what he knows but about what Socrates *does*. And in each case, as I have shown, they are at least on to something, pointing towards a genuine and true critique of Socrates, if they are not already adequately supported themselves by Socrates' own arguments.

Problems of reception typically follow from problems of procedure and describe their consequences: that Socrates presents himself before his interlocutors in ways that cause them to misunderstand his own nature or the nature of his occupation and the arguments and other procedures that he employs within it. In general, these problems go unnoticed by commentators because there is a very real sense in which they at least appear to be the responsibility of others, and not Socrates himself; Clitophon, for example, infers from Socrates' reproach that Socrates in fact lives a just life and can therefore teach justice. That this is wrong is of course an error on Clitophon's part. I have shown in this dissertation, however, that this kind of misunderstanding is a two way street; whether Clitophon errs or not, he can only err because Socrates himself, who ought to know better, presents himself in ways that facilitate Clitophon's error. Clitophon interprets Socrates' arguments in the way that he does because Socrates' occupation is itself puzzling; the more accurate interpretation of Socrates' arguments implies Socrates' own inaction, and yet, Socrates nevertheless acts, if only by reproaching others. Clitophon has to make sense of this somehow, and he does this by interpreting Socrates—incorrectly—with the utmost charity. That Socrates puts Clitophon in this position indicates that he too is responsible for Clitophon's turning away from Socrates' occupation and from justice.

Finally, problems of knowledge refer to the more general and more foundational ignorance upon which Socrates' other problems stand. While Plato puts in Socrates' mouth true or at least mostly true accounts of the soul, of justice, of wisdom, and so on, he consistently has Socrates emphasise throughout his corpus that he is ignorant of the matter in question. While many commentators have rightly emphasised the epistemic upside to Socrates' self-conscious ignorance—especially insofar as Socrates does not outstrip his knowledge to the same degree that others do—it is rarely appreciated that Socrates nevertheless outstrips his knowledge even so. The overarching theme of this dissertation has been the degree to which, first, Socrates rightly recognises that he must become knowledgeable but, second, he does not know, without that knowledge, how to actually *become* knowledgeable; while he makes the sometimes fruitful analogy to medicine, he does not know how to employ, for lack of a better term, psychiatric procedures to actually create justice or wisdom or any other excellence, nor does he know the limits of this analogy. The consequence of Socrates' ignorance about these most important matters is, of course, that he risks causing the most important harms; it is one thing, after all, to try one's hand at using a hammer without knowledge of carpentry, but quite another to try one's hand at using a soul without knowledge of justice; and Socrates is just as guilty of the latter as Gorgias is or Callicles or Euthydemus or Clitophon—even if he is guilty in a slightly different way.

I emphasised in the introduction to this dissertation that I do not develop Plato's critiques of Socrates merely to show how Socrates falls short of justice. This much can be done without much involving Plato himself, although in many cases, my own critiques of Socrates may differ from his. Rather, I develop Plato's critiques of Socrates in order to contribute to the

resolution of a significant, if oft-neglected, metaphilosophical question within Plato scholarship: why Plato lives a life and practices an occupation that is so different from the life that his Socrates lives and the occupation that he practices. I have touched on this issue so far only in passing and as it arises within the hermeneutic context of a given dialogue. As I bring this dissertation to a close, then, let me turn finally to this question more fully and articulate how Plato's criticism of Socrates explains his distinction from him.

