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THE PROBLEM OF SOCRATES' GOODNESS
AN APPLICATION OF GREGORY VLASTOS'
ACCOUNT OF SOCRATIC IRONY

by

JOHN PIERLOT, B.A., M.A.

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for the degree of

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Department of Philosophy

University of Ottawa
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ABSTRACT

Socrates is supposed to be a good man, but he consistently disclaims the very knowledge of goodness which he thinks one has to have in order to be good. This is the problem of Socrates' goodness.

But Socrates' ignorance is ironic, not in the sense that when he says he lacks moral knowledge he means he really has it, but rather in the sense that he holds a set of moral intuitions that he considers true because they have survived the test of the elenchus. Thus his ignorance is characteristic of what Gregory Vlastos has called "complex irony," an irony consisting of the articulation of two senses of knowing. Socrates disclaims godly wisdom but at the same time he reclaims wisdom in another, more contingent sense, consistent with his conviction that what he does know has withstood the rigours of his unique method of critical discussion. Vlastos' notion of complex irony is a valuable clue for understanding how Socrates might be good. Socrates is good to the extent that he lives in a manner that is consistent with some reasonable intuitions about how a good person lives his/her life.

At the same time, however, Socrates' moral knowledge is self-admittedly deficient. This means that not only is his ignorance characteristic of complex irony, so too, by the same token, is his goodness. Socrates is justified in believing that he is good in the sense that he conforms to as much as he does know about the human good, but he is also not-good in that he knows he still cannot fully satisfy the requirements of the doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for goodness.

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--To Mary and Thomas.

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This is really yours--for all those endless days,
months and years of patience.*

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INTRODUCTION

I: Synopsis

i) The problem

Socrates is supposed to be the wisest and most virtuous person in all of Athens. He also believed moral knowledge to be both necessary and sufficient for virtue, from which it follows that whoever is good has the knowledge of the good. But Socrates consistently disclaimed moral knowledge. It follows that he cannot be good. This is the problem.

Chapter one presents the problem by laying out the claims that 1) Socrates is supposed to be good, 2) he did believe that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue, and 3) he did consistently jeopardize the possibility of thinking that he is good by disclaiming the very knowledge that he thought one had to have in order to be good. At the end of the chapter, this problem is labeled SG, the problem of Socrates' goodness.

Chapter two begins by considering, first, the question whether Socrates may simply have been wrong to believe that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue: for if there is no good reason to think that the doctrine is true, then there would be no good reason to worry if Socrates fails to live up to it. That possibility is rejected, however, on the grounds that Socrates' concept of moral knowledge seems sufficiently robust to withstand the introduction of contentious counterexamples, in which it appears that one can act irrationally, in a manner

contrary to what one knows to be the case, or can act in an apparently rational manner without actually knowing what is rational.

ii) The solution

Accordingly, a second avenue of appeal becomes the age-old assumption that Socrates' ignorance is actually ironic: when Socrates says he lacks moral knowledge, the disclaimer is not literally true because in some non-literal sense he is claiming the very thing he denies. The apparent advantage of this is that perhaps Socrates does not in fact deny having the knowledge he has to have in order to be good. Socrates' irony is the subject matter from here on.

In the remainder of chapter two, the possibility is explored that Socrates is ironical in the sense that he dissembles when he says he is ignorant. The occasion is Thrasymachus' accusation, at *Republic* 337a, that Socrates simply pretends to be ignorant. As it turns out, however, Thrasymachus is a hostile interlocutor whose accusation Socrates forthwith rejects. Chapter three then explores the possibility that Socrates' irony is a deliberate, conscious attempt to mock an interlocutor. This time, the occasion is Callicles' accusation, at *Gorgias* 489e, that Socrates intends mockery by his offer to switch roles with his interlocutor. However, in the context in which the supposed mockery occurs, Socrates should be considered quite serious. In situations such as this, where a discussion about moral knowledge appears to be getting nowhere, it is actually typical of Socrates to be willing to relinquish the role of the master. Callicles' accusation that Socrates mocks is therefore deemed to be scarcely less misconstrued than was Thrasymachus' contention that he feigns ignorance.

In both chapters two and three, we maintain, along with Gregory Vlastos, the view that Socrates believes he has to be nothing other than sincere when he is involved in elenctic discussions about serious matters (in Vlastos' parlance, as we shall see, the most fundamental rule of the elenchus is that both Socrates and his interlocutors have to tell the truth, saying what is really on their minds, when involved in discussions about the "right way to live"). Hence, a basic criterion for measuring whether or not Socrates' irony can be appealed to in order to see how he might be good is that in addition to not being a denial of the knowledge of goodness, it had better not be a habit of dissembling or mockery. There is a parting of the ways, however, in regard to Vlastos' claim that mockery is such a patently obvious insincerity it cannot be construed as a violation by Socrates of the requirement to be sincere, to avoid deceit. Against this, we contend that for Socrates to mock about something so fundamental as his willingness to change places with his interlocutor would be tantamount to deceit even if the underlying meaning is patently obvious; it would be a juvenile act, deceitful in that it treats a serious matter as not so serious after all.

We return to Vlastos, however, in chapter four, the subject-matter of which is Vlastos' notion of "complex irony." Complex irony means saying one thing and meaning another, not in that the underlying meaning contradicts the literal meaning of what is said, but rather in that what is said literally and what is said non-literally are both the truth. As Vlastos describes it, complex irony thus means that when Socrates protests ignorance about moral knowledge, he plays on two senses of what it means 'to know,' on the one hand denying "epistemic certainty," while on the other claiming "moral certainty." Complex irony thus allows Socrates to claim a standard of knowledge which falls short of knowledge as such. The object, in chapter four, is to follow

Vlastos in providing a textual basis for this conception of Socrates' irony. Subsequently, chapter five is concerned with offering complex irony as a partial solution to the problem of Socrates' goodness (SG). In the first part of the chapter, the argument is that it allows for a standard of knowledge consisting of firmly held convictions that define the philosophical life for Socrates, and assure him that it is the best kind of life to live. To spend his life examining both himself and others for evidence of knowledge of the good, is, as he puts it, "the very best thing a man can do" (*Apology* 38a) in the absence of moral knowledge as such. The result is that Socrates is both good and not-good, where goodness, just like knowledge, has two distinct senses: on the one hand, it is good to be given over to an overriding concern about the good, while on the other hand it is not good to lack a more definitive knowledge of the good. The object, in part two of the chapter is then to show how the idea that Socrates is good in one sense but not in another might be replicated in the case of each of the cardinal virtues, justice, temperance, courage, piety, and wisdom.

Chapter six revisits a problem introduced near the beginning of chapter two but deferred until the end: the fact that in spite of his belief that he must say what he thinks when involved in discussions about the right way to live, Socrates does occasionally indulge in the less forthright irony of deception. The paradigm example, introduced in chapter two and discussed more fully in the first part of chapter six, is Socrates' farcical exegesis of Simonides' poem in the *Protagoras*. Vlastos is a central reference point for determining that there is a problem in light of this episode. He too regards it as a deceit that Socrates enthusiastically pursues poetic exegesis while giving no hint that in reality he thinks this to be anything but a worthwhile pastime. In practicing just the sort of insincerity that he should abjure, Socrates maintains the false

impression that the exercise is a relevant adjunct to the main topic of the dialogue, the discussion with the great sophist, Protagoras, about the nature of virtue and whether it can be taught. Unlike Vlastos, however, we do not write this episode off as an instance in which Socrates can be excused because he is not talking about the right way to live (in Vlastos' parlance, we shall see, the episode is an instance of "extra-elenctic capering"). Accordingly, the object of the chapter is to see whether Socrates can be excused in some other way.

To that end, part two of the chapter turns to yet another instance of such insincere rhetoric, Socrates' first speech on love in the *Phaedrus*. This is considered a worthwhile context in which to try posing a solution because Socrates 1) expresses shame at his first speech while clearly admitting that he spoke falsely, and 2) follows up the speeches on love with a discussion on language in which there lies a potential excuse, the distinction between two sorts of bad rhetoricians, one truly artless the other not. In this instance, art signifies the ability to lie, to speak otherwise than as one thinks -- to deceive without being oneself deceived. As such, the art of deceit consists of the ability to perpetuate a simple irony, speaking contrary to what one thinks with the ulterior motive of enticing people to adopt some viewpoint they might not otherwise accept were it presented in a less oblique, less rhetorically pleasant fashion. While this is not Socrates' habitual irony, it does occur occasionally and presents a problem because it denotes just that kind of insincerity that Socrates should and normally does avoid. In suggesting an excuse for such deceit, chapter six aims to supply an understandable motive for Socrates' *occasional* indulgence in simple irony.

By the end of the chapter, however, one question remains, namely what might be Socrates' motive for employing *complex irony*? This question occurs because it would

obviously have been much clearer if, instead of asserting his ignorance in the form of a complex irony, Socrates had simply explained quite literally that he disclaims moral knowledge in one sense while reclaiming it in another. In the absence of such a clear explanation, one has to wonder if complex irony is also inherently deceitful. Vlastos' answer to this question is explored, and, some differences with Vlastos notwithstanding, chapter six concludes by saying, along with Vlastos, that although complex irony might deceive without the intention to deceive, this is not a damaging admission about Socrates' credibility. Irony such as this can be employed without a full awareness on the part of the speaker as to all that it means. Complex irony signifies a middle ground between knowledge and ignorance, where the meaning of one term partially collapses into, partially remains distinct from, the meaning of the other. This is different from simple irony, which plays on a well-understood intention to say something different from what one means. That Socrates might employ complex ironies does not in itself mean that he spoke insincerely because it is possible for this kind of irony to occur prior to a full understanding as exactly what it means.

II: Who Socrates is, the "Socratic problem"

i) The context of the problem

The problem with which this thesis is concerned occurs in the context of what are commonly called the early dialogues, in which resides the closest thing in Plato to a representation of the historical Socrates. This is not to say that the thesis purports to be a historical project. The presumption, throughout, is that we are talking about Socrates as a dramatic character in the dialogues, not as a historical figure. The discussion is restricted to the

early dialogues because that is where the problem of Socrates' goodness first occurs, and the object as much as possible is to find a solution limited to that context. It will be noted, however, that occasionally we stray from the canon of dialogues usually thought to be early and Socratic. This requires justification, which in turn requires some discussion about the so-called "Socratic problem"--i.e., the problem of the early, historical versus later, Platonic Socrates--and the closely related issue of the chronology of the dialogues. In what follows, the object is 1) to indicate the basic canon within which the problem of Socrates' goodness occurs, and to which the possibility of a solution is in the main restricted, and 2) to explain the occasional digression from the canon on some occasions but not others.

ii) The canon

The following canon is a generally accepted listing of the dialogues according to Plato's early, middle, and late periods.

| I: early, and transitional | II: middle-period | III: late-period |
|----------------------------|-----------------------------|------------------------------|
| (Ia) <i>Apology</i> | (<i>Cratylus</i> , GV) | <i>Timaeus</i> |
| <i>Charmides</i> | (<i>Phaedo</i> , GV) | <i>Critias</i> |
| <i>Crito</i> | (<i>Symposium</i> , GV) | <i>Sophist</i> |
| <i>Euthyphro</i> | (<i>Republic</i> II-X, GV) | <i>Politicus (Statesman)</i> |
| (<i>Gorgias</i> , GV) | <i>Republic</i> I-X | <i>Philebus</i> |
| <i>Hippias Minor</i> | <i>Parmenides</i> | <i>Laws</i> I-XII |
| <i>Ion</i> | <i>Theaetetus</i> | <i>Epinomis</i> |
| <i>Laches</i> | <i>Phaedrus</i> | <i>Epistles</i> I-XIII |
| <i>Protagoras</i> | | |
| (<i>Republic</i> I, GV) | | |
| (Ib) <i>Cratylus</i> | | |
| <i>Euthydemus</i> | | |
| <i>Gorgias</i> | | |
| <i>Hippias Major</i> | | |

Lysis
Menexenus
Meno
Phaedo
Symposium

This is Leonard Brandwood's chronology,¹ with indications as to the manner in which Vlastos has varied from it in his most recent works.² The variations are indicated parenthetically, with the initial "GV" (Gregory Vlastos) appended. While the order in which the dialogues fall within each group is a matter of some importance for both Brandwood and Vlastos, it is less significant here. The question of chronology revolves in the main around subtle variations of style³ which are quite beyond the scope of this introduction to discuss.⁴ Suffice it to say here that

¹ p. xviii; Brandwood (1976). In addition to Vlastos, discussed in the following note, cf. Guthrie (1975), whose chronological study of the early and middle dialogues one by one corresponds quite closely to the divisions of groups I and II above. Similarly, with minor variations, p. 38, Charles H. Kahn (1992); p. xii, n. 57 p. 46, Richard Kraut (1992). Also, pp. 11-14, Crombie (1962), a chronology with discussion of controversial members of the canon, and Shorey (1933), the table of contents on p. vii.

² See pp. 46-47, Vlastos (1991); also, p. 135, Vlastos (1994). Compare this to the partial listing, at n. 1 pp. 1-2, Vlastos (1987), where (I) is a complete listing the same as what is here called group Ia; (II), corresponds to what is here called group Ib but lists only three dialogues, *Lysis*, *Hippias Major*, and *Euthydemus*; and (III), not filled in at all except with the note that it begins with the *Meno*, corresponds to what is here group II. There is no mention at this time of the late dialogues--doubtless because that is the area of widest consensus (see, e.g., p. 2, Ross 1951; also pp. 2, 249-250, Brandwood 1990) and in any case Vlastos' topic is not concerned with them. Concerning the middle dialogues, Vlastos remarks that there is "massive agreement about what belongs in (III);" similarly for "most of those in (I)." But there is "wide disagreement on which should go into (II)" (cf. pp. 250-251, Brandwood 1991), and indeed, we see that later on Vlastos put the *Meno* into the list of earlier dialogues, specifically those which, in 1991, he agreed with Brandwood were transitional. Subsequently, in 1994, however, Vlastos lists the early dialogues without any distinction between Ia and Ib. In both the later works, however, Vlastos is consistent in maintaining three headings corresponding to early, middle and late dialogues. Moreover, he remains consistent in the minor differences with Brandwood (including that in the last group, unlike Brandwood, he does not include the *Epinomis* and *Epistles* I-XIII).

³ That is to say, stylometry, statistical studies of the development of Plato's prose style. Brandwood did a comprehensive survey of the discipline in his 1958 Ph.D. thesis, *The Dating of Plato's Works by the Stylistic Method* (University of London, 1958), subsequently revised and published in 1990 under the new title, *The Chronology of Plato's Dialogues*. Prior to stylometry, the approach was to establish a chronology by interpreting the development of Plato's thought (see Guthrie's discussion of the criteria in this regard, pp. 42-54, Guthrie, 1975). As Ross (1951) has pointed out, however, this "led to very different conclusions in different hands," and eventually it was the "stylometric method" that "proved most fruitful" (p. 1). In a similar vein, see pp. 8-17, Holger Thesleff (1982), an exhaustive list of the widely different views about chronology which have been offered from the late eighteenth century up to and including the late 1970's and early 1980's. Also pp. 1-2, Brandwood (1990), who

no suppositions are made about the order within each major division, and that Vlastos' chronology is the one most compatible with this thesis. In what follows, therefore, we restrict ourselves to the following three considerations: 1) the reason for treating Book I of the *Republic* as an early dialogue distinct from Books II-X following, and so for not appealing to the theory of justice developed in the later books in order to suggest a remedy for the aporia in Book I; 2) the reason for not appealing to the theory of recollection in the *Meno*, even while considering the problem of Socrates' aporia which that theory was probably supposed to address; and 3) the rationale for using the *Phaedrus* in chapter six, despite it being a middle dialogue, to tender a solution to the problem that Socrates occasionally indulges in an irony of deception.

1. *Republic* I as early, distinguishable from Bk's II-X: It is consistent with Vlastos' chronology to regard Book I of the *Republic* separately. Vlastos' reasoning, for his own chronology generally, is based on the ten theses which his book, *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, aims to prove. Of these, the ones most relevant to the way this thesis treats of the first book of the *Republic* are theses I, II, III, and IX.⁵ First, the early Socrates ("Socrates_E" in

summarizes the tradition and adds that despite all the variation, the former approach did at least achieve the consensus that the *Laws* was the last dialogue Plato wrote, and that before this there came the *Timaeus*, *Critias*, and *Republic*, themselves preceded by the "*Philebus*, *Phaedo*, *Symposium*, *Politicus*, *Sophist*, *Parmenides* and *Theaetetus*." About any other dialogues, however, Brandwood notes, "there was little or no accord." As Ross points out, however, this was enough to give stylometric studies a starting point; being generally considered the last dialogue Plato wrote, the *Laws* could be used as a standard for deducing the "style and vocabulary" of Plato's late period (p. 1). The result of stylometry was a much higher incidence of consensus, at least about there being two distinct groupings of earlier and later dialogues, and, about what dialogues fall within the later period (p. 2).

⁴ Not only is stylometry a complex and highly specialized field, there is also the related scepticism about the method and associated reincorporation of historical or doctrinal criteria such as, for example, by Thesleff (1982), whose "new model" (the criteria of which are laid out at pp. 97-99, borne out in application from there on to the end of the book) proposes a lot of revisions on the part of Plato, and a correspondingly very complex chronology with significant discrepancies between the start and finish dates of various dialogues (see pp. 236-238).

⁵ So as to avoid a tedious repetition of bibliographic references to what is quite self-evident, we notice here, quite simply, that the ten theses occur on pp. 47-49, Vlastos (1991), and that the following discussion referring to them is based on these pages.

Vlastos' parlance) "is exclusively a moral philosopher," who had no "grandiose metaphysical theory," neither of "'separately existing' Forms" nor of "a separable soul which learns by 'recollecting' pieces of it's pre-natal fund of knowledge" (theses I and II). Second, the early Socrates is the elenctic Socrates who assiduously seeks moral knowledge while at the same time conscientiously "keeps avowing that he has none;" by comparison, the later Socrates "seeks demonstrative knowledge and is confident that he finds it" (thesis III). Finally, and thirdly, the early Socrates takes piety to be "service to a deity which, though fully supernatural, is rigorously ethical in its own character and in the demands it makes on men;" for the early Socrates "religion is practical" and "personal," "realized in action," while the religion of the later Socrates "centers in communion with divine, but impersonal Forms" (thesis IX).

In these respects, Book I of the *Republic* presents an early, elenctic Socrates who poses justice as a problem, criticizes various common sense definitions,⁶ but then, in the end remains aporetic, distinguishable from the character of the same name who develops a much more formal theory of justice later on (Book IV in particular). In this regard, Book I could be regarded as dialectical, a setup to pose a problem which the following books then attempt to solve.⁷ That is

⁶ I.e., Polemarchus' view that justice is "to render each his due" (331e); Simonides' claim that the justice is the art "which renders benefits and harms to friends and enemies" (332d); this same claim subsequently modified as "it is just to benefit the friend if he is good and harm the enemy if he is bad" (335); and, finally, Thrasymachus' view that "justice is nothing else than the advantage of the stronger" (338b).

⁷ Cf. p. 82, Crombie (1962), for whom Thrasymachus' function in Book I of the *Republic*, in opposing Socrates as he does, is to show that "morality needs to be justified....This is a challenge which Plato regards as perfectly legitimate, and the *Republic* is designed to show that it can be met." In a similar vein, p. 2, F. M. Cornford (1965). Also p. 216, Shorey (1933), an analytic outline with Book I, the "introduction," a challenge to Socrates to come up with a less conventional and more satisfactory conception of justice; Books II-IV, "development of an ideal out of a typical or 'natural' city, by the specialization of function and a reformed education of the military and ruling class," "definitions of the cardinal virtues in term of the three faculties of the soul corresponding to the three classes of the population," and "the conception of justice and happiness as the health and right order of the individual or the social organization;" Books V-VII, "completion of the ideal state by rule of the philosophers," and "philosophic education required for the apprehension of the idea of good;" Books VIII-IX, "degenerate and inferior types of city and man;"

not necessarily incompatible, however, with the view that it is also a short, early dialogue in its own right, distinguishable from all the rest of the *Republic* on the grounds that it ends inclusively⁸--because Socrates lacks the knowledge to go the extra step of positing an alternate viewpoint about justice in place of the populist ones he refutes. Book I can be considered both an early dialogue and an introduction to a later one. It posed a problem in need of a solution and could, quite conceivably therefore, have served as a convenient introduction to a more developed theory of justice presented in a later, more extensive work on the same topic.⁹ In fact, appealing to this later work might be one way to solve the problem of Socrates' ignorance in Book I. In the present case, however, that would be to take the problem of Socrates' goodness out of the context in which it initially occurs, and to which this thesis is restricted in trying to find a solution. The object behind this restriction is by no means to suggest that Plato's insights should be considered irrelevant in regard to problems posed by the figure of the early Socrates. It is just that the object here is to see if the problem can be solved in the context of the early dialogues alone, without any systematic appeal to doctrines and ideas that Plato might have developed later on in his own right.

and, finally, Book X, "confirmation of the banishment of the poets," and "the myth of immortality."

⁸ This is Vlastos' (1987, 1991, 1994) basic reason for distinguishing Book I as belonging to group Ia. But stylometric studies have sometimes supported a distinction between books I and II-X as well; for examples, see p. 2, Ross (1951). Alternatively, see p. 198 and n. 2 p. 216 Irwin (1992), who locates in the characteristic of an early dialogues in the defense of the sufficiency thesis whereby the just live well and are happy (353e4-354a4).

⁹ See p. 208, Paul Shorey (1933): the first book could be regarded "as the last of the minor or Socratic dialogues" as a matter of "convenience." Also p. 251, Brandwood (1990), observing that it has been thought that Book I was "originally a separate work written some time before the rest, but possibly revised at the time of its incorporation." That would help explain the early nature of the book and yet the convenience of its being compatible, as a dialectical setup, with the later ones. Terence Irwin (1992) thinks the supposition is "unnecessary" because since Plato was probably quite capable of writing Book I "deliberately as an introduction to the *Republic*" (n. 2 p. 216) Either way, though, it is accords credit to Plato the writer to suppose that he was able to incorporate an early, or early styled, work into a later one. As Thesleff (1982) has noted, "surely we underrate Plato if we consider him unable to transform a separate sketch into an introduction" (p. 107).

2. Recollection in the *Meno*: In the foregoing canon, the *Meno* occurs in the first list under the heading, Ib. as a transitional dialogue.¹⁰ In addition to the characteristic Socratic elenchus and Socratic aporia, it also presents a new theory, recollection, tendered by Plato to help explain how the knowledge of virtue can be acquired or taught¹¹ despite the fact that the teacher, Socrates, is fundamentally ignorant and aporetic (80c-d).

The *Meno* is discussed briefly in chapter one to help shed light on Socrates' paradoxical contention that virtue can and cannot be taught. It is also discussed again in chapter five, this time to help clarify the distinction between knowledge and opinion which is already endemic in the notion that Socrates' ignorance is a complex irony. In former instance, the object is merely to supplement a discussion of the *Laches* in showing that when Socrates says virtue both can and cannot be taught, he is not being paradoxical because these are two different kinds of claims where the truth of one does not necessarily contradict the truth of the other. The argument on this point is as follows: On the one hand, Socrates is simply saying that there is at present no one who actually has the required expertise to teach virtue. For this reason, it is true to say that virtue cannot be taught. On the other hand, however, Socrates believes that virtue is knowledge, in

¹⁰ Or "hybrid," as Vlastos' (1991) calls it. His criterion is the elenchus, which prevails up to 80e but supposedly drops out after that when the object becomes to demonstrate recollection rather than to continue inquiring about virtue in the usual (Socratic) manner (n. 41 p. 115). But see n. 11 following.

¹¹ I.e., instead of being treated like an object of knowledge, which a competent teacher should be able to deliver and which a student would acquire as a result of direct instruction, it now comes from within as recollection. This is the new object of Socrates' questioning, the result of the examination of the slave-boy, as Socrates explains at 85b-86a. See p. 118 including n. 52, Vlastos (1991), for whom this "startling proposition (82a5-6)" is a "radically new start" intended to deal with the fact that by 80e the elenchus has once again failed, with Socrates professing in the usual fashion, "I don't know what it [virtue] is." In this regard, however, the hybrid nature of the dialogue just seems all the more evident. The interrogation of the slave-boy arrives at new result--recollection instead of aporia--but it is still an elenctic interrogation. Cf. p. 119, Vlastos (1991), who answers "Yes and no" to the question as to whether the interrogation is "a paradigm of Socratic elenchus." Also p. 139, Irwin (1977) as referred to by Vlastos at n. 55 p. 119; and Gail Fine (1992) for whom the interrogation demonstrates both recollection *and* the continuing importance of the elenchus--because recollection is provoked by elenctic questioning.

which case it is also true to say that virtue is teachable. The appearance of a paradox occurs because both claims are supposed to be true even though they contradict one another. Note, however, that the first claim is factual whereas the second is logical. If the first is true, there is no contradiction because the second has the status of being factually undetermined. On the other hand, if the second turns out to be true--in the event that somebody turns up who can demonstrate a thorough-going acquaintance with moral knowledge--then the first will be false. Again, there is no contradiction. Socrates is simply saying how things stand now, while at the same time maintaining what would be the case in the event that the present, unfortunate fact that there are no teachers is ever rectified. The point, in recapitulating this argument here, is simply to show that even if the *Meno* is helpful in explaining away the supposed paradox that virtue can and cannot be taught, at no point in the argument is there any reference, or any need to appeal, to the theory of recollection. In a manner quite distinguishable from this newer, Platonic theory the *Meno* simply helps to explain a problem that already falls within the purview of the early Socrates.

Likewise regarding the *Meno* on knowledge versus opinion. As indicated in chapter five, the distinction is already familiar from the *Apology* (23a-b), where Socrates claims human wisdom while disclaiming godly wisdom. The *Meno* simply clarifies the point by showing that for Socrates human wisdom is characteristic of opinion while godly wisdom is characteristic of true knowledge. Once again, this is to apply only those features of the *Meno* which already have a bearing on the early Socrates.

3. The *Phaedrus* and the problem of deliberate deception: The *Phaedrus* is a middle period dialogue, which means that it presents a new figure of Socrates who holds views foreign

to the figure of the early period. For example, in this dialogue we encounter a Socrates who espouses a characteristically Platonic theory of immortality (245c-264a), who repeats the Platonic notion of innate knowledge appropriated in recollection (249e-250b), and who also advocates the newer, Platonically inspired methodology of rational dialectics (divisions and collections, described at 265d-266b).¹²

But the *Phaedrus* is also a hybrid dialogue,¹³ reminiscent as well of the early Socrates. It is on this basis that it is appealed to, in chapter six, for a solution to the problem of deceit that

¹² This is the beginning of the method of investigating from a hypothesis, initially introduced in the *Meno* (86e), later more fully developed and pursued with vigour in late dialogues, of which the *Sophist* and *Statesman* are paradigm examples. For Vlastos, this denotes a totally new approach, entirely different from the elenchus in that the "say what you believe rule" has been abandoned (see pp. 122-123). The more usual opinion has been, however, that rational dialectics supercedes the Socratic method, not so much by replacing it, but rather by improving it. See, e.g., pp. 138-40, G. Haknikian (1980); p. 42, A. R. Lacy (1980); Hugh Benson (1990); p. 113, Richard Robinson (1980); pp. 53-54, 56, 58, 59, Myles F. Burnyeat (1992); and pp. 369-370, Crombie (1963). Lacy's position, with regard to the examination of the slave-boy in the *Meno*, is that the slave-boy still has to be the one who produces the hypotheses for discussion. Alternatively, Crombie has it that for Plato "collection *par excellence* includes the ability to 'give an account'" (p. 370), in which regard, even though not noted by Crombie, we should recall the Socrates of the *Gorgias* describing the moral τέχνη as the ability to "give a rational account" (see *Gorgias* 501a, as discussed at p. 17, chapter one following). Haknikian goes so far as to claim, in respect of various elenctic arguments in the *Republic*, that "the elenchus is superior to, and more fundamental than, the method of division" (p. 140). On a more moderate note, Benson views Platonic dialectic as an attempt to augment the Socratic method with a more "substantive" one. All these variations are too involved to be discussed or decided about here. Suffice it to say, however, that regardless of the extent to which dialectics supercedes the elenchus, it is a new method and another criterion, therefore, by which to distinguish the early Socrates from Socrates the Platonic mouthpiece--in which regard it is important to note that in chapter six the object is to try making a case without in any way relying on this new feature.

¹³ And for that reason, long considered a notoriously difficult dialogue to date accurately. Indeed, up until the 19th century, it was often considered to be the earliest of Plato's dialogues. See, e.g., Thesleff's (1982) reference to the tradition at p. 171. Also pp. 549-550, Shorey (1933); p. 81, Ross (1951); pp. 396-397, Guthrie (1975); n. 39 p. 42, Richard Kraut (1991); and the extensive discussion at pp. 7-11, de Vries (1969). Among some of the more quaint reasons for an early dating: 1) the dialogue presents a very broad philosophical outlook and it is normal to think of such an approach as a writer's first opus, and 2) there is so much on eroticism it must have been written by Plato when he was quite young, just embarking on his literary career. Suffice it to say, however, that the view of a very early dating no longer has any currency. But that is not to say that the dialogue's hybrid character has not sometimes been an occasion for stressing its early character. Julius Tomin (1988), for example, has retained a marked sympathy for the hypothesis of an early dating, on the grounds that it presents a Socrates who helps us better understand the figure of early dialogues (pp. 40-41). Most notably, Tomin has in mind a comparison between the *Phaedrus* and the *Apology*, both of whose Socrates' professed a fundamental ignorance (*Phaedrus* 229e-230a vs., e.g., *Apology* 20d-e, 23a-b, 29b) and in that regard considered a philosophy of incessant search and examination to be the most vital occupation (e.g., *Phaedrus* 257b vs. *Apology* 37e-38a).

occurs in light of Socrates' exegesis of Simonides' poem in the *Protagoras*. The basic reasoning is that 1) the situations are analogous in that Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* seems like another example of this ploy, and 2) it is useful to refer the problem to the *Phaedrus* because unlike the *Protagoras* the *Phaedrus* includes a discussion of language that provides a possible excuse for Socrates. One should simply note that in applying the *Phaedrus* to this problem no systematic appeal is made to any of the distinctively Platonic elements of the dialogue. It is with regard to the speeches in their dramatic impact, more than their content, that the *Phaedrus* is taken to be reminiscent of a similar situation in an earlier context. The primary indicator of backwards compatibility in this regard is Socrates' reference to the *daimonion* at 242b-d. This, coupled with his shame at his first speech (237a), plus his judgement at the outset of his second that what he said in the first speech was false (244a), are taken to mean that (apart from what is actually said in the speeches) the Socrates of the *Phaedrus* is bound by the same requirement to speak sincerely and by the same rules of rhetoric that are espoused by the Socrates of the *Gorgias*.¹⁴

The thing to keep in mind, then, is that we are somewhat less concerned with *what* Socrates said in his two speeches than we are with the fact *that* he spoke insincerely in one of them. This is not to say that there are no other important philosophical issues¹⁵ in what Socrates said, nor that one gets anything like a comprehensive view of Plato's object in writing the

¹⁴ Most notably it is not okay to indulge in dithyrambic speech or in a rhetoric of flattery (see *Gorgias* 500e-502c as discussed in chapter one) such as Socrates admits to having done at *Phaedrus* 238d, 241e. On the connection in this regard between the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus*, cf. p. 325, Guthrie (1975). Also p. 196, Crombie (1962), whose point that the *Gorgias* and *Phaedrus* are "the two main discussions," one early one late, on the subject of good versus bad rhetoric, in no way obviates the present contention that the rules of engagement are still roughly the same in both contexts. For one thing, knowledge is still the basic criterion of the art (see n. 18 following).

¹⁵ Some of which are noted along the way, in chapter six.

Phaedrus with such a restricted consideration of just this one problem in regard to the early Socrates. In particular, one should not conclude, from the claim that Socrates' first speech is insincere, that it had nothing of importance to offer about the Platonic conception of eros.¹⁶ It is just that this is not the primary concern here. Rather, the object is to show *that* Socrates speaks deceitfully, in a manner reminiscent of the situation in the *Protagoras*, and then to move on and try to explain *why*.

This is where the discussion on language becomes relevant, specifically that portion of the discussion in which Socrates distinguishes between two sorts of bad rhetoricians, one artless the other not, and then applies this distinction to judge that his two speeches were better than that of Lysias.¹⁷ The thing to note here is that although rational dialectics comes up as a criterion for Socrates to say that his rhetoric was better than that of Lysias, we stop short of appealing to this criterion ourselves. The justification for this is that dialectic is only one criterion, and not even the most important one. More importantly, to be artful, a rhetorician must have knowledge.¹⁸ This is a typically Socratic position, which applies to the notion of art as conceived by the early Socrates. It is in this regard, insofar as it relies on the criterion of actually being able to say what

¹⁶ Although, it might be noted, the sudden shift from blame to praise of eros does require more attention than, for example, Ferrari's (1992) fleet recognition of Socrates' "violent change of heart" (p. 263). In the course of explaining that Socrates did have something of importance to say, even in his first speech, one should at least not overlook the fact that he called the whole story false (for more on this, see n. 100, chapter six following).

¹⁷ The section as whole comprises 261a-266b. More precisely, the distinction between the two sorts of bad rhetoricians occurs at 262a-c, immediately after which Socrates invites Phaedrus to compare his speeches and that of Lysias, "to observe some instances of what I call the presence and absence of art." The culmination of the critique of Lysias occurs at 263d, after which Socrates concentrates on his own speeches.

¹⁸ I.e., *Phaedrus* 277b: "First, you must know the truth about the subject that you speak or write about; that is to say, you must be able to isolate it in definition, and having so defined it you must next understand how to divide it into kinds..." This makes sense enough; before you can analyze, you need something to analyze. Socrates offers this as a summary of the results of the examination of Lysias, and of speech writing in general, according to "what does and does not make it art" (277a-b).

one knows, or what one thinks one knows, that the notion of artful but bad rhetoric can be referred to for a solution to the problem of deception in the *Protagoras*. Although the basis for an explanation comes from a middle-period dialogue, it can still be considered authentically Socratic in that it does not have to rely on anything that is characteristic, exclusively, of the more Platonic Socrates.

Another variation from the foregoing canon is the reference in chapter six to material from Books II and III of the *Republic*, concerning falsehood and the noble lie. Again, however, this is not to introduce any new, essentially Platonic material so much as to help illustrate the notion of an art of deceit as practiced in the both the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagoras*.

Finally, there is also the discussion in chapter four of Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*. Despite this being a middle-period dialogue, the view is that Alcibiades describes a Socrates who conforms more closely to the figure of the early period. Suffice it to say that this is consistent with Vlastos, to whom the discussion of Alcibiades' speech is heavily indebted.¹⁹ Alcibiades comes on the scene late in the dialogue, and when pressed to take his turn at making a speech about love, instead of continuing in the manner of the foregoing speakers, he takes up Eryximachus' suggestion to eulogize Socrates (214d). In the process, Alcibiades refers to a fundamental trait of the early Socrates, namely that "he loves to appear utterly uninformed and ignorant."²⁰ Subsequently, Alcibiades then provides an alternate description, different from that of Thrasymachus in *Republic* I, about the nature of Socrates' irony. At the same time, however,

¹⁹ And with Lacy (1980), who also takes Alcibiades' Socrates to be the early one.

²⁰ *Symposium* 216d. This plus the point noted following, that Alcibiades describes the *characteristic* Socratic irony, are, for Vlastos (1991), decisive reasons for taking the speech to be about the early Socrates (see pp. 33-34).

he says he is describing *the characteristic* Socratic irony.²¹ It is in regard to this claim in particular that chapter four sides with Vlastos in thinking that Alcibiades' attribution of complex irony to Socrates is authentic.

Any other variations are minor and meant solely for the sake of illustrating some feature already taken to be characteristic of the Socrates of the early dialogues. If the reason is not already self-evident, an explanation is provided in the context in which the illustration occurs.

²¹ I.e., *Symposium* 218d6-7: Καὶ οὗτος ἀκούσας μάλα εἰρωνικῶς καὶ σφόδρα ἑαυτοῦ τε καὶ εἰωθότως ἔλεξεν.... ("He heard me out and then said with that [characteristic, εἰωθότως, 218d7] ironical simplicity of his..."). As Vlastos (1991) advises (n. 47 p. 34), compare this with Thrasymachus at *Republic* I 337a4-5: ὦ Ἡφάκλεις, ἔφη, αὕτη ἰκείνη ἡ εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία Σωκράτους... ("Ye gods! Here we have the well-known irony [εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία, 337a4] of Socrates..."). (Regarding translation and texts used, see n. 1, chapter one.)

CHAPTER ONE

The Problem of Socrates' Goodness

I: Socrates, virtue, and the knowledge of virtue

i) Socrates' moral character

In the *Apology*, Socrates refers to himself as a “gift of God,” a “father or elder brother” figure, and a “champion of justice” (30d-31b, 32a), who deserves lasting fame as a “wise man (ἄνδρα σοφόν, 38c)” for having performed the “greatest possible service,” that of devoting his life to the task of alerting his fellow citizens to the importance of their “mental and moral well-being” (36c-d).¹ In the *Symposium*, Alcibiades testifies that Socrates' bravery in the field of battle (220a-221b), coupled with his superior argumentative skill (221d-222a), makes him “godlike and extraordinary” (219b-c), “absolutely unique” in comparison any other person past or present (221c-d). Phaedo concurs, saying immediately subsequent to Socrates' death, that he was “of all those whom we knew in our own time, the best (ἀρίστου) and also the wisest

¹ Unless indicated as from other sources or as emendations and modifications of my own, all translations in this thesis are those of the various translators in *The Collected Dialogues of Plato* (edited by Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns, Princeton University Press, 1989, 14th printing), referred to hereafter, as the case warrants, by the particular translator's name and the parenthetical indicator, Hamilton and Cairns. In all cases, unless otherwise specified, Greek terms parenthetically included in a citation have been supplemented by myself. The Greek texts used are those of the Loeb Classical Library series and the Oxford Classical Text, John Burnet, *Platonis Opera* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 5 vols.), the latter consulted for verification and for line numbers in the case of particularly important terms or passages.

(φρονιμωτάτου) and most upright (δικαιοτάτου).”² On the advice of Socrates himself, as well as other important witnesses in Plato’s dialogues, it would appear that one should consider Socrates a “good man.”³

Paradoxically, however, it is not at all clear that Socrates actually qualifies as a good man, when he is measured by his own standards. This emerges once we realize what counts as moral knowledge for Socrates, what relationship he believes exists between moral knowledge and goodness, and what he says about the possibility of himself possessing such knowledge.

ii) The sufficiency thesis

In the *Protagoras*, both Socrates and Protagoras agree that “wisdom and knowledge” (σοφίαν καὶ ἐπιστήμην) are the “most powerful elements (πάντων κράτιστον) in human life,” so much so that

...if he can distinguish good from evil (ἐάνπερ γινώσκη τις τὰγαθὰ καὶ τὰ κακά), nothing will force him to act otherwise than as knowledge (ἢ ἐπιστήμη) dictates.” (352c)

This is the same as to say that knowledge is sufficient for acting in accordance with what one knows.

But by ἐπιστήμη, “knowledge,” Socrates clearly means *moral* knowledge, the ability to know the difference between good and evil. When he says one cannot act otherwise than as knowledge dictates, he means this with regard to the ability to distinguish good from evil. As he says, even more clearly, in the *Charmides*:

² *Phaedo* 118a

³ An “inescapable inference.” p. 169, Brickhouse and Smith (1990).

...it is not the life according to knowledge (τὸ ἐπιστημόνως ἦν ζῆν) which makes men act rightly and be happy (τὸ εὖ πράττειν τε καὶ εὐδαιμονεῖν ποιοῦν), not even if it be knowledge of all the sciences (οὐδὲ συμπασῶν τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν), but one science only, that of good and evil. (174b-cc)

Socrates is interested in the ability to know the difference between that which is bad for us and that which is good, and in particular to know this with regard to the good life and the ability to act well and be happy. Although he does not always make this qualification explicitly, therefore, there is good reason to think, as commentators generally do, that when he is talking about knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) in the context of talking about virtue, he means *moral* knowledge.⁴ If one cannot act otherwise than as this sort of knowledge dictates, in effect Socrates is saying that moral knowledge is sufficient for being virtuous.

The same is often true when Socrates uses the word “wisdom” (σοφία, or as the adjective, σοφός) as a synonym for “knowledge,” as with σοφίαν καὶ ἐπιστήμην, for example, at *Protagoras* 352d1-2. As Vlastos has remarked, “*Moral* wisdom is clearly what he has in view in the doctrine that all the virtues ‘are’ wisdom.”⁵ In Vlastos’ estimation, this is always the case because the words σοφία and ἐπιστήμη are always equivalent for Socrates. This is certainly true part of the time. In addition to *Protagoras* 352d, see for example, *Laches* 194d2 where “wise” (σοφός) is an antonym of ἀμαθής, “ignorant” or “untaught,”⁶ and in that regard the source of the virtue of courage. Likewise at *Euthydemus* 281e4-5, where “wisdom is good, but ignorance is bad” (ἡ μὲν σοφία ἀγαθόν, ἡ δὲ ἀμαθία κακόν); and at *Apology* 19c6, where Socrates uses ἐπιστήμην and σοφός interchangeably in the same sentence to denote

⁴ See, e.g., p. 189, Santas (1979): “Most commentators take ‘knowledge’ to mean ‘knowledge of virtue...’.”

⁵ See n. 34, p. 164, also n. 5, p. 237: Vlastos (1991)

⁶ See n. 66 p. 197 following.

moral knowledge as the very matter about which his lack of knowledge revolves. In these contexts, σοφία and ἐπιστήμη do indeed appear to be synonymous. But the issue is not always straightforward. At *Protagoras* 330a2, it is also the case that “wisdom is the greatest of the parts of virtue” (μέγιστόν γε ἡ σοφία τῶν μορίων), and as such is included in the list of cardinal virtues: “justice, temperance, and holiness” (δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ὁσιότης).⁷ The difference between wisdom and knowledge will become important later on (in chapter five following) when we discuss the question as to whether Socrates can be good notwithstanding his lack of knowledge as ἐπιστήμη--or as “wisdom,” specifically the godly wisdom of which he speaks at *Apology* 23a-b while contrasting this with deficient, human wisdom. In the meantime, however, we can take it that both ἐπιστήμη and σοφία--the latter when it clearly is synonymous with ἐπιστήμη--denote a kind of knowledge which is moral knowledge, the knowledge of good and evil which is, for Socrates, sufficient for virtue.

Alternatively, but equivalently, when Socrates says that there is “nothing more powerful than knowledge” (357c) he means that

...when people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains--that is, of good and evil--the cause of their mistake is lack of [moral] knowledge (ἐπιστήμης ἐνδεΐα). (357d)

If knowledge is such a powerful element in human life that evil is a mistake, as opposed to some deliberate choice to err, it is not possible that anyone who has such knowledge could be capable of wrongdoing. The good is the only choice for those who know it (358b-d). Socrates' well-known conviction that evil is involuntary is thereby equivalent to his conviction that moral

⁷ As given by Socrates at 329c4-5, shortly before adding that wisdom is the greatest virtue (330a2).

knowledge is sufficient for being virtuous.⁸ A cardinal doctrine of the *Protagoras* is, it seems, that *moral knowledge is sufficient for virtue*.

In this regard, Socrates considers moral knowledge to be comparable to the technical expertise associated with “physical training, military campaigns, doctors’ treatments involving cautery or the knife or drugs or starvation diets,” for just as these fields of expertise turn out to be well-informed when, even though they often cause pain and discomfort in the present, “in the future there result from them health, bodily well-being, the safety of one’s country, dominion over others, wealth” (354a-b), so too, by analogy, must there be a “special skill or branch of knowledge (τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη)” (357b) guaranteeing that whoever has the ability to know the good, will *be* good. Moral knowledge is sufficient for being virtuous, therefore, in that it denotes a kind of moral expertise akin to the expertise by which an artisan practices a craft.

iii) The scope of the sufficiency thesis

Socrates appears to believe that moral knowledge is sufficient to the extent that it makes one wholly virtuous, such that, if someone truly understands virtue, the individual virtues-- namely justice, temperance, piety, courage, or, the greatest virtue of all for Socrates, wisdom⁹--

⁸ Cf. p. 189; Santas (1979): “It is plausible enough to take the contrapositive of this [i.e., of “If one has knowledge of virtue one is a virtuous man”] to mean that if a man does something that is unjust (or intemperate, cowardly, or the like) then he does not know that it is unjust.”

⁹ *Protagoras* 329c, 330a: since “wisdom is the greatest of the parts of virtue” (καὶ μέγιστόν γε ἡ σοφία τῶν μορίων), it is part of the list of cardinal virtues that includes, as well, “justice, temperance, and holiness” (δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ὁσιότης). The contention is Protagoras’ but Socrates seems to agree even though his assent is not explicit. For he merely continues his train of thought, asking Protagoras to clarify the manner in which the parts of virtue resemble one another. It is the fact that Socrates does not disagree which is significant. Normally Socrates would react negatively to such bold assertions if he found them suspect. See e.g., 331c, where he prevents Protagoras from too hastily capitulating, before the point has been settled in discussion, that “justice is holy and holiness just (δικαιοσύνη ὅσιον καὶ ὁσιότης δίκαιον);” or 331e, where he was astonished (ἐγὼ θαυμάσας) when Protagoras hazarded the counterclaim that justice and holiness are different.

occur not separately but simultaneously.¹⁰ Thus, in the *Protagoras*, he believes that if one is pious, one is also just, and, conversely, that a just person is also pious (331a-b); that temperance does not occur to the exclusion of wisdom (332b-333c); and that those with moral knowledge are more courageous than those without (349e-350c). Likewise, in the *Laches*, it turns out that if courage is the “the knowledge (ἐπιστήμην) of the grounds of hope and fear” (196d), then it must include a knowledge not just of future goods and evils, but of all past and present ones as well “without reference to time” (198c-199d); which results in Socrates eliciting from Nicias a positive response to the question, “If a man knew all good and evil, and how they are and have been and will be produced, would he not be perfect, and wanting in no virtue, whether justice or temperance or holiness?” (199d). Alternatively, consider *Euthydemus* 281a-b, where, on the premise that “acting rightly (τὸ ὀρθῶς)” requires “knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) [as] the guide which

slight similarities notwithstanding.

¹⁰ It is difficult to provide an exact reference for Socrates’ belief that the virtues are simultaneous, no single one occurring separately from the others. As stated here, it is a summary of the view that emerges from the long discussion spanning 239b-334c about the unity of virtue. Prior to this Protagoras had made a long speech (320c-328d) in which he claimed the expertise to teach virtue and in this way to make others better. This is the claim that initially concerned Socrates (see 319a where he elicits it from Protagoras and in response to which Protagoras unloaded with the long oration from 320c-328d). Socrates wanted Protagoras to clarify himself, and in particular to explain “whether [he thinks] virtue is a single thing, but justice, temperance, and holiness are parts of this, or whether these things I just now spoke of are all names of the same single thing (πάντα ὀνόματα τοῦ αὐτοῦ ἔνος ὄντος)” (329c). Socrates himself does not doubt that the virtues always occur together, for if they didn’t it would be conceivable that one could be both virtuous and unvirtuous (see e.g., 331a-b, justice and holiness must resemble one another otherwise someone who is just could be unholy, or someone who is holy could be unjust). But Protagoras’ maintains otherwise. He accepts Socrates’ simile at 329d that the virtues are distinct like the parts of the face are distinct and thereby runs afoul of the contradiction and fails to prove that he has the requisite knowledge to substantiate the bold assertion that he can make others better. The question about the exact nature of the unity of the virtues is a difficult one, quite beyond the scope of the present discussion to discuss in detail. But neither is it central. The intention here is only to indicate the extent to which Socrates holds moral knowledge to be sufficient for virtue--i.e., to show that knowledge is sufficient to the extent that it makes one wholly virtuous. For a representative example of the way opinion has diverged on the issue, see Vlastos who thinks that the virtues are ‘interentailing,’ related to one another in a manner similar to the way in which Socrates thinks knowledge and virtue are related (e.g., pp. 119, 121-124, Vlastos 1994; n. 46 p. 210 Vlastos 1991); versus Terence Irwin who thinks that some “common quality which is the same in all cases” makes the virtues virtually identical for Socrates (pp. 86-90, n. 62 p. 302, Irwin 1977).

directed the action.” Socrates opines that “good doing (τὸ ὀρθῶς), as it seems, is provided by knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) for mankind in every getting and doing.” When Socrates believes that moral knowledge is sufficient for virtue, he means, therefore, that it is sufficient for being wholly virtuous.¹¹

iv) The necessity thesis

But for Socrates, this belief goes hand-in-hand with the conviction that moral knowledge is also *necessary* for virtue, meaning not only is anyone good who has such knowledge but also, conversely, whoever is good necessarily possesses it. In the *Protagoras* he tells us that no one “can be utterly ignorant yet very brave,” that “everything is knowledge--justice temperance and courage alike,” and that virtue must therefore be “a single whole, knowledge.”¹² Evidently, no

¹¹ Does the *Lesser Hippias* militate against this? Socrates appears to repeat the doctrine that moral knowledge is sufficient for virtue when he asks Hippias, at 375e, to confirm that “if justice is knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), then the wiser will be the juster soul (ἡ σοφοτέρα ψυχὴ δικαιότερα), and the more ignorant (ἀμαθεστέρα) the more unjust (ἀδικωτέρα).” Shortly afterwards, however, Socrates leads Hippias to the paradoxical conclusion that “he who voluntarily does wrong and disgraceful things, if there be such a man, will be the good man” (376b). This runs counter to the view that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for goodness. But Hippias refuses to agree with what Socrates says at 370b, and at the very end of the dialogue Socrates likewise retracts, saying “nor can I agree with myself, Hippias, and yet that seems to be the conclusion which, as far as we can see at present, must follow from our argument” (376b-c). The problem seems to be this. The paradox that it is good to err voluntarily derives from a series of craft analogies: a runner is swift, a good runner, by the very fact that he can choose to run slowly (373d-e); likewise that a wrestler is a good wrestler is proven by the fact that he has the option to wrestle badly (374a); and so on, with a host of other examples including archery (375a-b) and the “art of medicine” (374b). Socrates’ point in this regard is that it is “he who is *better made*” who is proven to be better, if he can do wrong voluntarily (374a-b). In terms of the skill and native ability required to run, wrestle, shoot a bow, or practice medicine well the one who malpractices deliberately certainly is better than the one who malpractices involuntarily. However, this is only to say that one is more skillful or “better made” for a given, narrowly defined task, not that one is morally superior. There is no paradox because good and better mean *technical* not *moral* proficiency. The occurrence of the paradox may simply mean that morality is a special case of craft expertise (we shall see this shortly in the *Gorgias*), determined by a special kind of knowledge according to which one cannot “act otherwise than as knowledge dictates” (*Protagoras* 352c). The conclusion of the *Lesser Hippias* may derive from a disanalogy between technical and moral proficiency, a disanalogy that calls for a special conception of craft expertise, if such expertise is to be used as an analogue for moral knowledge. If that is the case, then the sufficiency doctrine may be the solution to, rather than a cause of, the paradox that people who err deliberately are good.

¹² *Protagoras* 360e, 361b

one is both good and ignorant of goodness. Virtue and the knowledge of virtue stand or fall together: for Socrates, it is true that ‘if you know what virtue is, then you are good *and* if you are good, then you have the knowledge of virtue.’ Moral knowledge is not only sufficient for virtue, it is also necessary.¹³

v) **The problem, preliminary synopsis**

Believing this, Socrates should also believe that whoever does not have moral knowledge cannot be virtuous. Logically enough, then, in the *Laches* he agrees with Nicias that “every man is good in that in which he is wise (σοφός), and bad in that in which he is unwise (ἀμαθής):”¹⁴ while in the *Charmides* he is “surprised (θαυμάζω)” that Critias thinks “temperate men to be ignorant (ἀγνοεῖν) of their own temperance” (164a). Essentially, the *Laches* and the *Charmides* both concur with the *Protagoras* that goodness and moral knowledge stand or fall together; from which it follows that if Socrates is a good man, it can only be because he himself knows what is the good. For us to understand exactly why Socrates is good, therefore, it would seem that all we have to do is read the dialogues for detailed information about his special expertise.

Unfortunately, however, such a project would always prove to be quite disappointing.

¹³ It is relatively common to think that the relationship between knowledge and virtue is, for Socrates, bi-conditional. In particular, see p. 189, Santas (1979); and pp. 87, 88, nn. 24, 25; p. 124, n. 71; p. 191; p. 237, n. 5, Vlastos (1991). Also, cf. p. 256, R. E. Allen, (1960); p. 91, Lloyd P. Gerson (1989); p. 169, Brickhouse and Smith (1990); and p. 6, Vlastos (1980). The doctrine tends to get treated as a matter of common knowledge to such an extent, however, that textual support is often lacking to clearly establish that Socrates really is uttering a bi-conditional when he says ‘virtue is knowledge.’ Textual support is required to make this clear, however, otherwise the point is *not* established. Rather, Socrates’ claim that virtue is knowledge (*Protagoras* 361b) could just as easily be taken to mean ‘virtue is knowledge’ but not ‘knowledge is virtue;’ just as ‘a car is a vehicle’ means ‘if it is a car, then it is a vehicle’ but not ‘if it is a vehicle, then it is a car.’

¹⁴ *Laches* 194d; cf. p. 124, n. 71, Vlastos (1991).

In the *Protagoras*, we have witnessed Socrates calling moral expertise a “special skill or branch of knowledge (τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη)” (357b4) that is somehow analogous to the technical expertise of medicine (354a-b). In this regard, Socrates refers to an art of “measurement” (μετρητική, 356e3, 357a1), the ability to make “the correct choice of pleasure and pain” (357a). But Socrates does not get into any detail about the art of measurement at this point, so as to establish the exact nature of this science. He contents himself with the general statement that in regard to such an art, there is “nothing more powerful than knowledge” (357c) and that whoever has it will not “make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains” (357d). Consequently, although it seems clear that he believes such knowledge to consist of the ability to know good from evil, the sense in which this might be true with regard to moral knowledge specifically remains unspecified; i.e., although it is relatively clear that a doctor knows good from evil with respect to the body, it is by no means clear how this same sort of ability applies with regard to moral good and evil. All we have from this dialogue, therefore, is the very general claims that “wherever it [moral knowledge] is found it always has the mastery over pleasure and everything else,” and that if “people make a wrong choice of pleasures and pains--that is, of good and evil--the cause of their mistake is lack of knowledge” (357c-d). Beyond this we learn next to nothing. Instead the dialogue flirts with contradiction and eventually plays itself out in ignorance. Early on, in the initial stages of the conversation, Socrates had maintained, in opposition to Protagoras, that virtue cannot be taught (320b). In the end, however, after likening virtue to technical expertise, he admits that if “everything is knowledge--justice, temperance, and courage alike,” then it would “be most surprising if it cannot be taught” (361b).

The *Protagoras* lacks a clear explanation as to why Socrates would thus contradict himself. To understand the problem, we need to look at the rationale for each claim separately.

First, regarding the claim that virtue is not teachable, consider the following remark from Socrates in the *Laches*:

Then must we not first know the nature of virtue? For how can we advise anyone about the best mode of attaining something of whose nature we are wholly ignorant? (190b-c)

In the *Laches*, the ability to teach virtue is conditional on one actually having the knowledge of virtue. That is to say, as a general rule, if one does not have knowledge, then one cannot teach. Hence, when Socrates say, at *Protagoras* 320b, that "I do not believe that virtue can be taught," what he may be saying is that he does not believe there is at present anyone who is qualified to teach. This seems to be born out by the following observation upon which Socrates' conclusion is premised:

...the wisest and best of our countrymen are unable to hand on to others the virtue which they possess. Pericles, for instance, the father of these two boys, gave them the very best education in everything that depends on teaching, but in his own special kind of wisdom he neither trains them himself nor hands them over to any other instructor; they simply browse around on their own like sacred cattle, on the chance of picking up virtue automatically....I could mention plenty of others too, excellent men themselves who never made anyone better, either their own relatives or others. (319e-320b)

Socrates admits that it is possible for there to exist good men. But he also notes that these men do not seem capable of passing on their goodness to others in any systematic, reliable fashion. It is in regard to this observation that he says he does not believe that virtue can be taught. He simply lacks evidence that there is anyone capable of teaching it.

But why, then, would he say later on, at *Protagoras* 361b, that virtue can be taught? To make sense of this counterclaim, we need to notice the condition that Socrates specifies when he says virtue can be taught. Virtue is teachable, subject to an important proviso: it has to be knowledge. At *Protagoras* 361b, it was in light of his contention that virtue is knowledge that Socrates said it would be teachable.¹⁵ This is consistent with the observation made above with regard to *Laches* 190b-c. It is also consistent with what Socrates says in the *Meno*. Consider the following exchange between Socrates and Meno:

Socrates: What attribute of the soul must virtue be, if it is to be teachable? Well, in the first place, if it is anything else but knowledge, is there a possibility of anyone teaching it--or, in the language we used just now, reminding¹⁶ someone of it? We needn't worry about which name we are to give to the process, but simply ask, Will it be teachable? Isn't it plain to everyone that a man is not taught anything except knowledge (ἐπιστήμη)?