2. The End of Socrates' Oral Dialectic

As I mention in the introduction to this dissertation, there are broadly two kinds of explanation that are given for the distinction between Plato's and Socrates' occupations. The first kind asserts that Plato simply couldn't hack Socrates' occupation, whether because he lacked the dialectical skill or the moral courage and discipline required for it. He undertakes therefore a different, inferior occupation that better suits his skills and predilections. As far as explanations go, this kind of explanation is sufficient to explain Plato's difference from Socrates if its assumptions hold true. But they certainly don't. This kind of explanation demands that we hold specific claims about a historical Plato that stands beyond the authorial Plato: that he did indeed lack the skill or courage or discipline or anything else to productively converse orally with others, that he did indeed find writing and publishing dialogues to be merely more convenient, and that he did indeed write and publish dialogues that would, if this explanation is right, reflect poorly upon himself. Not only is there no evidence supporting any of these assumptions, but there also cannot be any such evidence unless and until we find ourselves possessed of a working time machine. But even further, the very dialogues that this kind of

explanation relies upon not only for its explanans but also its explanandum tell against it. They are, after all, public objects that provoke and challenge the Athenians no less than Socrates did, if less directly, and their doing so could land Plato in the same trouble that Socrates faced if he were insufficiently careful. There is no sense in which Plato lacks the moral courage or discipline in the sense that this explanation demands while still practicing written dialectic; all that remains is skill in oral conversation, which may be plausible but, again, lacks in principle any compelling evidence.³⁸⁹

The second kind of explanation is much more plausible but still, I suggest, insufficient on its own. It asserts that Plato undertakes written dialogue as an extension of Socrates' oral dialectic. In this sense, Plato's literary activities are not sufficient unto themselves but function to in some way improve the effectiveness of Socratic oral dialectic. Clearly, this explanation depends upon what we should mean here by "effectiveness." For Danielle Allen, written dialogues are more effective than oral speech with respect to their image-making capacity and their power to traverse space and time. And there is something to this. I show shortly that Allen is right to emphasise especially the role of image-making for Plato's written dialectic, but not because it is more effective. In general, I suggest that any notion of effectiveness is quite irrelevant for explaining Plato's turn towards written dialogue. I do not mean by this that Plato does not believe that his dialogues are not at least minimally effective. He clearly does. I mean

³⁸⁹ Isocrates tells his readers in the *Panathenaicus*, 9, that his nature was unsuited to speaking and altogether useless, which explains his own decision to take up writing. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*, 3.5/135, suggests that Plato stood in essentially the same position, possessing himself a weak voice. If this is true, we might suggest that Plato's writing is explained similarly to Isocrates', but there is good reason to be skeptical of Diogenes Laertius's account of Plato generally, especially since he reports (23-24/145) several instances of Plato speaking publicly and even in court, even if he did not generally engage in public life. This does not of course imply that Plato was an adept and skillful public speaker, but it does suggest that any lack of ability he may have had need not have discouraged him or explained his turn towards writing.

rather that the comparative judgement—that written dialogue is more effective than oral—is either irrelevant or simply not in evidence. In the first place, Allen does not explore the ways in which Socrates’ oral dialectic might be ineffective beyond the mere practicalities of Socrates’ own limitations as a single individual living a single life in a single city. Since written texts can be separated from their author, they can clearly move beyond these same limitations. But this is no serious advantage if Socrates actually succeeds at turning others towards his oral dialectic, as Allen believes that he does, for those others whom Socrates turns then move across space and time to turn yet others who then move across space and time themselves to turn yet others, and so on, extending Socrates’ occupation eternally over the face of the whole earth and beyond. Second, when Allen then explores the ways in which Plato’s written dialectic is more effective, her emphasis lies similarly upon these mere practicalities, and especially that it turns others towards dialectic more quickly or more reliably. But Allen does not and obviously cannot provide sufficient evidence for either of these claims, especially taking into consideration the well-known limits of literature as a means of communication in Classical Greece.³⁹⁰ While texts can travel much farther in space and time than a single individual, they are of course always conveyed by other individuals, and those other individuals can spread any single argument, story, or other sort of message much farther and more quickly than even the texts that they bear with them. And that being the case, there is little sense in saying that the

³⁹⁰ There are three basic and related considerations here: that literacy was quite low, significantly reducing the potential audience for any given text from what it might be for some other form of oral performance; that texts were extraordinarily expensive and difficult to produce and to reproduce, limiting their spread; and that texts cannot speak for themselves, saying always the same thing rather than adapting to the needs of its readers. See Harvey Yunis, *Written Texts and the Rise of Literate Culture in Ancient Greece*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, for a collection of essays that discuss the many dimensions of these problems both within Plato studies and beyond.

text is the more effective, quicker, and more reliable element of missionary philosophy, as Allen does.

But even beyond these more historical and conceptual issues, there is another dimension to Allen's explanation of Plato's writing that tells against it. Allen points to Socrates' own apparent turn towards poetry in the *Phaedo* as evidence for his support for something like Plato's dialogues. This is right. But it is worth recognising that Socrates there says nothing about the *effectiveness* of his poetry. When Cebes asks Socrates why he, having never made a poem before, now undertakes poetry,³⁹¹ Socrates answers that he undertook poetry in order that, first, the meaning of some dreams be tested and, second, Socrates himself be purified if, consequently, he had been many times commanded by them to make a different kind of music than he initially thought.³⁹² Socrates had initially interpreted his dreams, he says, as encouragement to continue his existing occupation "like those who encourage runners."³⁹³ But now that he has been languishing in prison, Socrates thought it *safer* (ἀσφαλέστερον) to reevaluate the meaning of his dreams and take up one kind of music in place of another, popular poetry in place of his oral dialectic. And unlike the comparative effectiveness of Socrates' and Plato's occupations, there is plenty of evidence for their comparative safety. I have shown throughout this dissertation at minimum that Socrates has reason to worry about the safety of his occupation. In the *Phaedo*, Plato suggests that this sort of critique is not only his but that it is shared also by the very gods themselves who send Socrates his dreams. And

³⁹¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 60d

³⁹² Plato, *Phaedo*, 60e; "music" here has the much broader meaning than the English word. It is anything under the purview of the Muses, which is why Socrates could be licensed to interpret the dreams initially as encouragement to practice philosophy. Even so, Socrates' new interpretation accepts music as something closer to composing a song or poem in our sense.

³⁹³ Plato, *Phaedo*, 61a

Socrates' response to them prefigures Plato's own response to the problems faced by Socrates' occupation.

This is not the place for a comprehensive exploration of the issues surrounding Socrates' turn towards poetry at the end of his life, but there are a couple issues that must nevertheless be mentioned before moving forward. First, and the main reason why commentators have so scarcely interpreted Socrates' dreams as critical, Socrates does not turn completely towards poetry in the *Phaedo* and away from his oral dialectic; he still, as the subsequent conversation demonstrates, conducts his oral dialectic just as he always has. Socrates may then merely reinterpret his dreams as "*not just* encouraging him to keep on philosophising, *but as also* commanding him to make popular poetry," as Mark McPherran says;³⁹⁴ Socrates' poetry may not then be an alternative to his oral dialectic but an extension of it, which is precisely what Allen argues in her explanation of Plato's literary activity. Second, and relatedly, Socrates only incompletely practices his poetry. He tells Cebes that he first made a hymn to Apollo, whose festival occasioned the delay of his execution in the first place, but then, because he is no storyteller, he undertakes to put into verse those stories he has closest to hand: Aesop's fables. I shall shortly show that these aspects of Socrates' turn towards poetry in the *Phaedo*, rather than demonstrating the continuity between Socrates' occupation and Plato's, further corroborate the critical interpretation of Socrates' dreams.

Plato illustrates the cost of Socrates' incomplete turn towards poetry as the plot of the *Phaedo* progresses, emphasising ultimately that Socrates' oral dialectic is indeed unsafe. Plato does not, of course, have Socrates tell Cebes what he means by safety, implying little more than

³⁹⁴ Mark McPherran, "Socrates and Aesop in Plato's *Phaedo*," *Apeiron* 45, 2012: 51; emphasis added.