Meno: That would be my view.

Socrates: If on the other hand virtue is some sort of knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), clearly it could be taught.

Meno: Certainly.

Socrates: So that question is easily settled--I mean, on what condition virtue would be teachable. (87b-c)

Immediately afterwards, Socrates then says,

¹⁵ I.e., *Protagoras* 361b: "If virtue were something other than knowledge, as Protagoras tried to prove, obviously it could not be taught. But if it turns out to be, as a single whole, knowledge...then it will be most surprising if it cannot be taught."

¹⁶ The process of "reminding" refers to the theory of recollection (85d) that Socrates tried to prove earlier on, by leading the slave boy to the correct solution of a mathematical problem (82b-85d). In this regard, the passage refers to a Platonic theory, a kind of learning not alluded to in an earlier dialogue like the *Protagoras* (see n. 45 p. 63 following). As Socrates points out, however, what process it is by which one teaches or learns is not the issue. Rather, the point is whether or not virtue is in fact teachable, regardless what might be the best method for teaching it. As explained in the Introduction, using the *Meno* to help explain away the paradox that virtue is and is not teachable does not necessarily imply reliance on the theory of recollection.

The next point then, I suppose, is to find out whether virtue is knowledge or something different. (87c)

This question is the topical concern until the end of the dialogue; and the result of the inquiry is the realization that since there are no teachers or students (96c-d, 98e), virtue is not in fact being taught as an object of knowledge. Not even the best statesmen of the day are wise, as in motivated by knowledge (99b-c). Rather, when such statesmen act well, they do so thanks to some sort of “divine dispensation” (θεία μοίρα).¹⁷ According to Socrates, this cannot properly speaking be called wisdom or knowledge because it does not denote the “kind of statesman who can create another like himself” (100a). In and of itself this observation is similar to Socrates’ point about Pericles at *Protagoras* 319e-320b. At the same time, however, his point is more developed in the *Meno*. Socrates devotes a significant portion of the discussion (97b-99a) to distinguishing between “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη, 97b6) and “opinion” (δόξα, 97b5). It is not impossible for people with opinion to be good (97b-c), but their goodness does not rest on a solid foundation of reason (97e-98a). The fact that they cannot reliably pass on their goodness to others, that they cannot teach, is an indication that they are not possessed of knowledge, the moral expertise upon which, in both the *Meno* and the *Protagoras*, the ability to teach virtue is conditional. The solution, apparently, to the paradoxical view of the *Protagoras* that virtue is and is not teachable, is that it is teachable in the ideal sense that there might be someone qualified to teach it, but that it is not teachable if in practice there is no one qualified.¹⁸

¹⁷ *Meno* 99e6

¹⁸ Cf. p. 213, Taylor (1991), for whom “the appearance of contradiction is illusory” because “Socrates is now operating with a conception of excellence quite different from that which underlay his original claim that excellence cannot be taught.” That is to say, Socrates’ rejection was based on “the alleged facts that the Athenians acknowledge no experts in political affairs and that outstanding men fail to hand on excellence to their sons.” As such his rationale was that “excellence as popularly conceived neither is nor presupposes any scientific technique,

But if this is the case, then Socrates is no more qualified to teach than anyone else; for he is no less ignorant about knowledge than anyone else. As he says, in the *Laches*, concerning his own ability to teach:

Socrates avers that he has no knowledge of the matter. (186e)

Likewise, in the *Meno*:

You must think I am singularly fortunate, to know whether virtue can be taught or how it is acquired. The fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is.¹⁹

And in the *Protagoras*:

For my part, Protagoras, when I see the subject in such utter confusion I feel the liveliest desire to clear it up. I should like to follow up our present talk with a

and hence cannot be transmitted by teaching.” On the other hand, however, “Socrates has shown to his own satisfaction that it is a necessary and sufficient condition of making the right choice of actions, and hence of being a good man, that one should employ a scientific technique of assessment of the consequences of one’s actions.” This makes virtue teachable in another sense. As Taylor notes, “[o]n this view what makes a man a good man precisely is the employment of that technique, from which it follows that the qualities which make a man a good man are such as to be capable of acquisition by a process of teaching.” Virtue is not teachable if one uses factual examples of what presently counts as teaching, but for Socrates this is no obstacle to presuming that teaching is possible if a new standard can be met. For a similar solution to the paradox that virtue can and cannot be taught, including the contention maintained at n. 19 chapter four following, that the problem therefore devolves to the irony of Socrates’ ignorance, also cf. n. 41 pp. 158-159 (point “e”), n. 58 p. 163, and n. 63 p. 165. Terry Penner (1992). It is in regard to this solution that we eventually depart, in chapter four, from Vlastos’ view that Socrates’ ambivalence about teaching is a unique instance of complex irony; maintaining instead that it is but another manifestation of the complex irony that Socrates both knows and does not know what counts as the knowledge of virtue.

¹⁹ *Meno* 71a: does the fact that Socrates cannot unequivocally say virtue is teachable mean that in the *Meno* he can no longer hold that virtue is knowledge--i.e., that it is necessary and sufficient for virtue? At first glance, this might appear to be the implication at 99b: “Now since virtue cannot be taught, we can no longer believe it to be knowledge....” Note, however, that Socrates is only saying that so long as virtue cannot be taught, there is no good reason to believe that it is knowledge. This is not the same as him saying it is not knowledge. The *Meno* still concludes, as already noted, with Socrates contending that knowledge is required in order to have “the kind of statesman who can create another like himself” (100a). The dialogue thus closes, not with a retraction, but aporetically, with Socrates identifying the need to “try to discover what virtue is in and of itself.” This is markedly similar to the conclusion of the *Protagoras* at 361c (cited in the main text following). In neither case does there appear to be any retraction of the belief that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. The doctrine remains the underpinning for Socrates’ belief that knowledge is required in order to say virtue can be taught, and the source of his determination to keep trying to discover it.

determined attack on virtue itself and its essential nature. Then we could return to the question whether or not it can be taught (διδακτὸν).²⁰

If the solution to the contradiction that virtue can and cannot be taught is to understand Socrates to be saying, essentially, that virtue is teachable in an ideal sense, according to the doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue, but that it is not teachable in a practical sense, since in point of fact there is *no one* who has the required moral expertise, then Socrates is himself not possessed of the knowledge of virtue. But if Socrates is ignorant in this way, this is tantamount to his denying the consequent of 'if you are good, then you have moral knowledge.' By telling us that moral knowledge is both sufficient and necessary for virtue, that no one is good unless he/she has moral knowledge, and that Socrates himself does not have such knowledge, the *Protagoras* yields the problematic but apparently unavoidable inference that Socrates cannot be good.

II: The full scope of the problem

i) *Gorgias*, Moral knowledge and technical expertise

Thus far, we know only in the most general terms that Socrates lacks the knowledge of virtue, and that because of this he might also lack virtue. The *Protagoras* provides at best a brief and quite rudimentary argument for the notion that moral knowledge is somehow analogous to the technical expertise of medicine. For that reason, our apprehension of the problem posed by Socrates' lack of knowledge is, as yet, quite formal and not well explained according to what it is

²⁰ *Protagoras* 361c: διδακτόν, accusative singular of διδακτός, can mean either that which is learned or that which is taught; both meanings could be considered applicable since it goes without saying that what can be taught can also be learned. Socrates wants to return to the question of virtue as such because the answer to that question is what might help determine whether virtue is teachable *or* learnable.

that he is actually denying when he says he is ignorant. In order to understand the problem in its full significance, therefore, we now turn to the *Gorgias* which provides a considerably more comprehensive account of the notion that moral knowledge is technical expertise. Perhaps additional insights are available in this context that could help explain the problem better or, maybe, show that it is not so serious as the *Protagoras* would initially make us think.

Consider, first, the following passage, *Gorgias* 506d:

...surely the goodness of anything (ἀρετὴ ἐκάστου), whether implement or body or soul or any living thing, does not best come to it merely by haphazard but through a certain rightness and order and through the art (τέχνη) that is assigned to each of them.

In this passage, Socrates has used the word “art” (τέχνη) in place of that for “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) in such a way as to indicate that the two terms are equivalent. To say that the goodness of a thing does not come about by chance, but only through the rightness and order of the art that defines it, is to say that goodness is not possible unless it is attached with a defining art. Goodness and art stand or fall together, just as was the case with goodness and knowledge; which means that now Socrates is saying, ‘if there is goodness, then there is τέχνη,’ and ‘if there is τέχνη, then there is goodness.’ The formulation is similar to his earlier one according to which it was moral knowledge that is necessary and sufficient for virtue, except that now the word for “knowledge” (ἐπιστήμη) has been used as an equivalent for the word “art” (τέχνη).²¹

²¹ Cf. n.9 p. 430: Emile de Strycker (1966): the use of ἐπιστήμη tends to occur most often when Socrates means knowledge in the most general sense; whereas τέχνη tends to occur as a substitute when he is talking more specifically about “particular branches of knowledge.” As we shall see, this seems to be the case here where Socrates gets quite detailed about what constitutes τέχνη, whereas in the *Protagoras*, we saw, he used the term ἐπιστήμη while speaking about moral knowledge in a much more general way. But there is still one sense at least in which the two terms should be thought of as equivalent. In the *Protagoras*, while discussing moral knowledge in very general terms, Socrates refers to such knowledge with both words, τέχνη καὶ ἐπιστήμη (357b4), while arguing that it consists of an art of “measurement” (μετρητική, 356e3, 357a1), the ability to determine good and evil for the soul (357c-d) in much the same way as the doctor is able to determine what is the correct way to

Throughout the *Gorgias* in fact, the governing topic is art (τέχνη), which Socrates pursues in order to convince Gorgias that rhetorical skill is not a true art so long as Gorgias insists that his students can still come to him to learn right from wrong (460a), even though his speciality is to produce “belief without knowledge (τὸ πιστεύειν...ἄνευ τοῦ εἰδέναι).”²² To convince Gorgias that such a trade does not deserve the name of art, Socrates’ first argument is that just as someone “who has learned the art of carpentry [is] a carpenter,” or someone “who has learned the art of music [is] a musician,” or someone “who has learned medicine is a physician,” so too “according to this principle he who has learned justice is just” (460b-c). Just as was the case in the *Protagoras*, here too Socrates clearly intends to try supporting the claim that knowledge is sufficient for virtue by relying on the analogy between moral expertise and craft knowledge. The only difference, however, is that now his intention is much more obvious, and the comparison considerably less rudimentary.²³ By telling Gorgias that a genuine knowledge of justice is sufficient to produce a just person, much as genuine craft knowledge is sufficient to produce an artisan, Socrates means to say that if a person professes to know how to teach the difference between right and wrong, this can only be true if the teacher is an artisan who actually produces genuinely virtuous people. This is a direct attack on Gorgias who, a little earlier, had admitted, of his own rhetorical expertise, that even though he aims to make people better, it is still perfectly possible for “someone to become a rhetorician, and then afterwards to use this

measure pleasure and pain with regard to the body (354a-b). The craft analogy, insofar as it depends on a very particular, unspecified conception of technical expertise, is the basis for thinking of τέχνη and ἐπιστήμη as virtually synonymous.

²² *Gorgias* 454e7: for Socrates, this is always inferior to knowledge as such (τὸ εἰδέναι, 454e8).

²³ That ‘knowledge is sufficient for virtue’ is supported, ultimately, by the craft analogy is a central argument of Irwin (1977, chapter three). See n. 41 following.

ability and this art with injustice.”²⁴ Early in the dialogue, therefore, Socrates undermines Gorgias by calling moral knowledge a kind of τέχνη, which one has only if one can reproduce the art of distinguishing good from evil in others. But what exactly does this moral τέχνη consist of, and how exactly is it different from and yet similar to non-moral artisanship, such that it can be considered both necessary and sufficient for virtue? Socrates attempts to explain:

1. First, moral knowledge is a τέχνη in that, like medicine, it “has investigated the nature of the subject it treats and the causes of its actions and can give a rational account (λόγον) of each of them” (501a). As such, it is a kind of knowledge, explainable by those who have it, which aims to preserve goodness by preserving “form” (εἶδος) and “order” (τάξις). Socrates refers to the knowledge by which “trainers and doctors give order...and discipline (δοσμοῦσί...καὶ συντάττουσιν) to the body” (503e-504a), as analogues for the ability of a “good and true artist” (ὁ τεχνικός τε καὶ ἀγαθός) to foster excellence of the soul (504b-e).

2. This makes moral knowledge a highly qualified kind of τέχνη, a “special art” (τοῦτο δὲ τέχνη τις εἶη).²⁵ Socrates says, whose object is “only those desires, the satisfaction of which makes man better” (503c). As such, moral knowledge is a science the unique role of which is the determination of good and evil. In the *Charmides*, Socrates thus calls it a “science of science” (ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμην):²⁶ and in the *Euthyphro*, in consideration of the virtue of piety, he adds that it is a science which knows “the essential form (ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος) of holiness which

²⁴ *Gorgias* 457b (translation my own): Socrates himself recalls this admission of Gorgias, sticking it to him at 460c-d, immediately after reciting the foregoing craft analogies.

²⁵ *Gorgias* 503d1-2; literally, “this would be some art.” Not all art is moral knowledge, just the one special art which is itself constituted by the knowledge of good and evil.

²⁶ *Charmides* 169b1

makes all holy actions holy....the one ideal form (μὴ ἰδέα) by which unholy things are all unholy, and by which all holy things are holy.”²⁷

3. For Socrates moral knowledge is not an abstract thing, but rather is proven by the activity associated with knowledge. That is to say, in order to be said to have such knowledge, one must act in accordance with it. In the *Euthydemus*, on the premise that “knowledge of carpentry” is that which “produces the right *use*” of “the working and the use of woodwork” (281a), it turns out that it is “good *doing* (τὸ ὀρθῶς)” which is “provided by knowledge for mankind in every getting and doing” (281b). Alternatively, in the same dialogue, via the examples of harp making versus harp playing, Socrates distinguishes one kind of knowledge from another according to the activity involved (289b-c). Similarly, in the *Charmides*, “temperance or wisdom...is a species of knowledge” in the sense that it is a “science of something,” a productive knowledge, much like “the use or effect of medicine...is the science of health” (165c-e); and “he who has this science or knowledge which knows itself will become like the knowledge which he has, in the same way that he who has swiftness will be swift” (169d-e). Finally, in the *Euthyphro*, the virtue of piety is defined, by analogy with a variety of crafts, including the care of animals (13a-c), medicine (13b), and shipbuilding (13e), as the active “science of sacrifice and prayer” (14b-c). That the knowledge of virtue is a productive act, and not only theoretical, has sometimes been characterized by commentators distinguishing between an active “knowing how” and a passive “knowing that,” where it is the assimilation of the latter into the former which approaches what Socrates’ means by moral knowledge.²⁸ Socrates’ point

²⁷ *Euthyphro* 6d10-11; regarding εἶδος, ἰδέα (6d11) see n. 57 following.

²⁸ E.g., R. E. Allen (1960); Edward Warren (1989); also, Lloyd P. Gerson (1989) who has two complaints against

seems to be this: one could know in theory how a cobbler stitches together the sole for a new shoe. One can get this sort of knowledge by reading it, or by having someone tell it or even demonstrate it with the pupil looking on as a spectator. But that does not mean that the person with a purely theoretical grasp of the intricacies of cobbling actually is a cobbler. The knowledge that makes for a cobbler is practical, consisting not just of knowing what one does in making a shoe, but also of the ability to actually put that knowledge into practice. The craft analogies seem to suggest that this is what Socrates has in mind about the knowledge of virtue. One can, presumably, dream up a sophisticated moral theory but unless one can demonstrate the theory in practice it cannot, properly speaking, be called moral expertise.²⁹ Moral knowledge has to be born out in practice before it can be said to be necessary and sufficient for being a virtuous

this sort of interpretation. First, since someone might have a general theory of goodness and yet not know “how to bring about the good and avoid evil in a particular situation” (p. 87), theoretical ‘knowledge that’ is not easily assimilated into the practical “knowledge of how to bring goodness about in any area” (pp. 91). Second, Gerson ‘suspects’ that “the claim that the knowledge that is virtue is ‘knowledge how’ has been falsely inferred from the argument that knowledge is sufficient for virtue” (p. 87). To the latter objection, suffice it to say that no inference is required: as we have seen, Socrates simply says that by moral knowledge he means knowing how to be good is not dissociable from knowing what the good is. As for Gerson’s first complaint, one might well imagine Socrates retorting, ‘while it is no doubt true that some people know something about goodness and yet do not know how to bring the good about in all situations, instead of proving that moral knowledge is not an assimilation of knowledge how into knowledge that, it proves that someone’s moral knowledge is still deficient.’ As noted elsewhere (see pp. 43ff), Socrates is so extraordinarily consistent in what he believes, and has so well buttressed his intuitions about moral knowledge accordingly, it is by no means an easy task simply to prove that his beliefs are wrong. It is difficult to prove anything against him because his conception of moral knowledge is questionable not because it is clearly false but because it hard to make it look either true or false.

²⁹ See pp. 216-217, G. M. A. Grube (1968) explaining this in light of Socrates identification of “the useful and the good,” so as to arrive at the following sort of reasoning: To be knowledgeable at a craft is to be useful or good at it; hence “to be good at something is a matter of knowledge,” which eventually became “to be good is a matter of knowledge.” We should add just one qualifier to this: obviously not just any craft knowledge will do. With regard to virtue, specifically, one has to have the knowledge that consists of being good at being good. That is the only sense in which it could be true that “to be good is a matter of knowledge.” Hence, as we shall see shortly, the analogy between moral and craft knowledge is actually quite narrowly construed, resting as it does only on the similarities between moral expertise and the expertise associated with medicine and gymnastics.

person. That seems to be a fundamental reason why ἐπιστήμη is virtually equivalent to τέχνη for Socrates.³⁰

4. But this alone is not enough in Socrates' view. It is perfectly plausible that a knowledgeable craftsman could choose not to practice his/her craft. Apparently Socrates does not want to think that this is all there is to moral knowledge. He wants to go the extra step of maintaining that it is determining and that it motivates people such that they will not ever act contrary to it once they have it. As he said in the *Protagoras*, moral knowledge is "a fine thing...capable of ruling a man (καλῶν τε εἶναι ἢ ἐπιστήμη...οἶον ἄρχειν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου)."³¹ Likewise in the *Gorgias*.³² Moral knowledge is a τέχνη in the sense that

³⁰ In this regard, cf. in particular Warren's (1989) discussion of "practical knowledge" at p. 111-113; also p. 126. Penner (1992), approaching the issue the other way around--i.e., via the craft analogies moral "expertise is evidently thought of by Socrates as intellectual, and as involving the ability to 'give an account' [cf. *Gorgias* 501a, point #1 above], to explain to others, and to teach them: it is not just a matter of 'knowing how'." While Warren emphasizes practical knowledge-how, on the understanding that theoretical knowledge-that is not sufficient, Penner emphasizes knowledge-that, pointing out that knowledge-how is not sufficient. Surely both are right. On its own, knowledge-how does not guarantee that one has the theoretical expertise to teach others what one knows. On the other hand, knowledge-how without a systematic theory, the ability to 'give an account,' is not a very strong criterion to guarantee that one can pass on what one knows to others. Both theory and practice are required for true expertise. In addition, however, knowledge also has to be motivating, otherwise there is no way for Socrates to say that it guarantees that one will act as one knows. Hence point #4 following.

³¹ *Protagoras* 352c

³² Although, cf. Irwin (1977, e.g., pp. 127, 130-131), who thinks that the *Gorgias* does not support the idea of a motivating moral knowledge because, unlike the *Protagoras*, the *Gorgias* does not refer to pleasure as the ultimate goal to which people aim in the course of struggling to be good (but see *Gorgias* 467c-d, 468b-c cited shortly following). This is premised on Irwin's ongoing argument that for Socrates goodness is instrumental in its own right, the means for achieving the ultimate goal of human happiness (see, e.g., pp. 82-83, and nn. 52, 53, pp. 300-301). But for an argument contra Irwin, see Vlastos (1991), who has emphatically disagreed that goodness is instrumental for Socrates: instead "virtue and happiness are interentailing" (p. 223; pp. 7-9, 302-303 for the disagreement with Irwin, 200-232 for the alternate view itself). Also the in-depth critical note on Irwin's book by George Klosko (1977), and n. 14 p. 149, Penner (1992), explaining that one must be careful to keep in mind that for Socrates moral τέχνη is specifically ἐπιστήμη, otherwise a "craft-knowledge conception of ethics" naturally leads to an "objectionably narrow instrumental means to some further (independently identifiable) end" (i.e., any example of craftsmanship would be sufficient to establish the analogy, in which case a host of non-morally significant goods would attain the status of moral goods). As noted shortly, for Socrates, the craft-argument is indicative only insofar as it aims for the good of the soul, in which regard it is analogous, exclusively, to the arts of gymnastics and medicine (see pp. 24ff following). One might add that on the basis of this restriction goodness and happiness become concomitant, the relationship between them therefore being interentailment, as Vlastos says. In any event,

whoever has learned justice wants to be just and, moreover, never wants to be unjust.³³ By this, Socrates does not mean that one is *either* just *or* temperate *or* pious. Rather, he means that one is virtuous generally, for the “sound-minded and temperate man (τὸν σώφρονα)” is, at the same time, also “just and brave and pious (δίκαιον...καὶ ἀνδρείον καὶ ὄσιον);” in short, “a man who is completely good (ἀγαθὸν ἄνδρα εἶναι τελέως).”³⁴ Moral τέχνη is sufficient for being virtuous in the same strong sense as was ἐπιστήμη in the *Protagoras* and in the *Laches*: it makes one wholly virtuous. Socrates’ rational, for maintaining such a strong concept of knowledge, seems to be that everyone naturally desires the good.³⁵ This appears to be the basis of his contention, in the *Protagoras* (357c-d), that evil is involuntary. If people naturally desire the good, then it stands to reason that if they know the good they will adhere to it. See, for example, *Gorgias* 467c-d: drinking unpleasant medicine is not willing the unpleasant but rather the good effected by the medicine, and sailing the seas on a merchant expedition is not willing the hardships and dangers of the sea, but rather the wealth the voyage is meant to achieve. Also

the specific nature of the relationship between goodness and happiness, especially regarding the idea that virtue is instrumental, is a contentious and complicated subject, neither strictly relevant to, nor within the scope of, the present discussion. Rather, we are concerned with the relationship between knowledge and goodness, the extent to which Socrates believes that the latter always accompanies the former, and whether he can be considered good according to his own criteria of goodness. In this respect, what concerns us the most is what Socrates thinks counts as moral knowledge: for if it is a kind of artisanship that always produces results, such that the two stand or fall together, then in some significant way it had better be possible to say that Socrates can claim such knowledge, otherwise he cannot be considered good (let alone blessed with well-being).

³³ *Gorgias* 460b-c: i.e., “he who has learned justice is just:” a just person “must necessarily be just, and the man must wish to do just actions:” and “the just man will never wish to do injustice.”

³⁴ *Gorgias* 507b-c

³⁵ Although cf. pp. 81-82, n. 153, p. 130, Alfonso Gómez-Lobo (1994): independently of specific texts Gómez-Lobo actually reasons the other way around--that moral knowledge cannot be purely theoretical for Socrates because implicit in his belief that not adhering to the good occurs out of ignorance there is the corollary supposition that people naturally aim for what is best for themselves, and only go wrong when they do not understand what the good is. More similar to the present argument (as well as better documented), see Vlastos (1991): moral knowledge is motivating, in Socrates’ view, because it fulfills an innate desire for happiness, which we would willingly secure in the best sense, if only we knew what it should consist of (p. 203, n. 14).

Gorgias 468b-c: when “we kill an man, banish him, or confiscate his property” or “when we slaughter or banish from the city or deprive of property, we do not thus simply will these acts.”

Rather, Socrates says,

...if they are advantageous to us, we will them; if harmful, we do not. For...we will the good, not what is neither good nor evil, nor what is evil. (468c)

Because we naturally will what is best, evil is involuntary and always a mistake, not an innate wrongheadedness.³⁶

On the basis of the foregoing qualifications, Socrates applies his concept of τέχνη to distinguish between practices characteristic of art and non-art: and in so doing, makes it clear that the analogy between moral knowledge and craft knowledge is actually quite limited, relying on just two fields of technical expertise, namely medicine and gymnastics. Consider the following schema, provided for by discussions at *Gorgias*, 464b-466a, 500a-501c, and 517d-519d:³⁷

| | | |
|---|-----------------------------|-------------------------|
| I. | | |
| art relative to care of the soul | | |
| (referred to by Socrates as “political art” (πολιτική)) | | |
| art as such (τέχνη) | legislation (νομοθετική) | justice (δικαιοσύνη) |
| “flattery” (κολακεία) | sophistry (σοφιστική) | rhetoric (ρήτορική) |

³⁶ Hence Socrates’ claim that knowledge is power (*Protagoras* 352c), and his contention at *Gorgias* 467b--the claim he had so much trouble getting Polus to accept--that people who do what merely seems best, and not what they would hold to be the best if only they had knowledge, do not in fact do what they will.

³⁷ Gómez-Lobo (1994) provides a very similar diagram, which I came across after formulating the present one (see p. 74). For references to the key terms in the diagram see, e.g., πολιτική, 464b4, 521d7; τέχνη, 464b3, 465a2, 500b5; νομοθετική, 464b8, 465c2; δικαιοσύνη, 464b8, 465c3, 519a2; κολακεία, 464e2, 465b1, 501c3; σοφιστική, 465c2; ρητορική, 465c3, 517a5; γυμναστική, 464b6, 7, 465b2, b6, c1, 517e4-5; ιατρική, 464b8, c2, 465c3, 500b5, 517e5; κομμωτική, 465b3, c1.; όψοποιική, 465b1, c3, 500e5.

II.

art relative to care of the body
(no specific term provided by Socrates)³⁸

| | | |
|--------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------------|
| art as such (τέχνη) | gymnastic (γυμναστική) | medicine (ιατρική) |
| "flattery" (κολακεία) | beautification (κομμωτική) | cooking (ὄψοποιική) |

In sections I and II, there are "two different arts" (δύο...τέχνας, 464b3), one associated with betterment of the body, the other with betterment of the soul; and for each art, there is a practical and a theoretical side: legislation and justice concerning the soul, and gymnastics and medicine concerning the body (columns two and three). But there also two pseudo-skills, which Socrates calls "flattery" (κολακεία, 501c3). "Flattery" always aims for "the pleasant" (τοῦ ἡδέος, 465a2), whereas art aims for "the best" (τοῦ βελτίστου, 464d1, 465a2) for body and soul. Flattery therefore represents not "art" (τέχνην) but a "routine" or "a practice based on experience" (ἐμπειρία).³⁹ Additional examples of such flattery, provided by Socrates, are flute playing (501d-e), dithyrambic poetry (501e-502a), and tragic drama (502b), all of which have as their primary object the gratification (τὸ χαρίζεσθαι, 502c1), as opposed to the moral improvement, of their spectators (502b-c). Furthermore, when you strip from "all such poetry" its "music, rhythm, and meter," at bottom there lies but speech for the sake of flattery, commonly

³⁸ *Gorgias* 464b: "...to the single art that relates to the body I cannot give a name offhand."

³⁹ *Gorgias* 500e5: "routine" is Woodhead's translation (Hamilton and Cairns); ἐμπειρία is an abstract noun (cf. also the adjective ἐμπειρος) for which Liddell and Scott give "experience," and Gómez-Lobo (1994) "practice based on experience" (p. 73). In the context in which it occurs, the word is in apposition to τέχνη (500e5)--i.e., "cooking (ὄψοποιική, 500e5) differed from medicine in being, not an art (τέχνη, 500e5), but a routine (ἐμπειρίαν, 500e5)." While art is also a kind of experience or practice, not every experience or practice is an art because not every experience or practice is informed by knowledge.

used to please and gratify the “Athenian people” without regard for what “makes them better or worse” (502c-e). The primary criterion by which Socrates distinguishes between art and non-art, therefore, is whether or not a given practice consists of the knowledge of good and evil, and thereby promotes the reality of goodness rather than opinions about it. By defining art in terms of the knowledge of good and evil, Socrates has found a way to rule against the rhetorical expertise which Gorgias, by his own admission (460a), relies on to produce belief without knowledge.