that it is unsafe to disobey the gods' commands. But Plato later *shows* his reader just what's at stake in Socrates' turn towards poetry: after proceeding through his arguments for the immortality of the soul in his usual way, he finds that both Cebes and Simmias and everyone else had been driven to doubt "the speeches already having been said and also those ultimately being about to be said, lest not one of [them] be valuable judges or the matters themselves be doubtful."³⁹⁵ But, as Socrates says, "there is no greater evil that one suffers than hating speeches."³⁹⁶ A person descends into this kind of misology, as Socrates says, when they repeatedly put their trust in arguments only to find them each time unreliable; having been disappointed by arguments again and again and again leads people to infer, as they do for persons, that no argument can ever be sound. But Socrates' warning here is particularly ironic. Despite his awareness of the causes of misology and its stakes, he takes as a central pillar of his occupation the repeated refutation of arguments, causing the very thing he warns against.³⁹⁷ I have shown at least this much throughout this dissertation, and I suggest that the *Phaedo* illustrates the same dynamic too.

Unlike in his other dialogues, however, Plato depicts the Socrates of the *Phaedo* healing his friends and associates of their misology, and specifically by turning towards a different kind of music than his usual analytic argumentation. He tells his friends that he "risk[s], in this situation, about this very thing, not to carry on philosophically, but like those altogether uneducated lovers of victory," he says, "being eager, [he] bur[ies] these opinions in those being

³⁹⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 88c

³⁹⁶ Plato, *Phaedo*, 89d

³⁹⁷ The most notable exception here is, as I explored in Chapter 3, the Socrates of the *Euthydemus*, but that Socrates allows himself and others to be refuted by Euthydemus and Dionysodorus, producing the same overall effect.

nearby.”³⁹⁸ To do this, Socrates attempts “like Homer, [to] go near [Cebes’ counterargument]”³⁹⁹ by telling a long story—even after earlier claiming not to be a storyteller—about his own intellectual development and the theory of forms.⁴⁰⁰ After successfully persuading Simmias and Cebes of the theory of forms, Socrates ceases his expositive storytelling and returns once again to his analytical argumentation. But the consequence here is just the same as before: Simmias once again expresses his doubts not only about Socrates’ specific hypothesis but about the project as a whole.⁴⁰¹ To heal then this second bout of misology, Socrates turns once again to storytelling, this time concerning the fate of the soul upon death and ultimately concerning our cosmological position upon the earth.⁴⁰² Finally, then, Socrates apparently persuades Cebes and Simmias, who pose no longer any questions or critiques, and Crito takes the opportunity to intervene and discuss the more practical affairs of Socrates’ death. After this has all been arranged and Socrates swallows the poison, he bids Crito to sacrifice a cock to Asclepius. While commentators have long interpreted this as a claim about Socrates’ approach to the body itself as a sickly receptacle for the soul, Gonzalez argues that the relevant illness here is actually misology, and he is at least on the right track.⁴⁰³ Misology, I suggest and argue below, is only a symptom of the actual disease: ignorance. Whether Gonzalez is right, however, or ignorance is the relevant illness, Socrates heals his friends through his turn towards poetry, and more specifically storytelling, which allows him to push the conversation forward in ways that his typical dialectic does not. I

³⁹⁸ Plato, *Phaedo*, 91a

³⁹⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 95b

⁴⁰⁰ Plato, *Phaedo*, 96a-102a

⁴⁰¹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 107a-b

⁴⁰² Plato, *Phaedo*, 107c-115a

⁴⁰³ Gonzalez, “Is There an Art of Living?,” 263-264

suggest that Plato makes this same move too towards his written dialectic, his own form of poetry, so to best understand Plato's move, it is worth taking some time to examine precisely how Socrates' storytelling protects against misology and the ignorance that causes it.

Gonzalez makes the astute observation that the Socrates of the *Phaedo*, in the midst of telling his biographical story, makes an analogy between himself and those who study eclipses, saying that to study eclipses directly rather than by examining their images in water risks causing blindness of the eyes.⁴⁰⁴ Likewise, then, to study the beings (τὰ ὄντα), one ought not examine them directly lest they blind their souls, but ought instead to study them by means of their images. At first, therefore, Socrates says that he took refuge in speeches "to examine in them the truth of the beings," as if these speeches sufficiently protected his soul from blinding.⁴⁰⁵ However, Socrates immediately complicates this first strategy, saying that "I portray some turn," he says, "inaccurately, for I do not altogether agree that someone examining the beings in speeches examines in images more than in works (ἐν τοῖς ἔργοις)."⁴⁰⁶ Gonzalez interprets Socrates here as saying that works (or, as Gonzalez prefers, physical things) are images of the beings in just the same way that speeches are,⁴⁰⁷ but I suggest that Socrates intends here the opposite: that someone who examines the truth of the beings in works does not sufficiently protect his soul from being blinded, and so likewise for someone who examines the truth of the beings in speeches. While Socrates had earlier turned to examining the truth of the beings in speeches, then, he only now recognises his mistake upon telling the story of his examining; his hypotheses, the means by which he examines the truth of the beings in

⁴⁰⁴ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 192-195

⁴⁰⁵ Plato, *Phaedo*, 99e

⁴⁰⁶ Plato, *Phaedo*, 99e-100a

⁴⁰⁷ Gonzalez, *Dialectic and Dialogue*, 194-195

speeches, stand before the good like the moon before the sun, obscuring it while nevertheless blinding his soul. And as Socrates returns to his oral dialectic, proceeding to analyse the immortality of the soul by means of his hypotheses, Plato only confirms what Socrates had just recognised. As Simmias returns to his doubts, Socrates tells him that he is right to question, for “you speak well,” he says, “the first hypotheses, and, even if they are convincing to you, nevertheless must be examined more clearly. And if you analyse them sufficiently, I think, you will follow the argument to the greatest extent possible for a man to follow it, and if this argument becomes clear, you will search no further.”⁴⁰⁸ But to seek no further, no better, no more, is the real danger that Socrates seeks here to avoid; it is no less than misology, the blindness of the soul.

Plato does not have Socrates explicitly describe his solution to this problem; he rather displays it by having Socrates transition to storytelling once again and finally, moving from a means that still risks blinding his soul and others’ to a means that does not pose this same risk because it less directly depicts the good that Socrates seeks. And the consequence is more amicable than before, for Simmias now happily hears Socrates’ story without expressing his pessimism towards the arguments it conveys.⁴⁰⁹

There are of course many reasons why Simmias should be so happy to hear Socrates’ story, many of which Allen explores in depth within the context of the *Republic*.⁴¹⁰ But the key thing to keep in mind here is that stories do not so clearly and faithfully depict their subject; when a story reflects wisdom or justice or the good more generally, it does so only

⁴⁰⁸ Plato, *Phaedo*, 107b

⁴⁰⁹ Plato, *Phaedo*, 110b

⁴¹⁰ Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, 29-54

incompletely and only by depicting a certain aspect of that good. An auditor cannot easily grasp a specific claim or a specific being within a story to question and doubt or even to be satisfied by but must grasp first the story as a whole and seek its meaning, a process that requires moving back and forth between the truth of its claims and the broader coherence of the story as a story. To put this another way, the truth of the beings conveyed by a story is not only indirect but always outstrips any attempt to interpret and analyse that story, forever pushing dialectic forward. As a consequence, the storyteller puts into practice not only an image of the very good he seeks but by attempting to interpret it both creates and embodies, along with his auditors, that very same good.