On this criterion it also turns out that it is gymnastics and medicine in particular which count as analogues for moral knowledge. This is born out later on, from 517b-519d, where Socrates speaks of a “two-fold activity (διττή...ή πραγματεία) related to both body and soul” (517c8-d1). The first of these is “servile” (δουλοπρεπείς, 518a2) and restricted to material skills such as the ability to provide food, clothing, and footwear for the body, or harbors, ships, walls, dockyards, and revenues for the state (517c-518a, 519a). But in order to be sure that they are beneficial, those arts which provide for the material needs of the body have to defer to gymnastics and medicine, which alone understand how much or what sort of food, drink or other products are conducive to bodily excellence (ἀρετὴν σώματος, 517e8-518a1). Likewise for skills that produce goods for the state. The provision of harbours, dockyards, walls, and revenues should be guided, not by sophistry and rhetoric, but by a “political art” (πολιτικὴν) that understands how to put “temperance and justice” (σωφροσύνης καὶ δικαιοσύνης, 519a2) first, otherwise the result will be just so much “rubbish” (φλυαριῶν, 519a3) sickening the state and its citizens with ignorance and vice, rather than making it well in knowledge and virtue. For Socrates, not all craft knowledge is equal. The excellence of the soul depends on a political art

comparable exclusively to the manner in which the arts of gymnastics and medicine seek to establish excellence (ἀρετή 506d5) in bodily matters.⁴⁰ Moral knowledge is analogous to craft knowledge on the basis of a hierarchy, therefore, that puts the knowledge of good and evil as the first in line of all art. It is via this hierarchy that the craft argument proposes that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue.⁴¹

ii) The problem of Socrates' goodness

But what exactly does the political art consist of? That is, in addition to being very generally comprised of the knowledge of good and evil, what is this knowledge exactly which enables one to be consistently pious, just, temperate, brave, and wise from day-to-day?⁴²

Unfortunately, this is exactly what Socrates does not specify. All we know from him is the very general contention that the political art is constituted by a thorough-going knowledge of

⁴⁰ The assignment of ἀρετή (506d5) both to the political art and to gymnastics and medicine, apparently to encourage the comparison, comes from Socrates himself, at *Gorgias* 506d-e, and *Gorgias* 479b, 504c, 518a respectively.

⁴¹ The present argument resembles that of Irwin, in chapter three of *Plato's Moral Theory*, especially regarding the idea that moral expertise is like artisanship on the criterion that excellence depends on actually producing or acting in accordance with what one knows. It is this which, for Irwin, makes moral knowledge a "state of the soul" (see pp. 93-94, 95)--and knowledge of the good "instrumental to happiness" (regarding the relationship between goodness and happiness, n. 32 preceding). One significant difference, however, is that nowhere does Irwin stress, as we have done here, that the analogy between moral expertise and artisanship rests primarily and exclusively on the τέχνη of gymnastics and medicine. But see pp. 143-147, Santas (1979), who uses this same analogy from the *Gorgias* to interpret *Crito* 4a-e where, when the argument about whether Socrates should escape turns on the question as to what constitutes sound versus foolish opinion, Socrates again introduces gymnastics as a model for well-informed conduct.

⁴² This is actually the same question that worried Gerson (1989)--see n. 28 preceding--and in respect of which he concluded that it was Socrates' moral theory, the belief that knowledge is sufficient for virtue, that was deficient. In this regard, Gerson's conclusion resembles that of Vlastos (1980, pp. 15-16). In comparison, however, we are more concerned about the fact that it is actually Socrates who is deficient, in which regard we are therefore dealing with the possibility that instead of being a bad moral theorist, he is fundamentally ironical in that he has discovered that true moral knowledge is as beyond the ken of human reason as it seems to be necessary to make reason (Socrates') look reasonable.

good and evil which those who have it cannot help but practice, and which they could teach if they had it. The generality of Socrates' convictions does not prevent him from thinking that such art is both necessary and sufficient for virtue (*Gorgias* 506d); nor from claiming, near the end of the dialogue, that he alone is "engaged in the true political art, and that of the men of today I alone practice statesmanship" (521d); nor from maintaining, during his attempt to convince Callicles that virtuous people are always better off than vicious people, and that it is even better to suffer injustice than to harm someone else intentionally, that "[t]hese facts...as I state them...are buckled fast and clamped together..by arguments of steel and adamant" (508e). Such conviction, one might think, should be grounded on a positive knowledge of how actually to be good, knowledge that Socrates surely should divulge. Instead, however, he continues to disclaim such knowledge.

We have already witnessed one such disclaimer in light of the contradiction, in the *Protagoras*, that virtue can and cannot be taught: having maintained, throughout the dialogue, that virtue cannot be taught (320b), in the end after likening moral knowledge to technical expertise (albeit in a very rudimentary kind of way), Socrates nonetheless admits that "it will be most surprising if it cannot be taught" (361b). Coming as it does on the heels of the claims that courage is the "knowledge of what is and is not to be feared" (360d), that no one can be "utterly ignorant and yet very brave" (360e), and that "everything is knowledge--justice, temperance, and courage alike" (360e), we have seen, in light of what the *Laches* and the *Meno* say about teaching, that this contradiction dissolves on the understanding that when Socrates says virtue cannot be taught, he probably means that there is, as yet, no evidence of anyone who has the knowledge sufficient for making others better. As also noted, however, this solution comes at

the expense of realizing that Socrates himself does not have moral knowledge (361c), which, in conjunction with his conviction that moral knowledge is both necessary (360e, 361b) and sufficient (352c-d, 354a-b, 357c-d) for virtue, yields the problematic conclusion that Socrates cannot be good. Thus we turned to the *Gorgias*, to see if learning more about what Socrates thinks counts as knowledge might perhaps show that this problem is an idiosyncrasy unique to the *Protagoras*, perhaps because the *Protagoras* just happens to lack a full development of Socrates' moral theory.

But the same lack of knowledge pervades the *Gorgias*. The first example concerns Socrates' conviction that the knowledge of virtue is a "special art," analogous to the art of a physical trainer or doctor, such that, just as there is the art of fostering "health and general bodily excellence" (ἡ ἡγίεια...καὶ ἡ ἄλλη ἀρετὴ τοῦ σώματος, 504c8-9), so too is there an art which necessarily produces an orderly, law-abiding, temperate and just soul (504c-e). Ultimately, this skill boils down to what Socrates calls the "political art," the ability to apply a thorough-going knowledge of good and evil in order to be good oneself, and to make others better as well (464a-b). Socrates argues his case with vigour and lots of conviction, even going so far as to claim at one point that he is in fact the only Athenian who actually practices this art (521d). For all that, however, Socrates does not mistake conviction for knowledge:

...I think we should all be contentiously eager to know what is true and what false in the subject under discussion, for it is a common benefit that this be revealed to all alike. I will then carry the argument through in accordance with my own ideas, and if any of you believe that what I admit to myself is not the truth, you must break in upon it and refute me. For I do not speak with any pretense to knowledge, but am searching along with you, and so if there appears to be anything in what my opponent says, I shall be the first to yield to him (505e-506a).

Socrates is not speaking in order to put forth views that he regards as knowledge. Rather, he is advancing arguments based on the conviction that his own ideas can be considered true so long as no one comes forth who is able to refute him. To admit this, however, is tantamount to admitting that he does not have knowledge. So long as there is a possibility of being refuted, there is only conviction; and any claim to something stronger than this, to knowledge, would be pretentious.

This problem might perhaps be solved if Socrates could offer an example of someone who is good, and is capable of passing on their goodness to others. That is to say, his argument would look a lot less speculative and more plausible if he could actually say there is someone who can teach. Just as was the case in the *Protagoras*, however, here too in the *Gorgias*, there is no such person. Socrates and Callicles scratch their heads but fail to come up with a living, present-day example. All too commonly, the orators of the day

...neglect the common good for their personal interest and treat people like children, attempting only to please them, with no concern whatever whether such conduct makes them better or worse. (502d-e)

Callicles then suggests the names of Themistocles, Cimon, Miltiades, and Pericles as paragons of the past (503d). But the criterion is very exacting. While the late, great ancients might measure up just fine to the traditional standard of virtue, which consists in catering to one's "own appetites and those of others," they do not fare so well when the standard of excellence is Socrates' notion of a "special art" according to which "only those desires, the satisfaction of which makes man better, should be indulged, not those which make us worse" (503c-d). Socrates is forced to conclude, therefore, that:

I myself cannot say how a man such as this has become any of these things.⁴³

Just as was the case in the *Protagoras*, here too in the *Gorgias*, there seems to be no possibility of appealing to actual examples, living or historical, to support Socrates' views about knowledge and the good. When Socrates admits this, it is tantamount to him admitting that he lacks the support needed for his convictions to attain the status of knowledge.

The next example concerns Socrates' contention that the knowledge of virtue makes the virtuous person certain of always being better off than the vicious person. Since this is perhaps the most serious example in the *Gorgias*, for reasons to be clarified shortly, some additional discussion is in order to put the matter in context. In keeping with the craft argument, that just as gymnastics and medicine look out for the good of the body, so too does the "political art" concern itself with the good of the soul (464a-c), Socrates claimed that "rhetoricians or tyrants" possess no "great power in our cities:" for insofar as they lack knowledge they can only do "what seems best to them (ἃ δοκεῖ αὐτοῖς βέλτιστα)."⁴⁴ The rationalization for this, as Socrates himself explains, is that one has power only when one is doing what one wills, and one is not

⁴³ *Gorgias* 503d2-3; my translation, following the text of Lamb (Loeb) and Burnet, rather than that of E. R. Dodds (1959) for a passage which is problematic. The text is, τοιοῦτον ἄνδρα τούτων τινὰ γεγονέναι οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε πῶς εἶπω, and Burnet assigns οὐκ ἔχω ἔγωγε πῶς εἶπω to Socrates, but Dodds assigns it to Callicles, on the supposition that it is not in keeping with the uncooperative character of Callicles to think that he could be responsible for the rejoinder immediately following, urging better research on the problem--i.e., 503d4. Ἄλλ' ἐὰν ζητῆς καλῶς, εὕρησεις. "But if you inquire well, then you will discover" (for Burnet, this reply is Callicles'). Dodds could well be right: 503d4 could just as easily be Socrates rebutting Callicles' contention earlier on (484c-f) that philosophy is not a fit way for a grown man to form his opinions about the nature of virtue. But one could also argue that 1) to assign 503d2-3 to Callicles is to attribute to him a characteristically Socratic scepticism, and 2) 503d4 may simply be Callicles repeating his preference that Socrates pursue a less philosophical style of inquiry. It is a complex textual problem, impossible to decide or even discuss comprehensively here: this note is simply to indicate the problem and how the present reading stands in relation to it.

⁴⁴ *Gorgias* 467a-b

doing what one wills unless one is acting on the basis of true knowledge, as opposed to opinions.⁴⁵ Thus, Socrates asks Polus,

Do you call it good, then, if a man without intelligence (νοῦν μὴ ἔχων) does what [merely] *seems* best to him (ἅ ἂν δοκῆ αὐτῷ βέλτιστα εἶναι); and do you call this great power (καὶ τοῦτο καλεῖς μέγα δύνασθαι)? (466e)

Polus allows at least this much, but when Socrates presses the point by adding, then “I deny that they do what they will (οὐ φημι ποιεῖν αὐτοὺς ἅ βούλονται).”⁴⁶ Polus digs in his heels.⁴⁷

While it is no great matter for him to admit that action without intelligent decision is not particularly noteworthy, and no great indicator of self-determination, he cannot go so far as to imagine that people might be acting unwillingly just because they are guided by opinion rather than knowledge. The precise point upon which Socrates finds himself opposed, therefore, is with regard to the view that people do what they will *only* when they act out of true knowledge. Like Gorgias, Polus is quite content to think that opinion suffices as a guide for action. Socrates disagrees, with the much stronger position that only knowledge suffices. But unless he can state what knowledge is, it is doubtful that he has it; and if that is true, then it is likewise very difficult for him to maintain that knowledge is virtue. Despite Polus’ incredulity, however, Socrates persists. Proposing that “to do wrong is the greatest of evils (μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν),” and outright denying Polus’ counterproposal that it is “greater to suffer wrong,”⁴⁸ he tries hard to convince Polus that goodness is the only true source of human well-being (εὐδαίμων, 470e5)

⁴⁵ Cf. p. 206: Hall (1971): intelligence is integral to power, so without the power of rational choice, based on knowledge, “an apparently all powerful rhetorician is actually without power.”

⁴⁶ *Gorgias* 467b

⁴⁷ *Gorgias* 467b; i.e., to the foregoing claim Socrates appended the challenge “now refute me (ἀλλά μ’ ἔλεγχε),” to which Polus responds “What you say is shocking and fantastic, Socrates.”

⁴⁸ *Gorgias* 469b: to which counterproposal Socrates responds with “Most certainly not.”

and that evil-doers are always unhappy.⁴⁹ But Polus, proffering the example of a political tyrant who is undoubtedly evil but nevertheless far better off than his beleaguered but more innocent subjects (471a-d), cannot concur save in the case of someone who has been caught and is facing dire punishment (473b-d): to which Socrates retorts--quite consistently, it must be admitted, with his view that it is better to suffer than to do harm--that while neither case bespeaks a dirth of well-being, since "of two miserable creatures one cannot be the happier (εὐδαιμονέστερος μὲν οὐκ ἂν εἴη)" nonetheless, whoever is evil and escapes punishment is still the "more wretched (ἄθλιώτερος)."⁵⁰ But he finds it difficult to make a convincing case of it. Not only Polus but also Chaerophon and Callicles remain incredulous, and eventually Callicles takes the floor, relieving himself with a long vitriolic speech (482c-486d) in which he accuses Socrates of childish babblings quite unbecoming to a mature adult (485b-486c).⁵¹ Taking this criticism quite seriously, as the accusation that "I am not able to help myself or any of my friends and relations, or to save them from the gravest perils" (508c-d), Socrates tries to assure Callicles with further

⁴⁹ *Gorgias* 470e: i.e., when Polus asks, "Does happiness rest entirely upon this?" Socrates replies, "Yes, in my opinion, Polus, for the man and woman who are noble and good I call happy, but the evil and base I call wretched."

⁵⁰ *Gorgias* 473d-e

⁵¹ It is worth noting that underlying Callicles' frustration there is the fact that Socrates is directly challenging his belief that justice consists in allowing the strong to have their way (see *Gorgias* 482d-484c). Taking 'might is right' to be a matter of "natural justice" (484c), Callicles believes that the problem is not the question as to what justice is--he thinks he already knows that--but to understand, on the basis of a distinction between "nature and convention" (φύσις καὶ ὁ νόμος, 482e6), that justice is a natural right of the strong, against which the convention of the unjust is to get the weak to overcome the strong. In this regard, Callicles is in tune with Thrasymachus in *Republic* I (338c). But, as Hans-Georg Gadamer (1980) has explained, this is justice based on "mutual distrust and fear;" and the conviction, essentially, that "[n]o one does what is right voluntarily" (p. 50), which Socrates opposes with the counterclaim that no one does wrong voluntarily. In Callicles' mind, Socrates is flaunting a just natural order with an unjust convention order. But to Socrates it is Callicles' conception of justice which is conventional and unjust (that it is the *lex talionis* view of justice à la Callicles, Polus, and Thrasymachus which is the more conventional is an important point in Vlastos (1991), chapter 7, "Socrates' rejection of retaliation"). While Callicles may be angry and incredulous because Socrates is not able to be more convincing, he is probably all the more outraged because this confusing *philosophie* still does not hesitate to argue vehemently against a cherished convention.

arguments about the unique power of knowledge, all of which culminates in the dogmatic statement already noted that his views are true, "buckled fast and held together...by arguments of steel and adamant" (508e-509a). Immediately afterwards, however, Socrates undermines the impression of absolute certainty by adding:

...what I say is always the same--that I know not (οὐκ οἶδα) the truth in these affairs... (509a)

Given the context, this is perhaps the most serious expression of Socrates' lack of knowledge in the *Gorgias*. Socrates is supposed to be possessed of the "political art" (521d). As such, he should be able to enlighten his interlocutors, to improve their souls. But in the case of Callicles, he is not really successful. Socrates admits as much himself:

This fellow will not put up with being improved and experiencing the very treatment now under discussion, the process of discipline. (505c)

The "discipline" (κολαζόμενος, 505c4) in question, Socrates explains, is that a soul which tends to be "evil, senseless and undisciplined and unjust and impious....should be restrained from its desires and suffered to do nothing but what will improve it" (505b). Callicles agrees with this contention. Immediately afterwards, however, when Socrates adds that "to be disciplined is better for the soul than indiscipline," Callicles protests. He cannot understand: Socrates should question somebody else on the matter; he, Callicles, has "not the slightest interest" in what Socrates is saying; he only agreed to talk with Socrates in order to please Gorgias (505b-c). This is not a temporary resistance on the part of Callicles. Nowhere in the dialogue is there any clear indication of the kind of concession that would indicate he eventually becomes more sympathetic to Socrates' views.

According to Socrates, success in convincing someone else of the truth is the criterion that determines whether or not one actually has the political art of making others better. That was the point of his repeated attempts, in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, and *Meno*, to find a living example of an effective teacher of virtue. Now we see that for all Socrates' conviction about being possessed of the art of statesmanship, he falls to Callicles' criticism that he is of no use to anyone, not even himself, so long as he lacks the ability to be more convincing. Callicles is living proof of this. Far from proving the power of knowledge, Socrates has shown himself to be no more capable than any other deficient orator.³² In effect, Callicles' criticisms amount to the very practical observation that if the knowledge of virtue is necessary for virtue, Socrates is good only so long as he has this knowledge: that is to say, he is *usefully* good only so long as he can demonstrated the power of knowledge with a totally convincing explanation as to why virtue is better than vice. But at the very moment when he should disclose his knowledge in order to save the day for himself, Socrates states that he does not in fact have it (509a). If this disclaimer is literally true, then Callicles is basically right: Socrates is not a good man, and not an effective champion of justice such as he claims to be in the *Apology* (32a) during his defense of the philosophical life.

And, just in case one might be tempted to think that the problems posed by Socrates' lack of knowledge are unique to the *Gorgias* and *Protagoras*, here are some additional, characteristic examples indicating that it is, in fact, pervasive throughout the Socratic dialogues.

³² Indeed, one might go so far as to say *less* capable, at least so far as his reluctant interlocutors might be concerned, for he has not even been successful on the common standard: he has not gratified them.

Laches: Concerning the question as to whether anyone “is skillful or successful in the treatment of the soul, and which of us has had good teachers” (185e), Socrates says:

As for myself, Lysimachus and Melesias, I am the first to confess that I have never had a teacher of the art of virtue....and to this day I have never been able to discover the art (τὴν τέχνην) myself....Socrates avers that he has no knowledge of the matter. (186b-e).

We have already seen what a problem this lack of knowledge results in with respect to Socrates’ claim that virtue is knowledge: so long as there is no evidence of someone capable of teaching such knowledge, the claim is at best totally unfounded, at worst apparently false: virtue is not knowledge but something else, the result of “divine dispensation” perhaps (*Meno* 100a). But this lack of knowledge is a problem in another way as well. Later on in the *Laches*, Socrates tries to claim that courage is not only the “knowledge of the hopeful and the fearful” but of “every good and evil without reference to time” (199c-d). If this claim is true, then the knowledge of courage is akin, not to “a part of virtue (μόριον ἀρετῆς)” but to “all virtue (σύμπασα ἀρετή).”⁵³ But this contradicts an earlier thesis:

But we were saying that courage is one of the parts of virtue (μόριον εἶναι ἐν τῶν τῆς ἀρετῆς)? (199e).

This contradiction Socrates is unable to dispel. The term μόριον (199e3) for which Liddell and Scott give “piece, portion,” or “section,” indicates a distinguishable part, the knowledge of which, at the outset of the inquiry, Socrates thought might indicate competence at one virtue at least, courage. But eventually, he decides to substitute σύμπασα ἀρετή, “virtue entire,”⁵⁴ for

⁵³ *Laches* 199e3-4

⁵⁴ *Laches* 199e4

μόριον ἀρετῆς. “a part of virtue,”⁵⁵ so that the knowledge of courage will be the knowledge of virtue generally, as if the knowledge of one of its parts cannot be separated from moral knowledge as such. Lacking the knowledge to make his case more consistently, however, Socrates is forced to admit, near the end of the dialogue, that

We have not [even] discovered what courage is. (199e)

Euthyphro: At the beginning of the dialogue, Socrates does not know what piety means, and in this instance it is quite urgent that he find a remedy for his ignorance. The dialogue is dramatically situated immediately prior to the trial, when Socrates is facing prosecution by Meletus on the charge that he corrupts the young (2c-d). More specifically, he corrupts by “making new gods, and not believing in the old ones” (3b) and so, he explains, at bottom he is faced with an accusation of “impiety (ἀσεβείας, 5c7).” Since Euthyphro professes to “have an accurate knowledge” in such matters as this (5a), Socrates solicits instruction hoping for a definition of piety that will enable him to mount a secure defense (5a-b). As we have already seen, Socrates is after a definition that will capture the “essential form” (ἐκείνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος) of piety, the “one idea” (μὴ ἰδέα) “by which all holy things are holy” (ὃ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσια ἔστιν).⁵⁶ the “essence” (τὴν οὐσίαν) that makes a thing “cherished” (φιλεῖσθαι) because it is holy, rather than holy because it is cherished.⁵⁷ In effect, Socrates wants a definition of piety

⁵⁵ *Laches* 199e3

⁵⁶ *Euthyphro* 6d10-11

⁵⁷ *Euthyphro* 11a2, a7: as David Ross (1951), explains, ἰδέα, εἶδος (6d11, see also 5d4, 6e3) “are derived from ἰδεῖν [2nd aorist infinitive of εἶδον], ‘to see’,” the original meaning of which was “visible form” (p. 13). Examining these words in other contexts, including *Meno* (sic) 72d9, (sic) c7--as there is a single idea of health pertaining to both men and women (72d) so too is there a single idea common to all virtues (72a-c)--and *Phaedo* (sic) 102b1, 104e1--there are distinct forms which similar things participate in (102a-b), and unlike forms, such as odd and even, are distinct (104e)--Ross argues that although the original meaning of “visible form” is often preserved by Plato, he also means “something which he considers to be perfectly objective, existing in its own right

which will enable him to distinguish between that which is holy in and of itself, and that which is holy as a matter of opinion. During the ensuing conversation, the craft analogy comes up and the ability for piety is compared to a variety of skills, including the care of animals (13a-c), medicine (13b), and shipbuilding (13e), from which comparisons it is concluded that piety is the “science of sacrifice and prayer” (14c) or, alternatively, “a mutual art of commerce between gods and men” (14e). Without qualification, however, which is not forthcoming in this dialogue, the definition of piety as a “science of sacrifice and prayer” fails to distinguish between the holy as such and that which is thought to be “pleasing to the gods” (15c), thus allowing for actions to be called pious when they might be deemed pleasing to the gods regardless whether they are holy.⁵⁸ Having failed to isolate the essential form of holiness, Socrates presses Euthyphro to stay and help him find the truth:

And so we must go back again, and start from the beginning to find out what the holy is....I never will give up until I know....So tell me, peerless Euthyphro, and do not hide from me what you judge it to be. (15c-e)

and not by virtue of our thinking of it” (p. 15). In this regard, Ross thinks, even as early as the *Euthyphro* the terms have a “special Platonic sense,” namely the “two technical senses of ‘Idea’ and ‘class’” (pp. 12, 15). In a similar vein, see Chapter three, pp. 67ff, Allen (1970). All of which is to say, if Socrates wants a definition of the “one idea” or “essential form” of piety, the condition of knowledge of the virtue is knowing what it is in itself in all possible cases. That is the point of saying the holy is what is cherished because it is holy, not holy because it is cherished. Opinions are not knowledge; only appropriation of the independent essence true in all cases is knowledge. Also cf. pp. 56-57, including nn. 46, 48, 49, Vlastos (1991): the form of piety concerns the one, single “character,” or kind of thing that it is. The same would hold true of the *Gorgias* no doubt, at 503d1-2, where Socrates describes the moral τέχνη as a “special art” (τοῦτο δὲ τέχνη τις εἶη). Additionally, Ross notes, οὐσία and φύσις are alternate “ways of referring to an Idea,” while the difference between εἶδος and ἰδέα is that the latter “tends to be preferred in the more highly coloured and imaginative passages” (p. 16). Ross does not provide specific examples but for οὐσία and φύσις cf., respectively, τὴν οὐσίαν at *Euthyphro* 11a7, φύσεως ψυχῆς at *Phaedrus* 245e6; while for ἰδέας, see περὶ ἰδέας αὐτῆς at *Phaedrus* 246a3-4, the form of the soul which Socrates describes figuratively via the famous charioteer simile.

⁵⁸ See *Euthyphro* 15b-c

But Euthyphro has pressing business elsewhere, and the dialogue closes with Socrates lamenting the lack of knowledge that presently has him in such mortal danger:

What are you doing, my friend? Will you leave, and dash me down from the mighty expectation (ἐλπίδος μεγάλης) I had of learning from you what is holy and what is not, and so escaping from Meletus' indictment? I counted upon showing him that now I had gained wisdom (σοφός) about things divine (τὰ θεία) from Euthyphro, and no longer out of ignorance (ἄγνοίας) made rash assertions and forged innovations with regard to them, but would lead a better life in future. (15e-16)

Underlying the ironic hint that Euthyphro is actually no more knowledgeable than is Socrates there is, in this lamentation of impending doom a genuine enough expression, reminiscent of Callicles' criticisms in the *Gorgias*, of the extent to which Socrates' lack of knowledge prevents him from mounting an adequate defense of his moral intuitions, thereby to prove that he is good.

Charmides: While discussing the nature of temperance with Charmides, Socrates defines temperance rather loosely as "the doing of good actions" (163e). But this requires that one know what is good, and here the craft analogy, even with respect to medicine, falls short of an adequate explanation: for while the physician must "necessarily know when his treatment is likely to prove beneficial, and when not," the fact is that in reality "the physician may sometimes do good or harm, without knowing which he has done" (164b-c). Temperance likewise requires knowledge, specifically the "only science which is the science of itself and of all other science."⁵⁹ However, in the latter third of the dialogue, Socrates himself admits that he is "not certain whether such a science of science (ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμην) can possibly exist" and, furthermore, that "even if it does undoubtedly exist, I should not acknowledge it to be

⁵⁹ *Charmides* 166e5-6: Jowett's translation (Hamilton and Cairns), for μόνη τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν αὐτὴ τε αὐτῆς ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη, where "science," for ἐπιστήμη clearly means the same thing as "knowledge."

temperance (σωφροσύνην) until I can also see whether a thing such as this would or would not do us any good."⁶⁰ Having learned nothing to assuage these doubts, the dialogue thus concludes with Socrates admitting:

I have been utterly defeated, and have failed to discover what that is to which the lawgiver gave this name of temperance (σωφροσύνης).⁶¹

Republic I:⁶² Socrates wants to know what justice is (351a, 354b). Comparing justice to art (332c-333c), where art means the specific excellence associated with one and only one particular function (345b-d, 353bff), he argues that it is a very specific excellence, an excellence of soul whereby "the just" (οἱ δίκαιοι), with regard both to just individuals and to just societies (351e-352a), are always "wiser (σοφώτεροι) and better (ἀμείνους) and more capable of action (δυνατώτεροι πράττειν)" in comparison to "the unjust (οἱ ἄδικοι)."⁶³ At the end of Book I, however, it turns out that although Socrates has argued against Thrasymachus that justice is "wisdom and virtue" (σοφία καὶ ἀρετή) and not "vice and ignorance" (κακία καὶ ἀμαθία), all along he has been skirting the main issue, which was to say exactly "what justice is." Thus, in Socrates' own words:

⁶⁰ *Charmides* 169a-b; Jowett's translation (Hamilton and Cairns) save for the amendment, "temperance," in place of "wisdom or temperance" for σωφροσύνη. As we shall see eventually, in chapter six, there does indeed appear to be a sense in which wisdom and temperance are virtually interchangeable, thus partially vindicating Jowett's hesitancy to decide in the course of translation. The object is not to presume to correct Jowett, but rather to characterize Socrates' terminology as literally as possible with all neutrality prior to making any decisions as to what exactly he means.

⁶¹ *Charmides* 175a-b; Jowett's translation (Hamilton and Cairns), again amended to indicate "temperance" (as opposed to "temperance or wisdom") for σωφροσύνης. (See n. 60 preceding.)

⁶² As explained in the Introduction, this reading of the first book of the *Republic* is premised on the idea that although it can be considered dialectical, an initial inquiry about justice that ends aporetically so as to set up the development of a theory of justice in the books following (esp. Bk IV, 427d-449a), it can also be treated as a distinct dialogue, reminiscent of the aporetic Socrates of the early dialogues. One way of looking at it does not necessarily obviate the other. It could simply be that Socrates' genuine aporia was a convenient point of departure.

⁶³ *Republic* I 352b5-8

...the present outcome of the discussion (τοῦ διαλόγου) is that I know nothing (μηδὲν εἰδέναι). For if I don't know what the just is (τὸ δίκαιον μὴ οἶδα ὅ ἐστι).⁵⁴ I shall hardly know whether it is a virtue or not, and whether its possessor is or is not happy (354b10-c3).

All in all, therefore, instead of looking like a paradigm of moral knowledge and goodness, Socrates appears to be distinctly ordinary. He admits as much, at *Meno* 71a-b:

You must think I am singularly fortunate, to know whether virtue can be taught or how it is acquired. That fact is that far from knowing whether it can be taught, I have no idea what virtue itself is. That is my own case. I share the poverty of my fellow countrymen in this respect, and confess to my shame that I have no knowledge about virtue at all.

Over and over again, Socrates protests that he does not have moral knowledge. Regardless of how he attempts to describe such knowledge, he does not have the ἐπιστήμη, the τέχνη, the “special art” (τοῦτο δὲ τέχνη τις εἶη),⁵⁵ or the “science of science” (ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμην)⁵⁶ which he believes is synonymous with the ability to give an all-inclusive “rational account” (λόγον)⁵⁷ of the “essential form” (ἐκείνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος, μιᾶ ἰδέα)⁵⁸ of piety, justice, temperance, courage, and wisdom alike. Thus he is quite consistent in maintaining that he is himself unable to teach virtue. But nowhere does this seem to prevent Socrates from maintaining nonetheless, without any indication of his characteristic lack of knowledge, that knowledge is

⁵⁴ As Paul Shorey, translator (Loeb), points out in a gloss on the text at this point, “[k]nowledge of the essence, or definition, must precede discussion of qualities and relations:” in connection with this he draws attention to *Meno* 71b, 86d-e, *Laches* 190b, and *Gorgias* 448e. Of these, the references from the *Meno* are particularly clear that Socrates needs to know the essence of virtue before he can talk intelligently about it, as in describing what it is like or what are its properties. Though not referred to by Shorey, in the same vein also see *Euthyphro* 6d and 10a-11a discussed p. 35 preceding; also, further to the meaning of Socrates knowing nothing, pp. 95, 98ff following.

⁵⁵ *Gorgias* 503d1-2

⁵⁶ *Charmides* 169b1

⁵⁷ *Gorgias* 501a2

⁵⁸ *Euthyphro* 6d10-11

both necessary and sufficient for virtue -- such that anyone who has it must be good *and* anyone who does not have it cannot be good.

Herein lies the problem, then: Socrates thinks that you have to know what goodness is in order to be good, otherwise you cannot be good. But he also makes it quite clear that he does not himself possess the knowledge of the good. How, then, could Socrates, or anyone else who is at all sympathetic to what he believes, possibly claim that he is good? From here on, this problematic situation shall be referred to as the Problem of Socrates' goodness (SG).

CHAPTER TWO

Socrates and the Irony of Deceit

I: Irony in relation to Socrates' goodness

i) Strategizing the problem

Socrates' doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue, supported as it is by his conviction that moral knowledge consists of an artisan-like ability to promote the good and avoid evil, specifies the conditions which Socrates thinks have to be fulfilled in order to say that someone is a good person. But the problem of Socrates' goodness occurs because Socrates says that he does not have the knowledge of virtue he believes one has to have in order to be good. In what follows, we entertain two possibilities about how to approach this problem with a view to putting it in a better light.¹

¹ This is not to say that there are not other possible avenues. For example, Terry Penner (1992) poses the same problem, albeit in a more general sense, less directly related to the question of *Socrates'* goodness: i.e., "If virtue is the knowledge of how best to care for one's soul in order to be happy; and Socrates, the wisest human in Greece, knows only that he knows nothing; then, of course, no one has the knowledge of how best to care for one's soul--and indeed no one has virtue" (p. 137). Penner's solution is to argue for a lesser standard of goodness than actual knowledge such that if one lacks knowledge one can still be good by constantly trying "to get closer and closer to this knowledge" (pp. 137ff; cf. the similar argument at pp. 130 chapter five following). Another possibility, advanced by Brickhouse and Smith (1990), is that Socrates is good to the extent that he models his life according to divine inspiration, particularly that of his *daimonion* (see the more detailed precis of Brickhouse and Smith, with references to additional articles of theirs, at n. 48 chapter four and nn. 33, 34 chapter five following). Finally, there is Vlastos (1985), posing the same problem (p. 6) and offering complex irony as the solution: Socrates does not in fact know nothing because although he lacks the "infallible certainty" of knowledge as such (p. 18), his sense of moral certainty remains undiminished thanks to elenctic arguments that only disprove the views of his interlocutors (pp. 19-20). The solution to be offered here will be most indebted to Vlastos to the extent that it will rely on his conception of complex irony. That is not to say, however, that we shall merely be repeating a solution that Vlastos

First, perhaps Socrates was wrong to think that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. If this is the case, then we would have the further problem that Socrates' own beliefs are groundless, and that would be a prior issue to the question as to whether he is good--i.e., it would not make sense to try Socrates according to moral convictions or a moral theory that he should not have held. The object, in the section immediately following, however, is to show that this possibility should probably be ruled out because Socrates is at least consistent in what he believes, in which case it is not incoherent for him to believe in the strength of moral knowledge to the extent that he does, even though he does not appear to be able to provide a practical foundation for what he believes.

Second, if Socrates' insistent disclaimers of moral knowledge are ironic--in that the literal meaning of what he says is at odds with some underlying, non-literal claim about knowledge which does not actually gainsay the possibility that he is good--then perhaps there is a sense in which he is ironic which can be appealed to for a solution to the problem of his goodness. After ruling out the possibility that Socrates' doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue is groundless, this becomes the topical concern in sections three and four following, as

already offered. Far from it. For one thing, in his 1985 article where he poses the problem, Vlastos does not in fact have any specific reference to, or analysis and presentation of, the Socratic doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. Yet this is the doctrine from whence the problem arises (in conjunction with the fact that Socrates denies *moral* knowledge). Secondly, while Vlastos is preoccupied with occasions that demonstrate Socrates' certainty, not all of these occasions indicate the kind of *positive* convictions needed to solve the problem that arises when Socrates denies the knowledge he needs in order to be good. For example, a paradigm text for Vlastos is *Apology* 26b, where Socrates says that he knows it is unjust and evil to disobey a superior, be it god or man (p. 7). This is an expressed conviction about what is *not* virtuous, and it does not necessarily follow that Socrates knows or is convinced about what exactly *is* virtuous. Another example is *Republic* 351a, where Socrates only knows the negative proviso that "injustice is ignorance" (p. 10). Texts such as these do not actually address what is here called the problem of Socrates' goodness because they do not offer a clear view as to what might be Socrates' positive convictions. To notice that Socrates consistently denies the knowledge of virtue is to notice that it is difficult to see how he can be good (provided that one has also spelled out the substance of the conviction that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue). But to go the extra step of offering a solution it would be necessary to highlight what Socrates knows virtue *is*; what he knows it isn't won't do the job.

well as in the next two chapters. Subsequently, in chapter five, we apply what we have learned about Socrates' irony to a solution to the problem of his goodness.

ii) **The coherence of the necessity and sufficiency doctrine**

As we have seen, from the *Gorgias*, the doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue is supported by a craft argument according to which moral knowledge is a 'political art,' a *productive* awareness that Socrates thinks is analogous to the expertise of a skilled artisan, particularly a teacher of gymnastics or a medical practitioner. But the moment Socrates expresses doubts about himself being possessed of the political art, as at *Gorgias* 503d for example, he puts in jeopardy either his own expertise or the doctrine itself that such knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. That is, the fault either lies with Socrates himself in that he cannot prove his doctrine, or it lies with the doctrine in that it might simply be untrue or meaningless. If it is the latter, then it would be incongruous to suppose, as we have done, that in conjunction with Socrates' lack of knowledge the doctrine proves that Socrates is not a good man. The question is, then, are there good reasons to conclude that the doctrine is simply false or meaningless?

Vlastos has thought so. While noting that Socrates' doctrine was consistent at least insofar as it specified a kind of moral expertise that was *by definition* robust enough to be considered necessary and sufficient for virtue, Vlastos has nevertheless argued that Socrates maintained a purely *logical* argument at best, and in the process failed to protect himself from some obvious counterexamples that might prove him wrong.² Vlastos' paradigm example in this

² One could argue, perhaps, that Vlastos has no case against Socrates just because his counterexamples are not on

regard concerns the virtue of courage: taking as his cue "Aunt Rosie's" fear of mice, which "she knows quite well...can do her no harm," and contrasting this irrational phobia with her willingness regularly to take a "far graver risk to life and limb when she drives her car down Main Street." Vlastos thinks he has an example to prove that Socrates was wrong to think that you will fear only those things which you know to be evil, and are always brave about what you know to either good or harmless.³ If this is a fair counterexample, then in fact it is possible to fear what you know to be not fearful, and to be unafraid in the face of something that is fearful. And, since courage is a virtue, it would follow that Socrates was wrong to think knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue.

But against this, James Haden has argued that for Socrates moral knowledge is a kind of "moral act" akin to an inner disposition whereby one is or is not in the state of actually being virtuous depending on whether or not one is engaged in an inner struggle with one's own particular moral and intellectual infirmities. This, Haden thinks, suggests that in Socrates' mind the relationship between moral knowledge and action has to be factually true not just logical--as, he recognizes, is the case with Socrates so far as Vlastos is concerned.⁴ Nor is it necessarily liable to a critique derived from counterexamples in which people appear to be acting contrary to,

point. For example, in the *Laches* the kind of courage about which Socrates was consulted is, specifically, the courage of the fighting man (e.g., 180a, 182c, 190d, 191a). Note, however, that Socrates does press for a more general definition, something that conforms to the notion of virtue generally. He wants a definition that will account not just for the courage of infantrymen, but of cavalrymen and all other kinds of soldiers, plus anyone who manages to be stalwart in the face of disease, poverty, political turmoil, pain, fear and the desire for pleasure--in short, he wants a definition of courage that will express "the common quality, which is the same in all cases" (190c-e), the "knowledge of the grounds of hope and fear" generally (196d). Granted, none of this is about an elderly lady confronting mice and traffic, but surely a case such as Vlastos raises is not totally irrelevant given that it does fall within the purview of what is an appropriate basis for hope and fear.

³ See pp. 15-16; Vlastos (1980).

⁴ See pp. 376-377; Haden (1979).

or without apparent regard for their own knowledge about how one would act if one were to act rationally. Rather, moral knowledge may often be apparent only to the person concerned with the struggle to be good.⁵ Haden's argument is, unfortunately, not documented from the dialogues themselves: his major premise is merely the 'reasonable assumption' that Socrates would have been well aware of people in "Aunt Rosie's condition," and that his concept of knowledge must therefore cover the case of those in whom "fears...run counter to intellectual cognition."⁶ But there is a textual basis in support of the contention that moral knowledge is a kind of moral act for Socrates, namely the *Gorgias*' argument that the knowledge of virtue is a *productive act* analogous to a special conception of artisanship.⁷ This same idea is repeated in the *Laches*, at 190a-b. Socrates refers to the knowledge of sight and hearing, first, to say that without such knowledge no one could be very good at giving medical advice about the abilities of sight or hearing; and, second, to extend this by analogy to the domain of virtue so as to say to Laches that here too knowledge is required before one can be said to be competent at improving the minds of the young.⁸ In this regard, Haden draws our attention to the specifically moral dimension of Socrates' thought, to the fact that for Socrates knowledge has moral implications which are not adequately accounted for with a purely abstract conception of the relationship between

⁵ See pp. 377-378, 380: Haden (1979).

⁶ pp. 375-376: Haden (1979)

⁷ As discussed previously, see e.g., *Gorgias* 460c as supported by *Protagoras* 352c; *Euthydemus* 281a-b, 289b-c; *Charmides* 165c-e, 169d-e; and *Euthyphro* 13a-14b. Also *Gorgias* on its own at 464b-466a, 517d-519b and 503e-504e.

⁸ Specifically, Socrates is talking about Thucydides and Aristides (178b, 179a), the sons of Lysimachus and Melesias who initially consulted Nicias and Laches about how to educate their sons in courage. Socrates gets involved when Laches advises Lysimachus and Melesias to include him in the consultation (178a-180c) and Lysimachus accepts the recommendation (180c-181d).

knowledge and action. For Socrates, moral knowledge is by definition productive and inseparable from action, so if one does not act as knowledge dictates, perhaps that is because one does not actually have the right kind of knowledge. Perhaps Auntie Rosie's condition is like that of a struggling artisan, who cannot be said to have the knowledge of his/her particular craft so long as his/her actions bear no perceivable fruit.

In this regard, it is significant that the necessity and sufficiency doctrine is logically consistent: i.e., that knowledge and rational action amount to very much the same thing for Socrates. By stipulating that true moral acumen is a productive sort of knowledge, proven by the fruit it bears, Socrates seems to have stipulated a concept of knowledge which is by definition concomitant with virtue. In and of itself, this does not, of course, mean that the doctrine is meaningful. So long as Socrates cannot say anything more determinate than that he thinks knowing the good and doing the good have to go together his conviction lacks content and there is no clear reason for anyone to accept it. At the same time, however, the lack of content does not necessarily mean it is false, as in counterfactual, as Vlastos claims it is.⁴ Precisely because Socrates' doctrine is so logical, there is no more reason to accept it than to reject it. To make a decision, one would have to provide either a counterexample that takes into account the full scope of Socrates' concept of knowledge, or a supporting example such as Socrates tried to find of someone who seems to be good and seems to have a reliable method of making others good as well. In the former respect, the logic of Socrates' conviction makes it hard to find fault with what he believes; and in the latter respect his professed lack of knowledge makes it as just hard

⁴ See pp. 15-16; Vlastos (1980); he maintains this argument via the foregoing examples of Auntie Rosie's irrational fear of mice, and her equally unfounded security at being willing to risk the hazards of driving her car in heavy traffic.

to refute him as to believe him. That is probably why he manages to cling to his conviction despite the fact that he lacks the knowledge to give a practical demonstration of what he thinks. But it is also probably the reason why Vlastos' counterexamples do not seem to prove very much. So long as Socrates' conviction appears to rely on the assumption that moral knowledge and moral action are essentially indistinguishable, if one takes both in an ideal sense, it is just as hard to give a practical demonstration that he might be wrong as it is to prove him right. If Auntie Rosie is afraid of mice even though she knows mice are harmless, this could mean Socrates was wrong to think that one actually can have a kind of knowledge so powerful one cannot act otherwise than as it dictates (*Protagoras* 352c-d). Similarly, if she risks the far greater hazard of driving her car in heavy traffic, thus demonstrating courage without being aware of it or thinking about it, this could mean Socrates was wrong to think that no one can be both brave and ignorant (*Protagoras* 360e). On the other hand--with regard to her fear of mice--it may just be that Auntie Rosie has an irrational phobia that she cannot overcome. If this is the case, one could well imagine Socrates insisting that she acts as she does precisely *because she is in reality still ignorant*.¹⁹ He could also add that her most authentic recourse should be to admit her lack of a more rational governing knowledge; and that would be tantamount to her acknowledging *her own particular inability to be courageous*, not a failure of the doctrinal belief that knowledge is the key for solving her problem. Socrates can withstand this part of Vlastos' objection precisely

¹⁹ One might wonder, what if Auntie Rosie were given drugs to cure her irrational phobia? Would this count against Socrates, in that she is acting in an apparently rational manner on the basis of a non-rational 'persuasion' (as it were)? Of course Socrates did not consider the effects of modern drug therapy. However, he is given to finding enlightenment from other kinds of stimuli, like dreams, oracles, and divinations for example (*Apology* 20eff, 22c, 29d, 31d, 33c, 40a-b). Another point: modern drugs often correct pathologies that impinge on rationality, thereby helping to restore the ability to make informed decisions. Surely, one could imagine, Socrates would not have a problem with that.

because he is so extraordinarily consistent. Likewise for the other side of the objection. If Auntie Rosie habitually demonstrates courage by risking her life in her car on Main Street, Socrates is well poised to observe that 'this only shows that she is inconsistently courageous and not very perspicacious, therefore, about what courage is.' In fact, this sort of inconsistency seems reminiscent of Socrates himself, who claimed at one point to have the knowledge of good and evil to such an extent that he possessed the "political art" of making others better (*Gorgias* 521d), and yet at another point admitted that the claim is not reliable because he lacks the knowledge to demonstrate the art in action (508c-d) and to say what it actually consists of (*Gorgias* 506a).

The situation is this, therefore: Socrates' belief about the strength of knowledge is consistent precisely because he believes that a very special kind of knowledge is required in order for a person to be courageous, and just and wise and temperate, all the time. Granted, this is only a matter of belief: he will not ever be certain he is right until he can see it happening consistently and reliably with his own eyes. This could mean that his belief is, at best, purely logical and practically meaningless, or it could mean that it is not yet proven to be practicable. That is precisely the point which his own lack of knowledge prevents us from easily deciding. It seems that Socrates himself prevents us from wiggling out of the difficulties his viewpoint poses simply by trying to prove that he was wrong to believe that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. Instead, he exerts pressure on us to turn to the other question concerning what he really means when he says he lack knowledge.

With good reason, based on a number of examples from the dialogues (which we shall encounter shortly), most scholars agree that Socrates' protestations of ignorance are not literally

true but ironic. That is to say, when Socrates says he lacks knowledge, the literal meaning of what he says is untrue and in some non-literal way he is actually saying that he is not ignorant. Two possibilities in this regard are that 1) Socrates really is knowledgeable and simply pretends otherwise; or 2) he is serious but nevertheless it is still not completely true that he is ignorant. The first view is generally speaking that of Socrates' opponents, who therefore attribute to him an irony of deceit.¹¹ The classic example, to be discussed shortly, is Thrasymachus at *Republic* 337a. But this attribution has also become a standard to the extent that it is the definition for "Socratic irony" in contemporary English dictionaries¹² and in handbooks such as M. H. Abrams' *A Glossary of Literary Terms*.¹³ Particularly in recent scholarship, however, the second possibility is the one that tends most often to be regarded as the truth.¹⁴ For even if there is a

¹¹ See n. 46 following, which includes the example of Hermogenes in the *Cratylus* 384a; and also, contra Vlastos, Callicles' accusation at *Gorgias* 489d-e, to be discussed in chapter three following.

¹² E.g., definitions for the term "Socratic Irony" are included in the 20 volume O.E.D., as well as in the *Random House College Dictionary*, and the *Standard Dictionary of the English Language*; and generally they all agree that Socratic irony means the *pretense* (as opposed to the reality of) ignorance. As Vlastos (1985) notes, the view that Socrates' irony is a pretense of ignorance is "virtually ubiquitous;" he provides the same sort of justification for this claim as here--that this is the definition that has made its way into the lexicons (see p. 3; also p. 21, Vlastos 1991; and p. 96, Vlastos 1987).

¹³ See p. 93; Abrams (1985) where Abrams observes (somewhat cryptically), "[t]he term 'irony,' qualified by an adjective, is also used in a number of specialized applications to literary devices and modes of organization." Thence follows, as Abrams' first example, "*Socratic irony*," which he describes as "Socrates' characteristic assumption....of the *pose* of ignorance...." (emphases my own).

¹⁴ See, e.g., in addition to Vlastos, discussed at length in this and the following chapters, p. 447, Guthrie (1969) and p. 102, W. C. Greene (1963). Also Dregson (1981), Brickhouse and Smith (1984, 1986, 1989, 1990), Evans (1990), Strycker (1966), Cushman (1976), and MacKenzie (1988) as mentioned in chapter five following; and cf. pp. 40-41, Irwin (1977). But particularly Santas (p. 69, 72, 1979), who has what appears to a very similar view to Vlastos' complex irony, as does Penner (n. 63 p. 165 1992), in that Socrates' ignorance disclaims knowledge but not opinion. Vlastos would probably disagree, on the grounds of his long running point that instead of reclaiming opinion ironically Socrates reclaims knowledge in another sense of the word for knowledge (see p. 2, n. 25 p. 9, Vlastos 1985). However, it is difficult to see where there is any difference between what Vlastos means by the knowledge that Socrates reclaims and what Santas and Penner mean by opinion (see n. 15 chapter four following). Another point: Vlastos (1991) includes Guthrie as a proponent of the view that Socrates' irony is a deceit (n. 17 p. 25), whereas here Guthrie is an example of the view that Socrates is serious when he protests ignorance. Vlastos' view is premised on what Guthrie says on p. 446, concerning Thrasymachus' accusation at *Republic* 337a: "In Plato it [irony] retains its bad sense, in the mouth either of a bitter opponent like Thrasymachus or of one pretending to be

sense in which Socrates is serious about his lack of knowledge, it does not necessarily follow that he may not still be ironic: nor does it follow that if he is ironic he means to deceive. Rather, irony could simply be a way for Socrates to honestly admit, at the same time, of the scope and the limits of what he knows. This, as explained at the outset of chapter five, is the insight in Vlastos' attribution of "complex irony" to Socrates: instead of uttering a simple irony consisting of the pretense of ignorance, he employs a more sophisticated *double intent*, playing on different senses of what it means to know.¹⁵

Before getting to that explanation, however, there are a few issues that require more immediate attention. The first concerns the possibility that Socrates' irony might be a deliberate 'pedagogical device.'

angry at the way in which Socrates deceives everyone as to his real character (Alcibiades at *Symp.* 216e, 218d)." Vlastos adds that Guthrie is incorrect to take *Symposium* 216e, 218d as additional examples of such deceit. No disagreement on this point. However, his case is overstated when he takes this to mean that Guthrie *agrees* with Thrasymachus et. al. that Socrates' irony is characteristic of deceit. He should have read just a bit further in Guthrie: "the accusation of *eironeia* in the full sense, involving deliberate deceit, can scarcely be maintained. We should not dismiss his profession of ignorance as altogether insincere" (p. 447, as noted above). Guthrie then goes on to explain that Socrates' irony is integral to the elenctic mission of convincing an "interlocutor that, whereas he thought he knew something, in fact he does not." While admitting of Socrates' irony as a pedagogical device, Guthrie retains the notion that his ignorance was quite sincere: he simply did not reveal everything he thought, since "even when the teacher knows the answer, it is sound educational method not to tell the pupil at once, but to lead him to discover it step by step through the successive destruction of answers which are plausible but wrong" (pp. 447-448). This puts Guthrie more squarely in line with the present view that Socrates' irony was not a pretense of ignorance. Of course, this raises the question as to what his motive might have been for being ironical. Was it to be pedagogical? If so, the irony looks like a deliberate insincerity -- and yet Socrates is supposed to be bound by a rules of engagement that calls for sincerity. The question about Socrates' motive for irony is explored in more detail in chapter six following; see in particular the final section of the chapter.

¹⁵ This will be the basis for a solution to the problem of Socrates' goodness. The argument roughly speaking will be this: although Socrates does not know enough to claim the knowledge of virtue, he does have enough by way of opinion or moral intuition to be justified in thinking of himself as someone who 1) is as good as possible and b) better than anyone else. Significant too is that complex irony seems to absolve Socrates from the liar's paradox; see pp. 64ff including n. 48 following, regarding the likelihood that if Socrates' ignorance is not ironic, he appears to fall victim to the liar's paradox.

iii) Socrates' irony as a "pedagogical device?"

An apparent advantage of the idea that Socrates' ignorance is ironic, is that he may not in fact lack the knowledge he needs in order to be considered good. That is to say, if Socrates is speaking ironically, then his protestations of ignorance are not literally true and perhaps he is not literally denying the consequent of 'if you are virtuous, then you know the nature of virtue.'

From this it would follow that it is not necessarily the case that he is not-good.¹⁶

However, this presupposes that Socrates knows what moral knowledge is but chooses to withhold it; and that appears to violate another of his most important tenets, namely that everyone, himself included, must say what they think in discussions about virtue. Consider the following exchange, from the *Gorgias*:

Socrates: ...Callicles....you can no longer properly (ικανῶς) investigate (ἔξετάζοις) the truth (τὰ ὄντα) with me, if you speak contrary to your opinions.

Callicles: You are doing just the same, Socrates.

Socrates: Then I am not acting rightly (ὀρθῶς), if I am so doing, nor are you. (495a-b)

Socrates uses the word *ικανῶς*, translated by Woodhead as "properly," to indicate the criterion that would make Callicles a good interlocutor. Callicles should examine the truth properly with Socrates, and he certainly does not do this if he lies about what he thinks. But Socrates admits the same thing of himself. If he should lie, by speaking contrary to his opinions, he too would not be acting justly. The word he uses is *ὀρθῶς*, the adverb form of *ὀρθός*. In and of itself,

¹⁶ Cf. p. 13; Versényi (1982): "I would insist on reading Socrates' 'confession of ignorance' in the *Euthyphro* and the other early Platonic dialogues as an ironical statement. For taking it at face value....would not only make it impossible to find any substantive ethical theory in any of the Socratic dialogues up to the *Republic* (and inclusive of *Republic* Bk I) but it would make the Socratic method....and indeed Socrates' entire philosophical activity, incoherent and philosophically indefensible."

ὀρθῶς is slightly ambiguous. It could mean "rightly" either as in "correctly/accurately," which does not necessarily bear a moral connotation, or as in "justly," which is morally significant. This ambiguity might tempt one to think that Socrates is only admitting that he would be technically deficient, not morally deficient, in the search for truth, if he lied about what he thought. However, we have already seen that for Socrates technical expertise and moral sufficiency are interrelated, not mutually exclusive. The knowledge by which one engages in moral action is supposed to be a kind of craft knowledge. Technical sufficiency can be morally significant, the means by which Socrates tries to live the good life himself, while attempting to guarantee that others might do the same, if only they knew the nature of virtue.

With this, it becomes clear that Socratic irony has a wider significance in relation to the Socratic character than just its application to Socrates' protestations of ignorance. By agreeing with Callicles that he would not act justly or rightly, if he deliberately withheld his beliefs, Socrates is stating that to speak insincerely or to lie about what one thinks in relation to *anything* that is relevant to a discussion about morality is both a technical *and* a moral failing, proof positive that one is not acting like a good person. In addition to the foregoing passage, *Gorgias* 495a-b, consider as well the following, 500b-c:

...by the god of friendship, Callicles, do not fancy that you should play with me, and give me no haphazard answers contrary to you opinion. And do not either take what I say as if I were merely playing, for you see the subject of our discussion--and on what subject should even a man of slight intelligence be more serious?--namely, what kind of life one should live to which you invite me, that of a real man, speaking in the Assembly and practicing rhetoric and playing the politician according to your present fashion, or the life spent in philosophy, and how the one differs from the other.

Both Socrates and his interlocutor, one no less than the other, must say what they really think. Good people never lie about what they know; if they have opinions they state them, if they have knowledge they state that too. This requirement to be truthful is, as Vlastos has explained, the “touchstone of Socratic seriousness,” the one rule that he and his interlocutors must obey in an elenctic discussion about “the right way to live.”¹⁷ It is the most fundamental rule of the elenchus itself, for without it that question-and-answer style of conversation which Socrates deploys to ferret out and criticize the opinions of others, in his never-ending search for the truth, could never be the “truth-seeking device” it is supposed to be.¹⁸

And yet, sometimes Socrates really does appear to speak insincerely. A paradigm example in this regard (for Vlastos at any rate) is the famous exegesis of Simonides’ poem at *Protagoras* 342a-347a, where Socrates appears merely to be toying with Protagoras in a game of outsophist-the-sophist.¹⁹ For Vlastos, the solution to this difficulty lies in understanding that at

¹⁷ p. 134, Vlastos (1991); also p. 122, James Stuart Murray (1994); and pp. 1-3, Kenneth Seeskin (1987) who writes: “The first rule of the *elenchus* is that the respondent must say what he really thinks. When Protagoras tried to break this rule by adopting a hypothetical view about the nature of virtue (331c), Socrates stops him immediately....*elenchus* is more than an exercise in philosophical analysis...[it] has as much to do with honesty, reasonableness, and courage as it does with logical acumen: the honesty to say what one really thinks, the reasonableness to admit what one does not know, and the courage to continue the investigation. Most of Socrates’ respondents are lacking in all three....This book argues that the *elenchus* is central to Socratic philosophy and that only if we understand how *elenchus* places moral demands on questioner and respondent will that philosophy make sense.”

¹⁸ See pp. 111, 113-114; Vlastos (1991); on page 111, Vlastos cites the initial portion of the forgoing exchange at *Gorgias* 495a-b, namely 495a, Socrates’ contention that Callicles will ruin the argument if he speaks contrary to what he thinks. In a note (n. 21) accompanying this text he then adds *Protagoras* 331c, Socrates criticizing Protagoras because Protagoras allowed that “justice is holy and holiness just,” not because this is what he thought but because this is what he thought Socrates wanted him to say; and *Crito* 49c-d where, in the course of discussing whether *lex talionis* is an appropriate conception of justice, Socrates cautions Crito, “be careful, Crito, that...you do not end by admitting something contrary to your real beliefs.” Also see *Gorgias* 500b-c, cited immediately preceding, and by Vlastos (1991) at p. 134.