Plato is of course clear-eyed about what this process demands of him and other storytellers, and he consistently emphasises throughout his corpus, via the critiques he puts in the mouth of his Socrates, that not many popular poets can or do meet these demands. I have only scratched the surface of what storytelling demands (or does not demand) throughout this dissertation, but there is one key episode that I must emphasise here as it pertains to Socrates as a storyteller and paves the way for finally explaining Plato's occupation. In the *Apology*, Socrates claims to question the poets, who prove to be so incompetent, as he has it, that any of the bystanders might have better explained their poems than they could. When I discuss this episode in Chapter 1, I remark that the poets represent a specific kind of wisdom—creativity—and that Socrates' questioning of them implies the broader question about the relationship of creativity to wisdom generally—whether it is identical to wisdom or is necessary or sufficient or, alongside thoughtfulness and expertise, jointly sufficient. While Socrates concludes that the poets create their poems not with wisdom but by nature and inspiration, like the prophets and

oracles, I don't there lay the matter to rest myself. I mention only that Socrates' negative approach to the question may be misguided, and as we reflect upon Plato's own occupation and return to the *Phaedo*, we can begin to see that he in fact is. If I am right that the meaning of a story always outstrips its interpretation, there is no sense in which its creator, its author, must know better the meaning of a poem than anyone else. Rather than a problem for poetry, that the poets whom Socrates questions cannot tell him the meaning of their poems may well be evidence not of their ignorance but of their wisdom—at least in part— for they at least create and tell stories that push dialogue forward. Socrates, however, concluding that creativity is irrelevant to wisdom, passes over it; he cannot even create for himself a story when he attempts later to undertake poetry because, as he says, he is no storyteller. And yet, by the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates has finally become creative, and it is this creativity that ultimately protects his friends from misology.

I do not want to suggest here that the poets whom Socrates questions are in fact fully wise. While Socrates takes his critique too far, he is nevertheless, once again, on the right track: the poets conclude themselves that they are wise also about other matters beyond their creativity, and this, not their inability to tender a final and satisfactory interpretation of their poems, is their true shortcoming. They need to meet also other demands, demands that Plato presumably believes that he himself meets. I suggest that the four apparent models of wisdom in the *Apology*—the poets, the politicians, the experts, and Socrates himself—represent the bulk of these: the storyteller must indeed be creative, but they must also be thoughtful and expert and self-aware. The storyteller must, in other words, be fully wise.

I have shown in this dissertation that Socrates—or at least four of Plato’s Socrateses—lacks the fuller wisdom necessary to occupy himself as he does. But this is the curious thing about the *Phaedo*: unlike other dialogues, Plato gives this final, dying Socrates a significant and powerful character arc. He writes a Socrates that approaches the end of his occupation in two contrasting and ironic ways: first and most obviously by dying, leaving his occupation behind (unless of course Socrates may continue his occupation amongst the other shades, as he says in the *Apology*), and second by finally approaching that wisdom he not only lacks in the *Apology*, the *Clitophon*, *Euthydemus*, and *Gorgias*, but also at the beginning of the *Phaedo* itself. Whereas Socrates begins with the inkling that it is safer to undertake poetry in case his dreams offer critique rather than encouragement, he only finally takes this possibility seriously in the moments before he finally dies. His soul is healed, therefore, immediately before it shall undertake the voyage to the afterlife; whereas he was ignorant earlier, he has now been gifted with at least creativity. And I suggest, elaborating on Gonzalez’s proposal mentioned above, that this is the very healing for which Socrates requests that Crito sacrifice a cock to Asclepius. If there is anything unfortunate about this, then, it is that Socrates should not have come to this realisation earlier, spending his time not examining, questioning, and refuting the Athenians, but by provoking and teaching them with stories. And in this sense Plato shows his readers that he has learned from Socrates’ mistake.

3. The Source of Plato’s Dialogues

Interpreters of Plato frequently find themselves attempting to move beyond the literary events of a dialogue to the history that may lie beyond them. While, in truth, this is most often