¹⁹ Initially, when Protagoras introduces the poem, Socrates admits that it is a good and true piece of writing--i.e., when Protagoras asks “do you think it a beautiful and well-written poem?” Socrates replies, “Yes, both beautiful (καλῶς) and well written (ὀρθῶς)” (339b). The word ὀρθῶς seems significant. In light of the exchange at *Gorgias* 495a-b, Socrates’ seems to be saying that the poem is a properly construed piece of rhetoric thus implying

this point Socrates is indulging in "extra-elenctic capers."²⁰ Because the subject-matter is poetry and not the right way to live, he has departed from his standard pursuits for a time, and is thereby not in violation of the rule to speak truthfully. However, while it is true that the subject-matter itself is not directly concerned with the right way to live, the circumstances within which the discussion takes place surely are. Socrates' participation in the exegesis of the poem is central to a character contest²¹ between himself and Protagoras, the intended outcome of which is that he will refute Protagoras the much admired sophist and thereby score an audience more sympathetic to philosophical investigation as represented by himself, the master of the elenchus. In this context, Socrates still is very much preoccupied with the right way to live. He has not temporarily abandoned his pet project. Rather, in circumstances where he might not get any sympathy for his cause, if he did not attempt to achieve ascendancy over Protagoras, this is his way to enjoin people to admire him and want to be more like him, to live his way because he

that he in analyzing it he is indeed indulging in a worthwhile pastime. The giveaway, however, is at 347b-348a where, subsequent to his long exegesis, Socrates advises Protagoras to drop the discussion of poetry since not only is it the fitting pastime only of the vulgar, the common folk of the marketplace, nothing conclusive can be established because the intended meaning of the author can never be established for sure. Far better, therefore, to test one another's mettle in live debate. Cf. pp. 135-138, Vlastos (1991), who also recognizes this subsequent critique as the giveaway, indicating that for Socrates "the whole debate on what Simonides did, or didn't, mean had been an exercise in triviality, a complete waste of time, and a tasteless one"--Socrates simply "played the fool to make fools of those who took it seriously." (For other commentators who have taken Socrates' part in the exegesis to be insincere sophistry, and for more detail on the sense in which Vlastos takes this to be an irony of deceit, see pp. 175ff chapter six following).

²⁰ See p. 138; Vlastos (1991). This is part of the reason why Vlastos answers 'no' to the question "Does Socrates Cheat," the title of the 5th chapter of *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher* (Section II, pp. 135-139). His second reason (section III, pp. 139-154) is that even if Socrates appears to make few concessions to his interlocutors, he does not deliberately deceive anyone who is not already (self) deceived in the first place. A classic example, already noted in chapter one preceding, and indicative for Vlastos as well, is Socrates' uncompromising insistence during the long argument with Polus at *Gorgias* 466a-480e, that it is better to suffer than to do injustice. As Vlastos points out, even though Socrates is far from a disinterested truth-seeker, and sometimes appears to make little effort to extend "generosity to a befuddled adversary" (p. 156), it does not necessarily follow that he is deliberately sophistical.

²¹ Which Vlastos (1991) himself acknowledges, adding that Socrates enters the fray "reluctantly," though "once in it, he does everything he can to win" (p. 135).

thinks his way is closer to being right than Protagoras'.²² Contrary to what Vlastos would prefer to be the case, therefore, it does appear that Socrates can be both ironic about the subject-matter at hand *and*, at the same time, concerned about the right way to live. This makes it appear that Socrates violates his own requirement that one must tell the truth, but it does not look like he can be shielded from this problem by supposing that he is not really talking about anything serious when he is deliberately ironical.

In regard to this problem, the suggestion has been made that Socratic irony is a kind of "pedagogical device" which Socrates employs quite deliberately in order to induce others to come to the truth themselves.²³ Does this help to show that he is good, notwithstanding the fact that he is essentially guilty of cheating,²⁴ of breaking the rule of sincerity? Consider the following two examples of this sort of argument.

²² This is explained a greater length in chapter six (pp. 175ff) in light of Socrates' attempt to better Protagoras in order to get Protagoras to adhere to a more elenctic style of discussion. But also see *Gorgias* 500b-c, cited at p. 52 preceding.

²³ In addition to Burge and Navia, discussed following, the notion of the "pedagogical device" is discussed by James Stuart Murray (1994), who attempts to locate the origin of the practice; by Alexander Nehemas (1992A) who, although finding little reason to applaud the "moral improvement" Socrates supposedly imparts by not saying what he ostensibly knows, nevertheless (1992B) advises that one should not attempt to reduce the irony "into an educational ploy." Rather, one should leave it "intact"--"a mask that it is difficult, if not impossible, to remove." In the latter regard, Nehemas simply finds it profoundly ironic that in disavowing moral knowledge Socrates still managed to live "as moral a life as anyone who belongs in the tradition he himself originated" (pp. 180-181, 1992B). Cf. also pp. 11, 12, Vlastos (1980), and p. 32, Vlastos (1991), where pedagogical irony is central to the Socratic elenchus, and in fact is Vlastos' explanation (n. 18, pp. 239-240, 1991) as to why Socrates did not simply articulate the meaning of his irony literally and clearly (this argument is rejected in chapter six following). Also, pp. 447-448 Guthrie (1969). Alternatively, for an extremely hostile assessment of the possibility that Socrates indulges in a pedagogical irony see p. 53, Walter Benjamin (1983).

²⁴ The terming "cheating" comes from Vlastos (1991). As noted in at n. 20 preceding, the title of the chapter in which he considers the problem is "Does Socrates Cheat?" For Vlasto, the term is virtually synonymous with deceit. Why? Because it is such a deliberate insincerity. In violating the paradigm rule of the elenchus, and adopting the methodology of his sophistic competitor, Socrates gives the impression--at least to those who don't already know him well--that sophistry is okay so long as you're good at it, no worse than elenctic argumentation. That's a deceit, where deceit means promulgating as good and true a standpoint which you believe to be bad and false.

E. L. Burge²⁵ has argued that this particular function of Socratic irony is actually a Platonic invention, which was attributed to Socrates for the first time in the *Meno*. In that dialogue, Socrates still has no answer to the question about what virtue is.²⁶ But he does know the answer to a mathematical problem. Nevertheless, he withholds his knowledge--in effect pretending to be ignorant--apparently to prove that his interlocutor, the slave boy with no previous knowledge of mathematical geometry, can recover knowledge from himself.²⁷ This argument is tantamount to saying that so far as Plato is concerned, Socratic irony is essential for demonstrating the doctrine of recollection.²⁸ But this only thickens the mystery so far as we are concerned. Socrates is still pretending to be ignorant, and we still need to know why he could do so and yet not violate the rule to speak the truth, otherwise he is still prey to SG. To consider Socratic irony a pedagogical device *so far as Plato is concerned* does not help in this regard. Now all we have is the further possibility that Plato has taken a hand in seeing to it that Socrates falls prey to SG.²⁹

²⁵ "The Irony of Socrates," *Antichthon*, Vol. 3, 1969, pp. 5-17)

²⁶ Burge does not buttress the point with any specific references to the dialogue; but *Meno* 71b would be a good example.

²⁷ Again, Burge provides no specific reference. However, consider *Meno* 85c-d (Socrates speaking): "But these opinions were somewhere in him, were they not?...from questioning[,] [h]e will recover it for himself."

²⁸ Although, it could be noted, a fundamental weakness in Burge's argument is that it would be so obvious both to the slave boy and to Meno that Socrates is the expert, clearly possessed of the answer to the geometry problem, there is no way it would be construed by them that he is pretending to be ignorant. Rather, he is overtly knowledgeable but does not simply pass on what he knows because in this instance the object is something quite different from that of simply imparting a truth--he is demonstrating how others may learn to think for themselves (or how *anamnesis* works, which amounts to same thing essentially in respect of the difference between teaching by passing on some particular bit of information and teaching by passing on a method of learning). As Guthrie (1969, n. 1 p. 445) observes, while the question and answer approach to a mathematical truth was supposed to demonstrate how the truth about virtue might be approached in a similar way, it was patently obvious that Socrates and Meno already had the right answer. This, Guthrie explains, "was necessary if Meno was to see the point of the experiment." But for that very reason, the experiment does not count as valid instance of pedagogical ignorance.

²⁹ Against this one could argue either one of two things: 1) as in n. 28 preceding, because it was so obvious that

An alternate suggestion, coming from Luis E. Navia, is that Socrates needs no additional help from Plato to show that he is willing to exploit irony as a “pedagogical device.” Rather, it is an essential feature of the Socratic elenchus, part and parcel of Socrates’ program to convince an interlocutor “of his ignorance or confusion with respect to his original assertion,” thereby to unsettle him and put him more squarely on the “path that leads to wisdom and virtue.”³⁰ Once again, however, this makes Socrates’ irony look like an optional and arbitrary departure from the requirement to speak truthfully.³¹

To have any hope of appealing to Socrates’ irony for a solution to SG, we shall have to offer a compelling explanation as to why he would sometimes think that others would learn

Socrates knew the answer, and because the object this time was to impart a very particular method of learning, there simply is no deceit; or 2) along the same lines as we say in chapter six, if there is deceit *occasionally* it is excusable because it is the means by which the slave boy learns--Socrates gets his interlocutor to the truth in any case.

³⁰ pp. 289-90; Navia (1985)

³¹ An additional example of the view that Socrates is deliberately sophisticated, apparently for pedagogical reasons, is that of Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony*. Reflecting on Socrates’ activities in this regard in the *Protagoras*, Kierkegaard says, “...Socrates tricks Protagoras out of every concrete virtue, and when he is to lead it back to unity, he completely violates it. Thus we simultaneously have the irony carried by a sophisticated dialectic and a sophisticated dialectic residing in irony” (p. 59). This passage is, for Vlastos, reason enough to categorize Kierkegaard in the company of those who, incorrectly he thinks, suppose that Socrates “allows himself deceit as a debating tactic” (p. 42, Vlastos 1991). What Vlastos does not make clear, however, is that for Kierkegaard, this is just one of many senses in which Socrates is ironic. As Kierkegaard said, “...he really would not deserve the name of ironist if his distinguishing trait were merely the brilliant knack he had for speaking ironically just as others spoke gibberish” (p. 45). Another point to bear in mind: when Socrates does speak and act like the sophist, he is still radically different from the sophists he tries to outdo. For while sophists like Protagoras and Gorgias normally would plie their trade in order to win accolades from people they consider to be less capable than themselves, Socrates’ object was to get others to his level (cf. p. 449, Guthrie 1969, pointing out that Socrates differed from the sophists, not only because he exposed pretended expertise--in comparison to which, one might add, Socrates is often presumed to have pretended ignorance--but also because unlike them he had an “unshakeable conviction” in the possibility of definitive knowledge). This difference is the basis, in chapter six, for defending Socrates’ use of simple (as opposed to complex) irony. He aims to entice an interlocutor to participate in an elenctic conversation that will reveal everyone’s fallibility. Although sometimes given to sophistry, Socrates remains distinct from the sophists in that his ultimate object is to improve rather than gratify his interlocutors. As he said, at *Apology* 38a5-6, he would be perfectly satisfied if only he could get everyone else to realize, as he did, that “the unexamined life is not worth living for humanity (ὁ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἀνθρώπῳ).” Unlike the sophists who typically want to maintain their ascendancy over others, Socrates wants everyone to be on a level in recognition of their inherent fallibility and of the necessity, therefore, of subjecting their own lives to constant scrutiny.

better by not hearing what he really thinks; why, that is, it is okay on occasion to cheat, and that explanation would have to include reasons why his choice to speak in this way is not a fatal instance of what Vlastos calls "willful misrepresentation."³² a contravention of the rule to speak the truth. We shall return to this question in the last chapter in consideration of an even more striking instance of such irony, Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus*.³³ In that speech Socrates deliberately hold forth a theory of love that he believes to be false, in order to win Phaedrus' admiration and thereby convince him to listen eagerly to a second, better speech. In that context, Socrates acts well just because, for all his idealistic desire to want to speak truthfully all the time, he is realistic enough to know that sometimes there are extenuating circumstances in which complete sincerity would be unfruitful. In this regard, the important question becomes, 'how can this sort of irony be excused such that Socrates is not further embroiled in SG, even though a solution to SG requires a kind of irony that is totally sincere?' The basic idea for a favourable excuse is that sometimes (precisely because he is occasionally willing to violate the rule to tell the truth) Socrates leads an interlocutor to the truth in any case.

In the meantime, however, we should first examine Socrates' reaction to instances in which he is explicitly accused of being deceitful, or of indulging in mockery, when he speaks

³² p. 83; Vlastos (1987); for Vlastos, misrepresentation, deceit, and pretense for εἰρωνεΐα all appear to amount to the same thing, an irony of deceit where deceit means deliberately saying one thing while meaning another. From this, however, he distinguishes mockery, such as we witness at *Gorgias* 489e, on the grounds that the intent of mockery is too patently obvious to be construed as a misrepresentation (also see p. 26, Vlastos 1991).

³³ The justification for appealing to this dialogue, given in the Introduction and also in chapter six, is that 1) the situation in the *Phaedrus* is analogous enough to that of the *Protagoras* that it can be referred to as a similar instance of such insincerity, and 2) the distinction that Socrates subsequently makes between artless and artful rhetorical deception is, given that knowledge (*Phaedrus* 277a) is the criterion of being able to deceive without oneself being deceived, reminiscent enough of rhetoric as described in earlier dialogues that it can be appealed to for a solution to the question of cheating.

ironically. The first of these, examined immediately following, concerns an occasion when he is accused of lying because his interlocutor does not believe him when he says he is ignorant.

iv) **Deceit? (*Republic* 337a)**

In the *Republic*, Book I, there is an exchange between Thrasymachus and Socrates (336b-337c) during which, at 337a precisely, Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of being ironic in the sense that he is deliberately deceitful because he only pretends to be ignorant. The context is as follows: on the grounds that it is contradictory to justice to harm anyone, where harm means making someone *morally* “worse (χείρους, 335b7),” as opposed to morally “better (βελτίους, 335b6).”³⁴ Socrates has just refuted Polemarchus’ contention that justice can be defined as the practice of benefitting one’s friends and harming one’s enemies.³⁵ While he is certain that Polemarchus is wrong, however, Socrates has no definition of his own to proffer. Rather than supplement his critique of Polemarchus with an alternate viewpoint, therefore, he concludes this part of the conversation with a question that is characteristic of someone who is himself no less ignorant than his interlocutors:

...since it has been made clear that this too is not justice and the just, what else is there that we might say justice to be? (336a)

³⁴ *Republic* I 335b: βελτίους, the comparative of ἀγαθός, can mean better as in “more serviceable” but also moral goodness. χείρους, the comparative of κακός, has the same potential ambiguity. But just to remove all doubt that Socrates and Polemarchus might be considering something other than moral qualities note the clarification shortly afterwards, initiated by Socrates (335b-c): Socrates asks “must we not say that when they are harmed it is in respect of the distinctive excellence or virtue of man (τὴν ἀνθρωπεῖαν ἀρετὴν) that they become worse (χείρους γίνεσθαι)?” Polemarchus agrees and the conversation proceeds as if that point at least is settled.

³⁵ The argument is long, occupying the bulk of Book I, but the clincher occurs at 335a-e where harming someone, be it friend or foe, is tantamount to making someone “worse” (χείρους). It is at the end of this last argument (335e) that Polemarchus concedes, relinquishing once and for all his claim that justice is benefitting one’s friends and harming one’s enemies.

Socrates appears quite content merely to tear down the arguments of others, and not everyone appreciates his tactics. In particular, Thrasymachus has been stewing for some time now,³⁶ apparently on the understanding that Socrates is just practicing self-preservation.³⁷ As soon as Polemarchus has been refuted, therefore, Thrasymachus takes the stage, vehemently attacking Socrates for taking the easier route of asking questions of others, rather than answering and saying what he thinks justice is himself (336b-d). Socrates protests, however, saying

But you see it is our lack of ability that is at fault. (336e)

To which typical profession of ignorance, Thrasymachus immediately retorts:

Ye gods! Here we have the well-known irony of Socrates (ἡ εἰωθυῖα εἰρωνεία Σωκράτους), and I knew it and predicted that when it came to replying you would refuse and dissemble (εἰρωνεύσοιο) and do anything rather than answer any question that anyone asked you.³⁸

³⁶ As indicated at 336b, he attempted more than once to break in earlier, but was restrained by his companions who first wanted to hear out the argument between Socrates and Polemarchus.

³⁷ Alternatively, he simply has no patience with Socrates' insistent moralizing. Cf. Crombie (1962): "[h]e is a professional Sophist of the second rank whose cast of mind is cynical. He is exasperated by the moralistic sentiments which he detects in Socrates' arguments. In his view morality is a racket which every clear-sighted man will see through and expose" (p. 81). This sounds a lot like the character of Callicles as well, with the proviso, as noted by Crombie, that Callicles doesn't think all morality is an amphora full of rubbish, just the "conventional morality" that runs counter to 'might is right' (p. 81). It's on this score that Callicles is no less impatient with Socrates than Thrasymachus.

³⁸ *Republic* 337a: Shorey's translation (Hamilton and Cairns, Loeb). Notice "irony" as the translation for ἡ εἰρωνεία (337a4) but "you would dissemble" for εἰρωνεύσοιο (337a6). Vlastos disagrees with Shorey, saying he "shifts, without explanation, to 'dissemble' for the latter [i.e., εἰρωνεύσοιο]....[because] he is confused about the meaning of the English word 'irony,' taking it to mean 'dissembling'" (n. 13, p. 25, Vlastos 1991--emphasis from text). But surely there is no confusion on the part of Shorey. He is merely making it clear that in this instance εἰρωνεία, "irony," is being defined as εἰρωνεύσοιο, "dissembling," in effect pointing out, therefore, that Thrasymachus means to say 'so this is what your habitual irony means, Socrates: just as I thought, when the question is put to you, it is that you dissemble, pretending to be ignorant!' Where's the confusion in that? It would seem more confusing and less informative to think, as Vlastos' translation says, that Thrasymachus is saying 'so, Socrates, this is your habitual dissembling; just as I thought, when the question is put to you, you dissemble!' (see Vlastos' translation, p. 24; although note that he uses "shamming" and "sham" rather than "dissembling" and "dissemble." For more regarding Vlastos' counterview, see n. 49 following.)

εἰρωνεύσοιο (337a6), the aorist optative active, second person singular, of εἰρωνεύομαι, generally means to be ironical in the sense of “to dissemble,” especially by feigning ignorance. So far as Thrasymachus is concerned, therefore, when Socrates claims to lack moral knowledge--in this case the knowledge of justice--this is irony (ἡ εἰρωνεία, 337a4) in the sense that he is just plain lying. More than this, however, with εἰωθυῖα,³⁹ he is also announcing that it is a “well-known” or “customary” feature of Socrates that he is ironical in the sense that he lies when he says he does not have moral knowledge.⁴⁰

Recalling the observation we made earlier to the effect that Socrates’ own convictions preclude the possibility that he is allowed to lie, this is a pretty damning accusation. If he has moral knowledge he must explain it, if not he must tell the truth and say that too. This might make him susceptible to SG, but to lie about his ignorance is no solution either, since, according to what he believes himself, a liar is no more capable of being good or acting well (ὀρθῶς)⁴¹ than is someone who is morally ignorant. If Thrasymachus is right, therefore, and Socrates really is just toying with his interlocutors when he protests ignorance, there is absolutely no way that his irony could be his salvation. Instead, he just becomes even more hopelessly controversial, a superior, unhelpful, and elitist exemplar of virtue, who loses the right to be called a good man the moment he arbitrarily withholds the knowledge that he thinks can make himself and anyone else

³⁹ 337a4: the perfect active, feminine (so as to agree with ἡ εἰρωνεία) participle of ἔθω, “to be accustomed:” but as a participle the verb becomes adjectival, as in “accustomed, customary, usual.”

⁴⁰ As observed at n. 49 following, although not all irony is lying, some is, and in this instance that is the substance of Thrasymachus’ accusation.

⁴¹ *Gorgias* 495b2

good. The full substance of Thrasymachus' accusation is that it is a well-known fact that Socrates is just this contradictory, arbitrary, and unhelpful.

Not surprisingly, though, Socrates takes issue with Thrasymachus' assessment (337b-d), insisting that he is sincere when he says he is ignorant and adding, as if to prove his sincerity, the caveat that he is in principle always ready "to suffer" (πάσχειν) the truth from others, should anyone come along who is capable of helping him (337d).

In favour of the possibility that Socrates is telling the truth, and that Thrasymachus' accusation is wrong, consider for a moment the nature of the elenctic discourse by which Socrates attempts to discover the truth in the company of others. As Vlastos has pointed out,⁴² Socrates could be convinced that an interlocutor has the truth only if that person manages to withstand the rigour of an elenctic scrutiny; and that is a virtually impossible requirement because the elenchus is a "truth-seeking device" that only supports "moral" certainty, never "epistemic" certainty, meaning never true knowledge over and above persistent belief.⁴³ Constrained to a style of discourse that attempts to cull a (presumed) set of true beliefs from a larger set of true and false beliefs, the participants in an elenctic conversation are required to say what they really think or believe. But precisely because the requirement to tell the truth can be adhered to only by saying what one thinks--i.e., because it is not possible to articulate knowledge as such--Socrates' interlocutors "can always be faulted for inconsistency."⁴⁴ Being the one always the most aware of this limitation, the last word generally falls to Socrates, who, if he is to

⁴² See pp. 113-114; Vlastos (1991)

⁴³ On epistemic versus moral certainty, also see pp. 269-271; Vlastos (1991).

⁴⁴ p. 114; Vlastos (1991)

speak the truth, has to admit that he too does not have true knowledge. The way Vlastos describes it, the problem looks like a fundamental weakness of the elenchus as a truth-seeking device.⁴⁵ Perhaps, however, it should be considered a feature of philosophical dialogue generally, a feature which Socrates just happens to model authentically. For as long as philosophical dialogue is not constrained to purely logical deductions, or to well-established matters of fact (which would mean that it is saying not much at all), it relies on propositions of belief and opinion on the part of the participants. In this regard, it might be more fair to think that Socrates' method is just brilliantly consistent with the limitations of human experience and the human intellect, limitations which make it impossible, ultimately, to achieve certainty about moral knowledge, and, by the same token, avoid moral and ideological incommensurability. For this reason, it should be considered understandable that Thrasymachus would get so frustrated with Socrates as to accuse him of being insincere about his lack of moral expertise. But that does not necessarily mean his frustration is well directed when the target is Socrates. The difficulty could just as well be the inherent difficulty of a truly philosophical discourse. If this is a fair proposal, then Thrasymachus is a hostile witness, not because he has a legitimate complaint against Socrates, but because he does not understand, or perhaps does not have the patience, personality or stamina to participate in, rigorous philosophical dialogue.

⁴⁵ With good reason, since it seems to be a problem that preoccupied Plato, the writer, in just this way: in which regard, the theory of recollection is introduced in the *Meno* (85d) as an antidote, and relied on as such in the *Theaetetus* (150d) to suggest an art of midwifery by which Socrates has the ability, notwithstanding the absence of wisdom as such (150c), to "bring to birth" the "many admirable truths [which his interlocutors] have...discovered by themselves from within" Cf. *Theaetetus* 150d and *Meno* 85d. Also pp. 3-4, Gulley (1962), but also pp. 108ff, where dialectic, as at *Phaedrus* 266bff, functions as a further enhancement to the Socratic method, this time by bringing abstraction and analysis to bear on the products of recollection. In addition, pp. 53-4, 60, 61, Miles Burnyeat (1992): the "barren" midwife, Socrates, still "reduces people to perplexity;" he is still not able to deliver positive ideas of his own; rather, in his capacity as midwife, he delivers people of their own recollections from within).

Another consideration, also noted by Vlastos, is that in spite of his contention that deception is a well-known trait of Socrates, Thrasymachus is actually the “only character [in Plato] who says that Socrates is feigning ignorance.”⁴⁶ In regard to this we should note Socrates’ testimony, at *Apology* 20e, that anyone who publically doubts that he is telling the truth when he says he is wise in nothing other than a limited human wisdom “is a liar and willful slanderer” (20e). Furthermore, at *Apology* 38a, Socrates adds that if he were not serious, no one would ever take him seriously when he contends that his mission to examine himself and others is divinely appointed.⁴⁷ In effect, everything he says would be suspect because he would be embroiled in the liar’s paradox.⁴⁸ Given the facts that 1) Socrates outright rejects any accusation that he lies

⁴⁶ See p. 41; Vlasto (1994). Actually, this isn’t strictly speaking true. As already noted (n. 11 preceding), there is also Hermogenes’ accusation at *Cratylus* 384a. But Vlastos is right in principle. It does seem to be true that the attribution of deceit comes from Socrates’ detractors. In this regard he is accused of the same air of pretense such as, for example, Dionysodorus mockingly affects at *Euthydemus* 302b while nitpicking at Socrates’ claim (302a-b) that ownership means being able to do as one wills with what one has--i.e., (Socrates reporting): “He made a [very] mysterious [ironical] pause (εἰρωνικῶς πάντα ἐπισχῶν) with the air of someone pondering a mighty problem, and said....” (Dionysodorus was an eristic, someone who quarrels with words, and the irony in this instance is just a posture, a way to dramatize the victory he anticipated as a result of his verbal quibbling.) The contention that Socrates’ irony is characteristic of deceit originally seems to have come from John Burnet who not only noticed the judgement of Socrates’ opponents, he also seems to have believed them. See Burnet (1911, n. 5 pp. lv-lvi), referred to by Burge (1969, n. 4 p. 5); also Burnet (1924) on *Apology* 38a, as indicated by Vlastos (1987, n. 11 p. 82). As Vlastos reports (p. 82, 1987), the view was started by Burnet (regarding what Burnet says, and Vlastos’ counterview, see n. 2 chapter five following) and since taken up by other influential commentators (including Vlastos thinks, Guthrie (1969), although see n. 14 preceding to the effect he is probably wrong about Guthrie). But Socrates himself habitually protests innocence of deceitful irony. In response to Thrasymachus, e.g., he protests that it is not possible for someone who lacks knowledge to answer the kinds of questions he asks (*Republic* 337e). Moreover, at *Apology* 38a he says that if he were to indulge in such deceit, no one would ever take him seriously. Detractors notwithstanding, Socrates himself is not characteristically given to thinking of himself as a deceiver. This seems to be true not only in response to accusations of deceit, but also, as we shall see in chapter three following, when he is accused of mockery such as at *Gorgias* 489e, where he offers to Callicles to switch roles, he to be the pupil and Callicles the teacher. (Contra Vlastos, the argument in chapter 3 will be that this is not an instance of crude abuse too innocent to be regarded as deception. Rather, it is that Callicles attributes a quite juvenile deceit to Socrates, and Socrates rejects the accusation.)

⁴⁷ See n. 3rd chapter five following.

⁴⁸ The same would be true if Socrates meant that he knew nothing at all. Cf. p. 140, n. 65 p. 165, Penner 1992; p. 14, Versényi 1982; and pp. 82-83, including n. 4, Vlastos 1991. Vlastos’ explanation is clearest, since he refers us to one of the most important texts in this regard, *Apology* 21d, where Socrates says that he is wise because he does not think he knows what he does not. As Vlastos points out, if Socrates means that he knows he knows nothing at

when he protests ignorance. 2) his rejection appears to be consistent with his philosophical outlook generally, and 3) Thrasymachus may not actually be in good company in expressing his frustration as he does, it seems clear that although “εἰρωνεία means dissembling”⁴⁹ so far as Thrasymachus (or any other detractor of Socrates) is concerned, this is by no means a positive indication that deception is the right meaning for *Socratic* irony. We are left, therefore, with a text in which it is entirely possible that Socrates is neither deceitful nor even ironical. He may simply be expressing that very lack of knowledge that causes him to run afoul of SG. It seems that there is no solution to be found here.

all, then he becomes totally self-contradictory (n. 4 pp. 82-83, Vlastos 1991). Why? Because if it is strictly true that Socrates knows nothing at all, then there is no way he can claim to have learned from the oracle that he was the wisest. It would not be possible for both the oracle and Socrates to be right. Hence, while Socrates cannot be lying about his ignorance, neither can it be strictly true that his is ignorant. Either way he would fall to the liar's paradox. It is a matter of saving grace that his ignorance has to be ironic--provided that it is complex irony not mere pretense. (Regarding the meaning, then, of Socrates' claim that he knows nothing, see pp. 96ff including n. 10 following; also, regarding Penner's proposal about what exactly Socrates knows but does not know about the virtue of courage, n. 75 chapter five following.)

⁴⁹ p. 41, n. 7; Vlastos (1994). This is Vlastos' translation of the first occurrence of the word for irony at *Republic* I 337a4. It is consistent with his contention that it is inappropriate to translate εἰρωνεία as “irony,” as do Allan Bloom (1988), George Grube (*The Republic of Plato*, Indianapolis, 1994), and, as already noted, Paul Shorey (Hamilton and Cairns, Loeb). Vlastos maintains his point of view consistently, both here and in *Socrates: Ironist and Moral Philosopher*, but his reasoning occurs in the earlier book where, he says, if one renders εἰρωνεία as “irony,” “lying would be a standard form of irony [i.e., a standard for Socratic irony, presumably]” (p. 24; pp. 24-25 and nn. 13, 14 more generally). But this seems like a rather strong claim given the circumstances. A lie is ‘a false statement made with the intention to deceive’ (*The Random House College Dictionary*), whereas irony has many different meanings, some of which are not even characteristic of a verbal duplicity--e.g., structural irony, situational irony, tragic irony, comic irony, philosophical irony. A lie is inherently deceitful, a deliberate sham or feigning, but not necessarily irony. Vlastos is surely right to make that distinction. But this does not have to mean that if we translate εἰρωνεία as “irony,” and εἰρωνεύσοιο as dissembling, at *Republic* I 337a, we are thereby making it a commonplace that irony just means lying. Quite the opposite in fact. At most we are saying that Thrasymachus thinks *Socratic* irony is lying. Add to that the fact that Socrates denies the accusation and it is by no means a given that if εἰρωνεία is translated as “irony” and εἰρωνεύσοιο as “you would dissemble,” *Republic* 337a says all lying is irony.

CHAPTER THREE

Socrates and the Irony of Mockery

I: *Gorgias* 489d-e

i) **The accusation**

Now we turn to the *Gorgias*, where this time it is Callicles who accuses Socrates of irony. We pick up the discussion at the point where, against Socrates' contention that it is "more shameful to do than to suffer wrong" (αἰσχίον τὸ ἀδικεῖν τοῦ ἀδικεῖσθαι),¹ Callicles has argued that justice identifies "the better" (τὸ βέλτιον) with the "more powerful" (τὸ κρείττον).² Challenged by Socrates to clarify what he means by "powerful," Callicles replies that while the "better and the more powerful are the same thing,"³ by "powerful" he does not mean the strength of numbers, since, on this criterion alone, any "rabble of slaves and nondescripts who are of no earthly use except to be strong in body (τῷ σώματι ἰσχυρίσασθαι)" could become the basis for law.⁴ Predictably, in response to so little clarification, Socrates asks Callicles to expound still further, only this time he also invites a reversal of roles, he to become the pupil and Callicles the

¹ *Gorgias* 489a-b

² *Gorgias* 489b-c

³ *Gorgias* 489c3-4; translation my own for ὅτι ταῦτόν φημι εἶναι τὸ βέλτιον καὶ τὸ κρείττον.

⁴ *Gorgias* 489c; W. D. Woodhead's translation (Hamilton and Cairns) with slight modification, namely the more literal "to be strong in body" rather than "their bodily strength," for τῷ σώματι ἰσχυρίσασθαι at 489c5-6.

teacher, the better that he might be instructed. It is this offer to switch roles which Callicles takes to be insincere and ironic. Here is the exchange in question.

Socrates: But start once again and tell me what you mean by 'the better,' since you do not mean the stronger, and, my admirable friend (ὦ θαυμάσιε), lead me on the path of knowledge more gently [than beforehand],⁵ that I may not run away from your school.

Callicles' response: Now you are being ironical (Εἰρωνεύη), Socrates.

To which Socrates replies: No it is Zethus, Callicles, by whom you furnished yourself just now to be exceedingly ironical towards me *earlier on* (...πολλὰ εἰρωνεύου πρὸς με).⁶

The first thing we should notice from the foregoing translation of this exchange is that no immediate assumptions are made about the exact sense in which Callicles and Socrates are, supposedly, accusing each other of irony. Second, we should note that the verb Εἰρωνεύη, as spoken by Callicles, is in the present tense; while εἰρωνεύου, as spoken by Socrates, is in the imperfect tense.⁷ The difference warrants the addenda "Now you are being ironical" for Callicles' remark, and "you were ironical towards me *earlier on*" for Socrates' reply; just to

Socrates says, *πρότερόν με προῦδάσκει*. The comparative *πρότερόν* ("more gently") implies an earlier time when Callicles was not so gentle, in comparison to which he is now advised to act differently. This seems to warrant the addendum "than beforehand" as attached here to Woodhead's translation (Hamilton and Cairns).

⁵ *Gorgias* 489d5-e4; translation modified, as follows: Woodhead (Hamilton and Cairns) is retained for 489d5-8, save for the addendum, "than beforehand," as explained at n. 5 preceding; subsequently, at 489e1, it is Woodhead's "You are ironical, Socrates," save for the amendments of "Now" and "being" to emphasize the present tense of Εἰρωνεύη; and, finally, a more strictly literal rendition for 489e2-4 in order 1) to capture more clearly the past tense of εἰρωνεύου and 2) to clarify, in virtue of the dative relative pronoun ὧ, that it is in the name of Zethus "by whom." Socrates says, Callicles was ironical "earlier on." Cf. p. 25 including n. 18, Vlastos (1991); Vlastos' translation is very similar at least to the extent of emphasizing the tenses of Εἰρωνεύη and εἰρωνεύου, picking up on Socrates' "no" in response to Callicles' accusation, and indicating clearly the dative reference to Zethus--i.e., Vlastos, "by Zethus, whom you used earlier to do a lot of mocking." The main difference from Vlastos is that here Εἰρωνεύη and εἰρωνεύου are not translated as mockery; rather, the matter is left open, to be decided about in further discussion.

⁷ I.e., of the deponent εἰρωνεύομαι, εἰρωνεύη as spoken by Callicles (489e1) is the *present* middle/passive, second person singular; while εἰρωνεύου as spoken by Socrates (489e3) is the *imperfect* middle/passive, second person singular.

make it clear that Callicles' accusation refers to the way Socrates is speaking right now but that Socrates' reply refers to something Callicles said prior to the present moment--namely, that near the end of his critical speech. 482c-486c, Callicles admonished Socrates for being too much like the wayward Amphion, brother of Zethus.⁸

The distinction is important in that it emphasizes the context within which the exchange occurs and in which it should therefore be considered, if we want to understand exactly what are the meanings of εἰρωνεύη and εἰρωνεύου respectively. We are now well on in the dialogue, beyond both the long argument from 463c-480e where Socrates attempted to refute the contention, upheld by Polus (on behalf of Gorgias), that rhetorical skill is sufficient for determining good from evil; and the long speech subsequent to this argument (482c-486c), in which Callicles castigated philosophy and derided Socrates for his inability to provide convincing arguments for the view that being good and knowing good from evil not only requires, but is also guaranteed by, the knowledge of virtue.⁹ The context is important. In what follows the object will be to claim, first, contra Vlastos who thinks all this is just a mutual exchange of mockery, that Socrates rejects the *present* accusation of Callicles that his offer to relinquish the role of the teacher and to take on that of the pupil is a deliberate mockery. This casts doubt on Vlastos' supposition that Socrates mocks in the present tense in order to retaliate for a presumed intention on the part of Callicles to mock him earlier on (via the disparaging comparison between Socrates and Amphion). To advance these arguments, we need to take each term separately and try to decide what they mean in relation to the differing viewpoints of

⁸ See *Gorgias* 485eff.

⁹ In particular, see, e.g., 485d-486b.

Socrates and Callicles, not only with respect to the present moment, but also in regard the conflicting attitudes that lead up to the present impasse. Hence, in the following two sections respectively, we shall consider, first, what εἰρωνεύη means for Callicles and what it means for Socrates; and, then, in the final section of the chapter, what εἰρωνεύου means according to same distinction between two points of view.

ii) Master and pupil, Callicles' viewpoint

Callicles' accusation that Socrates is being ironical reflects a level of impatience that should remind us of Thrasymachus' frustration in the *Republic*. Although Socrates is adept at criticizing and refuting the views of others, he is frustratingly incapable of substantiating a viewpoint of his own. An important difference, however, is that in the present case, Socrates is not being accused of being insincere or ironic because he disclaims moral knowledge. Rather, he is now accused of being ironic with respect to his offer to switch roles, he to be the pupil and Callicles the teacher. Is this what Socrates' irony consists of, that he is insincere when he invites a reversal of roles with his interlocutors?

Without much doubt, this is probably the case so far as Callicles is concerned. For, unlike Thrasymachus, who was faced with a Socrates who was uncontrovertibly ignorant, Callicles is contending with a Socrates who tends to be much more dogmatic.¹⁰ That is to say, while the Socrates of *Republic* I has not got anything substantial to say about the nature of

¹⁰ Consider, in particular, the discussion with Callicles from 506b-522e, where Socrates is by no means reticent about what he thinks himself--his indications, at 506a and 506b, that he is by no means unwilling to stand corrected, notwithstanding. Also, consider the "fine story" (523a) Socrates tells subsequent to this discussion, at 523a-526d; a tale of the good that comes to those who devote themselves to the philosophical life, at the end of which, Socrates says, "I have been convinced by these stories, Callicles" (526d).

justice, the Socrates of the *Gorgias* is quite convinced that 1) moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue (506d¹¹), 2) it is better to suffer than to do wrong (508e), and 3) he is the only person at present who comes close to possessing the “political art” which enables one to be good oneself and to make others better as well (521d). Unlike Thrasymachus in *Republic* I, therefore, Callicles has scant grounds to accuse Socrates of insincerely withholding his beliefs. Callicles is quite aware of this and is in fact impatient not because of a presumed reticence on the part of Socrates but because he cannot understand why Socrates does not realize that his views are outrageous, groundless so long as they remain unjustified and unconvincing to others. Instead of chiding Socrates for dissembling and hiding his knowledge, therefore, he takes Socrates’ ignorance seriously and simply fails to see the point of

...an art (τέχνη) which finds a man well-gifted (εὐφυῆ) and leaves him worse (χείρονα)--able (δυνάμενον) neither to help himself nor to save from the extremes of danger (ἐκσῶσαι ἐκ τῶν μεγίστων κινδύνων) either himself or anybody else, but fated to be robbed by his enemies of all his property and to live literally like one disfranchised in his own city. (486b-c)

Callicles focuses our attention on Socrates’ ignorance because it is for-real, not because it is a lie. When he says, “you are being ironical (Εἰρωνεύη) Socrates,” he has no immediate intention to imply, as did Thrasymachus, that Socrates is lying when he professes ignorance. Rather, as Vlastos has pointed out, he must be reacting skeptically to Socrates’ request that he, Callicles, be the teacher, taking the remark to be a mockery rather than a sincere offer to switch roles. For up to now it was “Socrates who has been playing the schoolmaster right along.”¹²

¹¹ See the citation and explanation of this passage according to what, for Socrates, counts as art, pp. 15ff, chapter one preceding.

¹² p. 26; Vlastos (1991); this, according to Vlastos, makes Socrates’ offer to switch roles a “transparent irony,” disingenuous but quite obvious. Although Vlastos does not advance this view in the context of a comparison with a more reticent Socrates, such as that of *Republic* I, the comparison works in favour of his interpretation, at least to

In fact, Vlastos' view is that *both* Callicles' accusation *and* Socrates' reply, the latter taken in its context with the reference to Zethus, and so to 485e-486a where Callicles accused Socrates of being childishly helpless to defend himself, constitute "mockery;" and, moreover, mockery "without the slightest imputation of intentional deceit" since in the case of such "crude abuse" there can be no "question of shamming, slyness, or evasiveness," no more than if they had resorted to "calling each other 'pig' or 'jack-ass'."¹³ This is tantamount to attributing 'sarcasm' to Callicles and Socrates.

Sarcasm entails a deceit between literal and intended meaning, and for that reason is usually defined as a sub-species related to but also distinct from irony as such. The difference between the two is that the intended meaning is generally far more obvious with sarcasm, apparent both by the circumstances and by the speaker's tone. If one says, 'that was brilliant,' about an action which it is patently obvious was not brilliant at all, one is uttering a sarcasm, not an irony. Thus, as M. H. Abrams, explains, while sarcasm is "in ordinary parlance...sometimes used for all irony....it is better to restrict it to the crude and taunting use of apparent praise for dispraise."¹⁴ In this regard, sarcasm could be called 'irony with a bite,' where it is the 'bite' that makes the non-literal meaning too obvious to count as full-scale irony. Such is the nature of Vlastos' claim that Callicles and Socrates are indulging in mockery. If the repartee at *Gorgias* 489d-e is indeed abuse so crude that 'there can be no question of shamming, slyness, or evasiveness,' then it is just the mutual indulgence of sarcasm. Indeed, at least one translator has

the extent of making it clear that Callicles is not accusing Socrates of pretending to be ignorant. What remains to be seen, however, is whether Callicles is right or whether is actually quite serious about switching roles.

¹³ See pp. 25-26: Vlastos (1991)

¹⁴ p. 93: Abrams (1985)

used precisely this word as the translation of εἰρωνεύη and εἰρωνεύου at 489e1.3.¹⁵ This is tantamount to saying that Socrates adopts Callicles' viewpoint, runs with it, and throws it back, thus implying that he would agree with the accusation that he is given to indulging in the transparent sarcasm of mockery.

But is this right? Are Callicles and Socrates really doing no more than mocking each other, the former by a transparently insincere comparison of Socrates to Amphion, the wayward brother of Zethus, and the latter retaliating with an equally transparent taunt to make himself Callicles' pupil? And, can such obvious disingenuousness passing as sarcasm or mockery have anything to do with the substance of Socrates' irony generally? If so, then Socrates does not really mean it when he says he will be Callicles' pupil in order that he might be instructed "on the path of knowledge" (489d). Moreover, he would be insincere in the course of an elenctic argument about justice, and in violation of his own rules of elenctic engagement, that he must speak his mind, saying what he really thinks when talking about the right way to live.

iii) Master and pupil, Socrates' viewpoint

To address the question as to who, if anyone, is really mocking whom we need to consider not just Callicles' point of view but that of Socrates as well. For although we have seen that Socrates' offer to switch roles probably is a mockery so far as Callicles is concerned, it does not necessarily follow that this is what Socrates meant. In this regard, we should notice some other important similarities between the present case and that of Socrates versus Thrasymachus in *Republic* I. First, Socrates rejects the accusation that he is being ironic (in the present case

¹⁵ W. R. M. Lamb (Loeb)

with a decisive “no”¹⁷). Second, his rejection of the charge occurs in the context of a discussion in which his interlocutor has become restive, no longer disposed to take him seriously. Finally, Socrates responds to the accusation by indicating his willingness to be the pupil rather than the master.¹⁷ Vlastos contends that in the present case “Socrates is retorting that Callicles had used the figure of Zethus to mock him earlier on....” in effect, then, contending that he indulges in a transparent mockery of his own, replying tit-for-tat to Callicles’ (supposed) insults earlier on. His basic premise for this interpretation is that in the present circumstances it has been characteristic of Socrates “to play the schoolmaster” not the pupil.¹⁸ But even if this is true, it does not necessarily follow that Socrates was insincere in offering to change roles. He says “no” to that accusation. Vlastos pays no account to this and by that omission fails to see that perhaps Callicles’ and Socrates’ viewpoints need to be clearly distinguished. He simply believes Callicles, end of story. But the “no” in question is important. Is it ironic or is it literal? If ironic, then Socrates would be excusing himself with the weak justification that it was Callicles who

¹⁷ This is taking “no” at face-value not ironically, as Vlastos evidently does--though without saying so explicitly--since, for him, this is just a game of tit-for-tat. A fundamental weakness of Vlastos’ interpretation is that he doesn’t pay attention to Socrates’ “no” (further to this, see nn. 17, 19 and pp. 83ff following).

¹⁸ I.e., in the *Republic*, Socrates explained to Thrasymachus that a profession of ignorance such as the one he made (at 336e) indicates that it is fitting that the person who is ignorant be instructed, not that he provide answers himself (337d); for nobody can answer if they lack knowledge (337e). In the *Gorgias* the same point is made more directly; Socrates simply offers to be the pupil (489d), at which point Callicles accuses him of being ironical (as in mocking). In saying “no” to Callicles’ accusation, and following up with a counteraccusation, it could be that Socrates’ “no” is ironic, and that he is therefore effectively substantiating, not rejecting, a charge of mockery. This is the substance of Vlastos’ view, although, it should be noted, Vlastos does not actually discuss the “no” in question. On the other hand, however, if Socrates’ “no” is literal, he may be rejecting the charge that he mocks while at the same time noting that the same cannot be said of Callicles. The object in what follows is to argue for the latter claim, in which case it would follow that in effect Socrates is saying to Callicles ‘no, I wasn’t mocking, though you may have been earlier.’ If this is the case, then the meaning of mockery for εἰρωνεύη (489e1) and εἰρωνεύου (489e3) derives from Callicles’ viewpoint, but not from Socrates’; and there would be no reason to take this passage as an indication that Socrates’ irony could consist of mockery.

¹⁹ p. 26; Vlastos (1991)

started mocking in the first place. But that would be to exonerate himself in such a way as to actually substantiate Callicles' charge. The problem with all this, however, is that it is by no means atypical of a Socratic conversation that the elenctic master would be willing to change places with his interlocutors. There are simply too many texts that suggest otherwise.¹⁹

In the *Euthyphro*, the entire conversation--the dialogue as a whole, therefore--is premised on the fact that it is Socrates who approaches Euthyphro for instruction on the nature of the holy.²⁰ The dialogue is built on Socrates' role as a pupil, and depends on this role to such an extent that the conversation fails and the dialogue comes to an end just when, despite Socrates' plea to continue being instructed, Euthyphro leaves the scene for pressing business elsewhere.²¹ It is in thus failing, as we saw earlier on, that the dialogue closes with Socrates lamenting his ignorance.²² The sequence is this, therefore: first, Socrates is ignorant; second, he is willing to be instructed; third, the instruction proves to be either fruitless or not forthcoming at all; and, finally, his ignorance turns out to be irremediable.

¹⁹ There is no reason to think Vlastos is unaware of the texts which indicate that it is by no means uncharacteristic of Socrates to be self-critical and to be willing to be an interlocutor himself on occasion. Vlastos simply thinks, along with Callicles, that since Socrates has been the schoolmaster up to the time of his offer, at 489d, to switch roles, the offer in this instance must be a mockery. That appears to be his basic reason for believing that Callicles and Socrates are like-minded in this instance. But a clear distinction between the point of view of Socrates and that of Callicles seems warranted for three reasons: 1) just because Callicles thought Socrates mocked, it by no means follows that Socrates did mock--a thing is not true just because someone says it, 2) Socrates did say "no" to the accusation, and 3) his "no" should be taken at face-value, since he could not mockingly offer to switch roles with Callicles without in the process compromising a quintessentially Socratic disposition, the willingness to be himself the object of criticism, if his interlocutor starts refusing to cooperate with him in the role of the master. To suppose otherwise would be to doubt Socrates' sincerity at 458a, where he says he is just the sort of person willing to be refuted, if anything he says sounds untrue or unconvincing.

²⁰ See *Euthyphro* 5a.

²¹ See *Euthyphro* 15d-e.

²² I.e., *Euthyphro* 15e-16 (cited at p. 37 preceding).

This pattern is quite consistent with what we have already seen in *Republic I*: Socrates admits his epistemic deficiency, supplements this admission with the addendum that one must always be prepared “to learn from one who does know (μαθεῖν παρὰ τοῦ εἰδότης).”²³ and, finally, the dialogue ends with this ignorance (as the one thing which is true) because no one comes forth with a remedy. The only differences between this pattern in the *Euthyphro* and in *Republic I*, are that 1) in the *Euthyphro* Socrates comes forward gratuitously asking for instruction, while in the *Republic* his request is a response to Thrasymachus’ accusation that he is feigning ignorance, and 2) in the *Euthyphro* Socrates’ request has a taker whereas in the *Republic* it does not. But these differences are merely circumstantial and do not disturb the essential pattern whereby Socrates’ ignorance and need for instruction are authenticated once they make the light of day. For although the circumstances under which he asks for instruction may differ, and although this request sometimes is and sometimes is not met with a taker willing to try carrying the torch for Socrates, in both cases the request occurs *just when his ignorance becomes so oppressive there is nothing much left for him to say*--instead of further refutations, only a positive, well-explained truth can save the day, both for himself and for his interlocutors, and whoever thinks he might be able to deliver should be given the chance.

The important point, then, is that instead of being only a teacher, Socrates is in principle open to becoming a pupil. His ignorance is thereby authenticated in such a way as to clarify the circumstances in which he should and does invite a reversal of roles with his interlocutor. As Socrates himself says, of similar circumstances in the *Protagoras*, while arguing with Protagoras about the unity of virtue, this is what his elenctic activities are all about:

²³ *Republic I* 337d

For the most part I examine the argument (τὸν λόγον ἔγωγε ἐξετάζω), yet it turns out (συμβαίνει μέντοι) that both I who ask and you who answer are equally (ἴσως) under review (ἐξετάζεσθαι).²⁴

So far as Socrates is concerned, in an elenctic conversation both he and his interlocutors are being examined, both are required to say what they think, and one no less than the other is always subject to further questioning.²⁵ At some crucial point in a Socratic conversation--namely, when ignorance comes to the fore and threatens to spoil the day--the lines of distinction between the master and his pupils begin to blur. Such is the case here in the *Gorgias*. Callicles is ultimately reacting negatively to Socrates' ignorance,²⁶ to the fact that Socrates cannot really substantiate the strong claim that it is better to suffer than to do wrong.

²⁴ *Protagoras* 333c7-9; translation my own, the intention being to note as clearly as possible Socrates' point that although it is usually someone other than he who is the interlocutor, he is in principle *always* willing to depart from this norm. Cf. Guthrie's (Hamilton and Cairns) "It is the argument itself that I wish to probe, though *it may turn out* that both I who question and you who answer are equally under review," and Lamb's (Loeb) "For although my first object is to test the argument, the result *perhaps* will be that both I, the questioner, and my respondent are brought to the test." The mood is indicative. The more tentative tone of these two translations probably derives from Socrates' use of μέντοι (333c8). However, in Liddell and Scott the term has more force: as a conjunctive, it has the sense of "yet, but however, nevertheless," in an adverbial sense, "of course, certainly," both of which seem to suggest strengthening rather than a tentative weakening of the speaker's assertion.

²⁵ At one point, Vlastos (1991) argues that the elenchus is primarily "adversative" with respect to the interlocutor, and that Socrates himself is not normally subject to refutation. But for Vlastos, this does not mean that Socrates is not "intensely self-critical" (see p. 113 n. 28, referring to *Charmides* 166c-d where Socrates says that his object in examining others is, at the same time, to examine himself--cf. *Protagoras* 333c and *Gorgias* 458a). It is due to the methodology of the elenchus that Socrates is not himself subject to refutation in the same manner as are his interlocutors--his "formal role in the debate is not to defend a thesis of his own but only to 'examine' the interlocutor's" (p. 113). Another possibility, however, is that perhaps no one ever comes forth to challenge Socrates because as his views are presented in the dialogues they are radical, not well-known compared with the views that he attempts to refute (e.g., Socrates' view that someone who is well-informed about justice will adhere to it no matter what, versus Thrasymachus' and Callicles' adherence to the convention that justice consists of might-is-right, in which regard one could do as one wants so long as one can get away with it; see n. 51 chapter one preceding). It is as if Plato, the author, trod a fine line, presenting a Socrates whose convictions are strong but not dogmatic, supportable insofar as Socrates was not himself refutable but reasonable in that he was always open to the possibility of refutation.

²⁶ See pp. 69-70 preceding.

The result is that even when Socrates plays his game of out-sophist the sophist, he comes off looking radically different from the sophist he defeats. As we have already noted, in the *Protagoras* a considerable portion of the drama is given over to a character contest between Socrates and Protagoras²⁷--the champion of elenctic cross-examination desirous that both questioner and respondent experience correction as it comes²⁸ versus the famous, self-admitted sophist (317b), whose promise to "make men good citizens" (319a) enables him, at least in the initial stages of the dialogue, to enjoy a spell-bound following comparable to that of Orpheus the musician.²⁹ During the contest, Socrates deploys every trick imaginable, even resorting to sophistry himself on occasion,³⁰ and eventually wins the day by beating the sophist at his own

²⁷ I.e., spanning as it does Stephanus pages 316a-349a, out of a the total of 309a-362a for the dialogue as a whole, this contest occupies literally two-thirds of the dialogue. (Regarding the contest, see also pp. 53ff preceding)

²⁸ Perhaps nowhere is this disposition on the part of Socrates more evident than at *Apology* 21a-22e, where he details the story of his attempt to prove that the oracle was wrong to reply, "no one is wiser" (μηδένα σοφώτερον εἶναι), to Chaerophon's question, is there "anyone wiser than I [Socrates]" (εἴ τις ἐμοῦ εἶη σοφώτερος). Initially, Socrates simply did not believe the oracle. He thought he was not wise at all, and his life as a philosopher thus began with an attempt to be found wanting and to be instructed, not with the presumption that he was anybody special. If Socrates is adversative with regard to his interlocutors, therefore, it is only because he was always disposed to be adversative with regard to himself no less than anyone else. He started out by trying to put himself on the hot seat, a project at which he failed only because he was in fact the wisest; no one else had the wisdom to acknowledge their own ignorance, and thus arrive at a fundamental distinction between human and divine wisdom (*Apology* 22e-23b).

²⁹ Witness Socrates' first sight of Protagoras during the grand entrance scene in Callias' portico, 314e-315c. Socrates enters to discover Protagoras strolling with a panoply of admirers and pupils all charmed by his Orphic voice, following behind in a train, careful not to obstruct, making way and falling into ranks whenever the great sophist turned about to speak.

³⁰ The most relevant passage in this regard concerns the exegesis of Simonides' poem from 338a-347a of which the portion devoted to Socrates comprises 342a-347a (also see pp. 53ff preceding). Socrates' style is even more uninhibited and mellifluous than that of Protagoras, different from that of Protagoras mainly in that it is more skillfully sophistic. This is not to say that Socrates never expresses any typically Socratic ideas in the process. At 345e, for example, he does repeat his conviction that no one errs voluntarily. But this may only be to ensure that his interpretation will eventually appear the more skillful one. As we shall note in chapter six, knowledge can be a basis for Socrates to call rhetoric artful even if it is deceitful (see pp. 211ff chapter six; also, on the points at which Socrates' interpretative speech, 342a-347a, is sophistic, pp. 175ff in the same chapter).

game.³¹ But due to Socrates' willingness to use the sophist's art to subvert the sophist, the result is a dialogue initially dominated by the infatuation with rhetoric and sophistry giving way in the end to the tireless spirit of the elenchus, accepted by one and all.³² Initially, Protagoras presents as a teacher different from everyone else in the manner that an accomplished master might be superior to and distinguishable from untrained students. But it is precisely in this regard that he eventually turns out to be morally inferior to Socrates, and a less worthy champion of virtue. His persona is too supercilious and his approach is too one-dimensional to be genuinely instructive. His method of teaching seems more conducive to his own credibility and prestige than to advancing his students on the path of true knowledge.³³ In comparison, Socrates' superiority relies on the fact that he is on a par with his pupils in one important respect, his honestly acknowledged lack of accomplishment with respect to moral knowledge. His credibility as a teacher derives from the fact that he knows this ignorance more clearly than anyone.³⁴ and

³¹ That Socrates' speech is meant to be considered superior is evident enough by the fact that in the end there is no longer any sign of protest, neither from Protagoras nor from anyone else. Indeed, Socrates' "exposition" is, according to Hippias, "highly meritorious" (347a-b). Cf. Phaedrus' admiration for Socrates first speech at *Phaedrus*, 238c (considered in chapter six following).

³² With the exception of Socrates, at the outset every other character in the dialogue was totally bemused by Protagoras. Near the end of the contest, however, at 348b-c, Alcibiades, Callias, and "almost all those present" have come on side with Socrates, enough so to be instrumental in persuading Protagoras to give more credence to the question-and-answer method of Socrates (albeit not without some initial reluctance on the part of Protagoras, understandably enough). The great orator unsettled, the elenchus finally wins the day when, at the end of the dialogue, we find even Protagoras applauding Socrates, predicting that he will become renowned as a man of wisdom (*Protagoras* 361d-e; concerning whether or not Protagoras should be taken seriously at this point, see n. 34 chapter six following). Regarding agreement or shared opinions being the aim of the elenchus, also see *Crito* 49d (Socrates speaking to Crito): "consider very carefully whether you share my views and agree with me, and whether we can proceed with our discussion from the established hypothesis...." While shared opinion, as the result of the elenchus, is by no means an indicator of true knowledge, it can help to establish a working ground for further discussion. (Regarding agreement, also see pp. 129ff chapter five following.)