inadvisable—and even worse, boring—because Plato’s dialogues are narratively complete and self-sufficient, there is a sense in which explaining the very existence of those dialogues as historical objects can be seen to demand more consideration of the relevant historical events. Plato is not, after all, the only of Socrates’ friends and associates to have undertaken writing, nor the first. As Allen emphasises, many of the members of Socrates’ circle wrote Socratic dialogues, and possibly even during Socrates’ life.⁴¹¹ Perhaps Plato was inspired by these other Socratics. Or perhaps Plato was inspired by Socrates’ real deathbed conversion to storytelling. Or perhaps there is some other historical event entirely that drove Plato to undertake writing. But whatever the actual historical cause might be, our explanation of Plato’s turn towards written dialectic is not completed by merely identifying and describing it as if Plato were some inanimate physical body; rather, a complete explanation of Plato’s turn towards writing requires that we grasp the *meaning* of this historical cause, and not simply the meaning generally, but the meaning *for Plato*. I mean by this that an explanation of Plato’s turn towards writing can be complete only insofar as we understand the reasons, political or otherwise, that Plato himself might give for it. It does not much matter, then, whether the dialogues correspond in any way with the history that lies beyond them; the historical Plato is long dead and cannot now be cross-examined. We can only interpret the meaning of Plato’s turn towards writing by examining what Plato shows and tells his readers about writing in his dialogues.

I mentioned in the introduction to this dissertation that Plato has his characters discuss writing thrice in his corpus, and each time to discuss the *limits* and the *risks* of written texts. In the *Republic*, Plato has Socrates argue that writing (or more correctly, poetry) is an imitative

⁴¹¹ Allen, *Why Plato Wrote*, 15

medium and that imitating the good, presenting a mere image of it, corrupts rather than educates a reader because they are given only certain *aspects* of the good rather than the whole of it. Next, in the *Phaedrus* and the *Statesman*, Plato has respectively Socrates and the Eleatic Stranger discuss the same basic problem: that a text says always and everywhere the same thing to anyone who happens to read it. This is a problem for Socrates and for the Stranger primarily because the text cannot adapt to the pedagogical needs of a reader and so genuinely educate them.

It should be no surprise at this point how Plato responds to these problems: he transforms these two features of writing into genuine *benefits*. While the Socrates of the *Republic* disdains images because they mediate between the good and the seeker of that good, Plato represents this emphasis on directness as a core problem for Socrates' occupation in the *Phaedo*, as I mention above. That latter Socrates responds by embracing the imitative aspect of poetry, and so too does Plato, I suggest. By doing so, he is able to craft an object that depicts the good and points towards it while nevertheless protecting those souls who might come into contact with it from being blinded. It is worth emphasising here, however, that poetry need not be, and often wasn't, *written* in Plato's day, and there is no clear indication one way or the other that Socrates makes his poems by writing them. The key to explaining Plato's written dialectic lies then with Plato's response to the second problem: Plato writes because writing is the only way by which an image forever remains the same. That a text says always the same thing is a problem only insofar as it is supposed to teach a person, either asking or answering questions, embodying therefore the good in full. If a text is only an image of the good, however, it can no longer be expected to teach; a text in this position does not question or answer

questions: it stands static before its readers always in need of interpretation, pointing towards the good that it depicts while nevertheless remaining distant from it. A mutable image is not as provocative; it has the capacity to make progress, capturing the good now less clearly, now more clearly, now less completely, now more completely, provoking ultimately fewer questions than answers and so risking the mere satisfaction of anyone who claims to seek the good. The mutable image, in this sense, risks becoming less and less imitative, more directly representing the good and so blinding the soul in just the same way that Socrates' speeches do. The immutable text remains the sole means by which Plato or anyone else can everyday discuss excellence.

Much has been said about the power of the Platonic dialogue to truly affect a soul, to drive it out of itself, away from injustice, and towards justice, to use a soul and to do so justly, wisely, and excellently. This is, of course, essential for Plato. To the extent that it is true, Plato shows that his occupation is worthwhile. But this effectiveness does not alone explain Plato's occupation. The source of Plato's written dialectic lies in his recognition that Socrates does not do these things, that he does not truly affect a soul or know how to use it, turning it towards justice and improving it. The source of Plato's written dialectic lies in his recognition, that is, that Socrates' occupation does not live up to the ends that even Socrates himself sets for it: becoming truly happy.

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