³³ As Socrates notes, 317c-d, Protagoras just "wanted to display his skill to Prodicus and Hippias and get some glory from the fact that we had come as his professed admirers..."

³⁴ See e.g., *Apology* 23a where, Socrates explains, the wisest is anyone who, like himself, understands that true wisdom is the property of god, in comparison to which human wisdom is worth little or nothing. It is because he

therefore tries both to learn and to teach, by assuming the role of an instructive, dialogically inclined, critique. Acceptance of the Socratic style of conversation thus coincides with the dissolution of a clearly defined boundary between master and pupil. From the Socratic point of view, instead of being predetermined and inviolate, the two roles overlap, and Socrates, by his questions and refutations, quite deliberately and sincerely models both the part of the teacher and that of the student.¹⁵

In the *Gorgias*, we witness exactly the same sentiment. After arguing at some length with Callicles (487a-499e), to the point where they have begun bickering about whether or not to continue, and who should lead the way, Socrates once again indicates his willingness to be instructed by his interlocutor:

For I do not speak with any pretense to knowledge, but am searching along with you (ζητῶ κοινῇ μεθ' ὑμῶν), and so if there appears to be anything in what my

alone is not guilty of that "ignorance most culpable" of "thinking one knows what one does not" (29a) that Socrates considers it authoritative, a duty imposed on him from god, that he devotes himself to the "philosophical life, examining myself and others" (28e-29a), testing the claims of "those who think that they are wise when they are not" (33c-d).

¹⁵ This interpretation relies on understanding that the outcome of the dialogue was not accidental, that the design from the very beginning was to have Socrates come out looking like the morally superior character in comparison to the sophist. But there is ample evidence that this is the case. The opening scene, for example, when Socrates first spies Protagoras in Callias' portico and spotlights him with his train of admirers, is obviously a setup, introducing Protagoras as a rival to be defeated. Then there is the discussion of Simonides' poem, itself clearly a contest, which seems to occur like a restart in the dialogue, a new beginning after Socrates and Protagoras had reduced themselves to bickering over whose method of discussion was best, the short, snappy, refutational comebacks of the elenctic master, or the long-winded verbiage of the sophist. The audience participation is another giveaway, as for example at 337c-338e where Prodicus, Hippias, and "a large number of those present" take a hand in seeing to it that Protagoras and Socrates try to compromise, each giving way a little to the other in methodology. Finally, there is the fact that in the end, when Socrates clearly has won the day, Protagoras admits defeat, endorsing the Socratic standpoint (361d-e) and professing the willingness to continue conversing with Socrates at some future date. The main object of the dialogue is, as Vlastos (1991) explains, "to induce [Socrates' listeners] to submit to painful elenctic surgery" (p. 139). The obvious target was Protagoras, but before elenctic surgery could occur, the great sophist had to be willing to submit. Hence, the precedence of the contest. This is an instance in which, before he could take on the sophist, Socrates first had to prove that he was superior to the sophist. Herein lies the more serious reason than mere playfulness for Socrates' "extra-elenctic capers," as Vlastos (p. 138, 1991) calls them, in regard to the exegesis of Simonides' poem. This is discussed in more detail at the outset of chapter six following.

opponent says. I shall be the first to yield to him. But I say this only if you think the debate should be carried through to the end (διαπερανθῆναι τὸν λόγον). If you do not wish it, let us drop it now and take our departure. (506a)

Here, Socrates is making it clear that philosophical discussion cannot proceed unless he is willing to give way and become the pupil, albeit a critical one, when his own epistemic uncertainty prevents further progress. By the same token, his interlocutors have to be willing to keep the faith along with him. Socrates always needs an audience for his ideas to have any hope of becoming meaningful, but more than this he also needs the kind of audience where the roles of teacher and pupil are integrated, the lines of distinction never so delineated that they cannot interchange. If he is serious here, at *Gorgias* 506a, then he must be serious at *Gorgias* 489d, where he says to Callicles, "lead me on the path of knowledge more gently than beforehand, that I may not run away from your school."

Callicles thought Socrates was being ironical, as in mocking, when he said this. But that means that Socrates must have also been indulging in mockery earlier when he said:

And what kind of man am I? One of those who would gladly (ἡδέως) be refuted (ἐλεγχθέντων) if anything I say is not true, and would gladly refute (ἐλεγξάντων) another who says what is not true, but would be no less happy to be refuted myself than to refute (ἐλεγχθέντων ἢ ἐλεγξάντων), for I consider that a greater benefit, inasmuch as (ὁσῶπερ) it is a greater boon (μείζον ἀγαθὸν) to be delivered (ἀπαλλαγῆναι) from the worst of evils oneself than to deliver another (ἢ ἄλλον ἀπαλλάξαι). (458a)

ἐλεγχθέντων and ἐλεγξάντων are the aorist *passive* and aorist *active* participles (genitive plural), respectively, of ἐλέγχω, which, in Liddell and Scott, means variously "to disgrace, put to shame, examine, question, disprove, reprove, censure, accuse, confute." The way Socrates uses the terms, in the order that he does, so as to say that he is happy both to refute and to be refuted, means that so far as he is concerned *the role of the interlocutor or pupil is actually the*

better and more beneficial one so far as learning is concerned. This would be entirely consistent with his major preoccupation, which is to learn the truth by whatever way. If there is someone around more knowledgeable than he is, someone capable of instructing him, nothing could be more beneficial for himself. In the same passage above, there occur ἀπαλλάγηναι and ἀπαλλάξαι, the perfect passive infinitive and aorist active infinitive, respectively, of ἀπαλλάσσω, for which, in the active voice, Liddell and Scott give “to set free, release, deliver a person from a thing:” and in the passive “to be set free, be released from a thing.” Again, the use of the passive and active, and the order in which they are so used, is important, telling us that Socrates considers it more important to be refuted because, by the same token, it is even better to be delivered from evil than to deliver someone else. It should be no surprise for Socrates to think this. His mission in life is to deliver others from evil anyway, and he would be better able to do what he thinks he must, if he is himself enlightened first of all. This is all so consistent with Socrates’ principal moral intention, it would be quite senseless not to take him seriously here.³⁶ Otherwise he would be totally inconsistent.

As it turns out, then, there is every reason to think that Socrates’ willingness to reverse roles with Callicles is anything but an ironic, mocking jest. It is a wholly consistent application of his views concerning teaching and learning in the context of elenctic dialogue. A primary object for Socrates, in the *Gorgias*, is to show Gorgias how inconsistent it is to think that rhetoric is a true art (449a),³⁷ even though it only produces belief without knowledge (454e). Throughout

³⁶ Interestingly, Vlastos does take Socrates quite seriously in this passage (see p. 41, Vlastos 1991), which makes it odd why he would then doubt the sincerity of 489d where, after the conversation looks like it might stalemate, Socrates offers to be Callicles’ pupil.

³⁷ I.e., a true art in that Gorgias professes to be adept at teaching people to know right from wrong--even though he admits to being able, at most, to produce belief without knowledge (460a). Alternatively, at 448c-d, Polus calls it

this conversation, with all the many twists and the turns taken in response to various interlocutors, Socrates does not hesitate to say what he thinks himself. Hence his positive convictions that the knowledge of good and evil is a political art analogous to the art of a gymnast or doctor; that this kind of knowledge is both necessary and sufficient for virtue; and that with such knowledge one can be so certain that “wrongdoing is the greatest of evils.”³⁸ one will always think it better to suffer than to do wrong (469b-c). But for Socrates, merely to say what he thinks is not enough. Polus reacted to his claims, to the last two in particular, with incredulity, as did Callicles, who eventually took up Polus’ part with vigour, and remained unconvinced no matter what Socrates could say. In this context, Socrates’ offer to switch roles with Callicles, he to be the pupil and Callicles the teacher, is a typically Socratic move to keep the discussion from coming to a standstill. Contrary to Callicles’ presumption--which Vlastos aligns himself with in agreeing that Socrates’ mocks at 489d--that it is uncharacteristic of Socrates to adopt the role of a co-learner with his pupils, the fact is that such an offer is an entirely consistent application of the principle of Socratic conversation espoused at *Protagoras* 333c, *Gorgias* 506a and 485a-b, and manifest both at *Republic* I 337d and in the *Euthyphro* throughout. Callicles may not understand all the dynamics of a Socratic conversation, and for this reason may assume that Socrates is mocking him, but there are good reasons for thinking

the “noblest of arts”--a claim that is actually representative of Gorgias’ views since Polus’ role at this point (see 448a) is to play the mouthpiece, speaking on behalf of Gorgias, from whom he learned what to say in the first place.

³⁸ *Gorgias* 469b8-9: μέγιστον τῶν κακῶν τυγχάνει ὃν τὸ ἀδικεῖν, literally “it is wrongdoing which happens to be the greatest of evils.”

that this assumption is mistaken, and for taking Socrates' initial "no" to the accusation of mockery at face value.³⁹

To presume otherwise would be tantamount to thinking that the "no" in question is ironic. But this leads to the assumption that Socrates really is not serious about switching roles with his interlocutor and, consequently, to the view that he is serious neither at *Gorgias* 458a where he expresses the principle that he is always willing to be taught, nor at *Gorgias* 506a where he denies that he pretends ignorance when he acts like there is something worthwhile in what his "opponent says." In effect, to doubt the sincerity of "no" at *Gorgias* 489e2 is to doubt not only the sincerity of Socrates' willingness to switch roles with his pupils but also the sincerity of his ignorance from which such an offer typically derives. Although Callicles appears to take Socrates' ignorance quite seriously at one point, acknowledging it to be a quite genuine problem,⁴⁰ he also contradicts that initial impression the moment he suspects that Socrates' offer to switch roles is a mockery. Not being sufficiently perspicacious about the real nature of Socrates, he inadvertently implicates himself in a contradiction. Likewise in the case of anyone

³⁹ The only apparent textual obstacle to such a claim, from the context of the *Gorgias*, lies with Socrates' use of the vocative ὦ θαυμάσιε ("my admirable friend") preceding the imperative προδίδασκε ("lead me on the path of knowledge"), which could be taken to mean that he is mocking Callicles after all. However, there is nothing to prevent us from reading the vocative as a kind of rebuke (not devoid of sarcasm, admittedly), as if, at the same time as he offers to relinquish the role of the teacher, Socrates is chiding Callicles to be more patient and more clear and rational than hitherto. In this respect, note the diction following the rebuke implied by ὦ θαυμάσιε ("my admirable friend"): as noted earlier (n. 5 preceding), Socrates says, πρότερόν με προδίδασκε, "lead me on the path of knowledge more gently than *beforehand*." The comparative πρότερόν ("more gently") aligns with an earlier time when Callicles was not so gentle, in comparison to which he is now advised to act differently. This could be mockery only if it were true that Socrates does not normally relinquish the role of teacher. In the case of someone who plays both roles quite willingly and easily, the meaning is more likely instructional or advisory. The comparative only strengthens this possibility, providing the impression that however he spoke before, *now* Callicles is being advised to be more constructive, perhaps by accepting the opportunity to try his hand at convincing Socrates in a manner more clearly illustrative of master than pupil.

⁴⁰ See *Gorgias* 486b-c, cited and discussed at pp. 69-70 preceding.

else--i.e., Vlastos--who believes that Socrates' ignorance is generally quite serious, and yet uncritically fails to take note of the meaning of *Εἰρωνεύη* at 489e1 in light of *Socrates'* attitude towards switching roles with an interlocutor.

iv) Socrates' counter-accusation

So much for the truth about Callicles' accusation that Socrates' offer to switch roles is a mockery. But what about Socrates' supposed counter-accusation? Is it right to claim that he only means to retaliate, retorting that it was Callicles who was the one doing the mocking earlier on?

With the reference to Zethus Socrates is recalling the very speech in which he was castigated by Callicles for his inability to explain or defend himself clearly. Occurring as it does near the end of the Callicles' long speech, the passage where the name Zethus is mentioned marks the beginning of a closing summation⁴¹ in which Callicles takes one last opportunity to repeat his objections and vivify his disdain for Socrates, and for philosophy generally, by personifying himself as Zethus, who said to his brother, Amphion:

You neglect, Socrates, what you most ought to care for, and pervert a naturally noble spirit (*φύσιν ψυχῆς...γενναίαν*) by putting on a childlike semblance, and you could neither contribute a useful word (*ὀρθῶς λόγον*) in the councils of justice nor seize upon what is plausible and convincing, nor offer any brilliant advice on another's behalf. (485e-486a)

⁴¹ Judging by the point at which Callicles' speech reverts to repetition of material already covered, plus the change from indirect speech, more about philosophy than about Socrates as such, to a more personal tone addressing Socrates directly, it seems reasonable to locate the beginning of the summation at 485d precisely, beginning with the sentence "Now I am quite friendly disposed toward you, Socrates, and I suppose I feel much as Zethus, whom I mentioned, felt toward Amphion in Euripides." Thence follows Callicles' advice, in the persona of Zethus speaking to a wayward brother.

Clearly, we are supposed to plug in the name of Socrates as the metaphorical equivalent of Amphion, thereby to realize that in Callicles' opinion everything Socrates has said is just so much childish babble. Vlastos would have us believe that this constitutes no more than "crude abuse"⁴² on the part of Callicles, and on the part of Socrates who later on simply retaliated in kind by offering to become the pupil of the very person who mocked him.

The difficulty with this, however, is that we have already seen Socrates take Callicles' critique entirely seriously, thus acknowledging that he is indeed incapable of being any use to himself or to his friends and relations.⁴³ Socrates' object, in the *Gorgias*, was to undermine the pretensions of rhetoricians who teach people opinions that are not well-founded. That was what was wrong with Gorgias himself: although he claimed to be able to make others better, he was a not a capable rhetorician because he lacked the knowledge of good and evil.⁴⁴ Socrates' point is that to be a teacher one has to have moral knowledge, and he wants to define a better art, the "political art" (πολιτικῆ, 464b4, 521d7), as the province solely of those who do have knowledge. But so long as Socrates claims to be the consummate political artist himself, and yet lacks the knowledge to defend such a claim before a critical audience, he has not demonstrated his point. Socrates admits that Callicles identified a serious problem: without knowledge, he cannot help himself or anyone else; he is no better than *Gorgias*, it would appear, at making others better.

⁴² p. 26; Vlastos (1991)

⁴³ See *Gorgias* 508c-d, considered at p. 31 preceding.

⁴⁴ See pp. 16ff preceding.

Not only that, but on more than one occasion Socrates clarifies the problem himself. Hence the discrepancy between moral certainty and epistemic uncertainty such as we noticed at *Gorgias* 506a where Socrates is ambivalent about the craft analogy upon which rests his thesis that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue; at *Gorgias* 503d where his doubt that there is anyone past or present who has ever had the political art raises serious questions about his own claim of being thus possessed (521d); and, most memorably, at *Gorgias* 508e-509a where, immediately following his admission about the worth of Callicles' critique, he qualifies his categorical assertion concerning the power of knowledge--i.e., that 'these facts...as I state them...are buckled fast and clamped together...by arguments of steel and adamant'--with the rider that 'what I say is always the same--that I know not the truth in these affairs.'

This willingness to be so self-critical should be considered an entirely consistent extension of the Socratic principle that the true pedagogue is both teacher and student. If Socrates were totally certain, and had no doubts whatsoever, he would, to the extent that he fails to convince and improve others, as was the case with Callicles, turn out to be unconvincing, incredible, and incapable of perpetuating moral improvement generally. The appearance of such godlike inflexibility would render him a much simpler, but also more one-dimensional and less intriguing, character for posterity. But Socrates is as scrupulously honest about his epistemic uncertainty as he is about his great moral certainty, and he is quick to rebut any intimation that his protestations of ignorance are insincere. It is as if Socrates is playing the role of both teacher and pupil with himself, as if to buttress his standing invitation that he is in principle willing to relinquish the role of teacher whenever anyone agrees to participate with him in critical discussion--and by that willingness thereby turns out to be a truly worthy interlocutor.

It should be no surprise, then, that Socrates would take Callicles' critique to be far more than a mere insult. It is a true statement of the difficulties occasioned by the discrepancy between Socrates' beliefs and his ignorance, difficulties which Socrates himself does not hesitate to acknowledge, and to restate even more clearly than do his critics. To suppose, now, that Socrates has suddenly decided to become unaware of, or to refuse to acknowledge, his ignorance and the difficulties that it poses, would be radically out of keeping with one of the most credible (albeit perplexing) features of the Socratic character. Without good reasons from the text for such a change of heart, which are not forthcoming, it seems clear that Callicles' critique was not just mockery so far as Socrates was concerned, and that Socrates did not, therefore, simply mean to retaliate to the supposition that he mocked with mockery in kind.

Of course this does not necessarily mean that Callicles did not intend to mock earlier on, nor does it mean that Socrates is not simply reporting this. The word mockery carries not only the idea of an intention to deride but also dismissal, defiance, and ridicule. If εἰρωνεύου means mockery, Socrates is not merely pointing out that Callicles indulged in strong, vitriolic criticism; rather, he is saying that Callicles dismissed him, defied him, intended to ridicule him. While Socrates himself may not think that everything Callicles said was just mockery, it is perfectly possible that he recognizes a lack of prescience on the part of Callicles, such that Callicles himself did not understand the full import of the criticisms made in light of the reference to Zethus. In this regard, the meaning of εἰρωνεύου would indeed be the same as that of Εἰρωνεύη, mockery. The difference, however, between this assessment and that of Vlastos, is that this is only true from the point of view of Callicles. It by no means follows that the same is true of Socrates, or that Socrates simply meant to retaliate. There is not necessarily any game of tit-for-

that going on at *Gorgias* 489d-e. To suppose otherwise would be tantamount to thinking that the *Gorgias* contains, on the part of Plato, an artless, inconsistent and incoherent, representation of Socrates, a Socrates who is willing to resort to crude abuse with very bad timing, at a moment just when his position has become critical and the most appropriate redress would be to make a sincere offer to switch roles with his interlocutor.

Vlastos' interpretation of *Gorgias* 489d-e relies on treating Callicles and Socrates as moral equals, partners in crime in the crude art of trading insults, as if it does not matter whose perception Plato wants us to think is right, whose wrong. But clearly, and not despite but because of his ignorance, we are supposed to think of Socrates as the one possessed of the superior insight.⁴⁵ Once we entertain the question as to who is closer to saying the truth, as indeed we must if we pay attention to the indicators that Callicles' impressions of mockery are misconstrued, it becomes apparent that by having Socrates reply to Callicles, *Μὰ τὸν Ζῆθον, ὃ Καλλίκλεις, ὃ σὺ χρώμενος πολλὰ νῦν δὴ εἰρωνεύου πρὸς με* (literally, "no, it is Zethus, Callicles, by whom you furnished yourself just now to be exceedingly ironical towards me"⁴⁶), Socrates is 1) refusing Callicles' initial accusation with *Εἰρωνεύη* (much as he refused Thrasymachus' accusation in *Republic* I),⁴⁷ 2) merely reporting that Callicles may have intended

⁴⁵ Against this, one might be tempted to argue that because Callicles' critique was a prescient observation about the pitfalls of philosophy as practiced by Socrates, they really are close to being like moral equals after all. Note, however, that it was ultimately Socrates who substantiated the critique, not only accepting it as the valid observation that he is able to help neither himself nor anyone else (508c-d), but also following up this observation by honestly admitting that he is no less uncertain than he is certain about what he believes (508e-509a). Insofar as Callicles' observations depend on Socrates' insights for validation and clarification, he still plays second fiddle (at best).

⁴⁶ *Gorgias* 489e2-4

⁴⁷ I.e., in both cases, Socrates rejects an accusation of irony to the effect that he is being insincere. Granted, in the *Republic* this occurs in the context of his admission of ignorance, while in the *Gorgias* the occasion is his offer to be taught by his interlocutor. The common factors, however, are that 1) he rejects an accusation that he speaks in a non-literal manner, and 2) he does this in circumstances in which he would be seriously remiss did he not take pains

to mock him earlier on, and 3) thereby indicating that while εἰρωνεύου might mean mockery so far as an interlocutor is concerned, it by no means follows that this is a sense in which he should necessarily be considered ironic. This is a context where an imputation of insincerity, even one as obvious as mockery or sarcasm, could put Socrates on a level with his interlocutor in such a way as to compromise his moral authority, reducing him to a juvenile game of tit-for-tat in circumstances in which the most serious issue of Socrates' ignorance is paramount. As we have seen, Socrates' ignorance is, ultimately, the reason why he is in principle always willing to allow that he is under examination as much as are his interlocutors. He is not a teacher in the usual sense of someone who has some specific knowledge to impart. He speaks with no pretense to ignorance. He is always searching along with his respondents (*Gorgias* 506a). He is the kind of person always just as glad, if not more glad, to be refuted as to refute (*Gorgias* 458a). That is the basis of his offer, at *Gorgias* 489d, to switch roles with Callicles. To consider this mockery discredits Socrates on a crucial point. Even though mockery is supposed to be such a crude form of irony that there can be no hint of deceit, in this instance it would be to attribute deceit to Socrates. Why? Precisely because mockery is so patently obvious. If Socrates mocks about something so fundamental as his willingness to change places with an interlocutor, he would be indicating in a patently obvious way that his attitude about the master-pupil relationship really is *not* all that fundamental. This would be a juvenile act, deceitful in that it puts forth the false, misleading impression that such a serious aspect of his character is really not so serious after all. A distinguishing feature of Socrates would be thereby be diminished: his ignorance, the basis on

to correct the possibility of being misconstrued. In the *Republic*, the misconstrual would be that he is not really ignorant; in the *Gorgias* it would be that his characteristic willingness to be taught can be taken so lightly as to suggest that it is sometimes just a mockery.

which he is always willing to be pupil as much as master, would end up looking like not such a distinctive character trait after all. The impression would be of a lesser, more ordinary Socrates, someone little different from anyone else in that he conceals rather than acknowledges openly his inherently limited grasp of essential moral truths. Small wonder that Socrates said "no" to Callicles' accusation of mockery. He appears to do what is necessary to block the impression of insincerity that would occur on the understanding that he only intends to belittle an opponent when he comes forth with his characteristic willingness to learn.

What we are left with at this point, therefore, is the realization that we have rejected a kind of irony that would be fatal to Socrates' credibility. He cannot mock without putting forth a false impression as to what his character is really like. At the same time, however, we have acknowledged, once again, the reality of Socrates' ignorance. If Socrates cannot be considered guilty of mocking when he offers to change places with an interlocutor--because that offer is typically made to redress an argument gone sour as a result of ignorance--then we have exonerated him on one point only to find out once again that his ignorance is still the paramount issue. Precisely because Socrates does not mock at *Gorgias* 489d-e, when he says to Callicles "lead me on the path of knowledge," we have to take it as a given that Socrates still does not have the knowledge he needs in order to explain in a satisfactory manner what exactly it is that he should know if he is supposed to be good. Although we have defended Socrates from SG on one point, we have further embroiled him in it at another. We still have not found a conception of irony that might help solve the problem.

It should be noted, in fairness to Vlastos, that because the foregoing criticisms are based on the question as to how, if at all, Socrates' irony might be the basis for a solution to SG, they

relate to problems with which Vlastos himself was not directly concerned.⁴⁸ It would be quite unfair to expect somebody to solve a problem he/she did not him/herself pose, particularly if there is a feature of that person's research upon which one's own project relies, at least as a starting point. In this regard, the most salient feature of Vlastos' work, notwithstanding that he might be wrong about the meaning of irony at *Gorgias* 489d-e, is that he has nevertheless achieved a truly sophisticated conception of Socratic irony that has the potential to become a new standard definition in place of the age-old view that Socrates only pretends to be ignorant. In the following chapter, this definition will be the starting point for announcing the possibility of a conception of irony, applicable to Socrates, that shall, pending further discussion in chapter five, be robust enough according to Socrates' criteria for moral knowledge to count as the knowledge with which he (or anyone like him) cannot help but be virtuous, and without which no one can be virtuous--as virtuous as it is possible to be, at any rate, given the fact of Socrates' ignorance.

Accordingly, in the following chapter, we shall find that Vlastos' definition represents an insight

⁴⁸ Nor have many commentators been preoccupied with this specific problem, it seems, at least to not the extent of concentrating on it specifically. This is not to say that no one has thought of it before, nor offered no kind of solution. See Penner (1990), Vlastos (1985), and Brickhouse and Smith (1990) as discussed at n. 1 chapter two preceding. Of these, only Brickhouse and Smith, however, have actually focused on the problem in any detail. Their argument is basically this: Socrates is a good man, better than anyone else, even though he lacks the ability to explain virtue because he honestly admits his ignorance, his primary concern is the welfare of souls, he satisfies the command of the Delphic oracle, "know thyself;" and, most importantly, he never wavers in obeying the promptings of his *daimonion*. All this is sufficient to make him wiser and better than anyone else (p. 170, 1990), especially in comparison to "the multitude of Athenians, who needlessly labour under a variety of mistaken notions about the nature of virtue" (p. 175, Brickhouse and Smith 1990; see also pp. 518, 523, Brickhouse and Smith 1986). But Socrates still "cannot offer an account in terms of a general theory of virtue of what makes some things good and others evil" (p. 177, 1990). It is still the case, therefore, that "his life is clearly deficient" (pp. 173, 177-178, 1990). The intention here, in chapter 5, is to maintain the same sort of argument albeit in a somewhat different way, via the contention that Socrates' irony not the *daimonion* is the most important clue for reconciling ignorance with knowledge and goodness (so far as these are possible for humanity). Irony comes first because the *daimonion*, if it can be said to apply to anyone other than Socrates, must do so in virtue of the ironic disposition. Irony is what makes Socrates philosophical, the reason why he is possessed of a *daimonion* in the first place (where *daimonion* means, as explained in chapter 5 in light of *Apology* 27c-d, one's situatedness in the middle ground between human and divine wisdom). (For more on Brickhouse and Smith's argument, in context, see nn. 33, 34 chapter five following.)

and a vantage point to which the current project will be indebted as it attempts to find a solution to the problem of Socrates' goodness. In this regard, the current, ongoing critique of Vlastos should not be taken to mean that his research is in any way fundamentally wrong. Rather, the object is to obtain a clear view of his conception of Socratic irony as the one idea that has come out in recent years which is most amenable to further discussion, hopefully to such an extent that Socrates' irony may be considered the key to solving the problem of Socrates' goodness.

CHAPTER FOUR

Socrates and “Complex Irony”

I: The meaning of “complex irony”

i) Socrates’ argumentative style

As already noted,¹ Socrates’ requirements concerning the knowledge of virtue are so stringent it is unlikely that anyone, himself included, will ever be able to satisfy them. He employs a conversational method of searching for the truth where everyone is required to say what they think; and he relies on the opinions of others so that he can attempt to cull a set of true opinions from a larger set of intuitions consisting of both true and false opinions. His reference point for determining what is true and what is false is always a framework of actual experience, therefore, within which false opinions emerge clearly enough--what is false is whatever results in contradictory propositions--but truth as such can never be demonstrated because nothing ever turns up that is absolutely irrefutable.²

Socrates’ refutation of Thrasymachus, in *Republic* I, is a good characteristic example of the way this method of truth-seeking leads to the necessary conclusion that it is very difficult to articulate a truly consistent knowledge of virtue. Thrasymachus thinks that justice consists of the

¹ I.e., see pp. 62ff preceding.

² See pp. 111-115, Vlastos (1991); as well as pp. 62ff preceding.

advantage of the strong but this starts to look wrong the moment he accepts Socrates' opinion that "there is a specific virtue or excellence ($\acute{\alpha}\rho\epsilon\tau\eta$) of everything for which a specific work or function is appointed:"³ for if Socrates is right, then the soul has its own sort of excellence, "management, ruling, deliberation, and the like,"⁴ in relation to which the criterion of strength is an irrelevant and often contradictory aim,⁵ not at all in keeping with the all-important ability to govern on the basis of a thorough-going knowledge about how to live well rather than badly.

Socrates does not need to know what the excellence consisting of justice actually is in order to have definite ideas about what it is not. So long as a particular opinion turns out to be contradictory to some common intuition about what is excellent, then he has justifiably rooted out and discarded a view that cannot be maintained consistently within the (dialogical) community (of elenctic conversation) in which it has arisen as an object of critical attention. Such is the nature of the case at hand. Eventually, Thrasymachus agrees (grudgingly it must be admitted) with Socrates that the soul has a particular form of excellence in relation to which the

Republic 353b

Republic 353d

³ Socrates' victory in this regard sounds a bit hollow. Thrasymachus claims that "injustice on a sufficiently large scale is a stronger, freer, and more masterful thing than justice,...it is the advantage of the stronger that is just, while the unjust is what profits a man's self and is for his advantage" (344c). His concept of justice is basically democratic: the rule of might is the rule of the majority (328e), a notion which, as Shorey (1933) has said, was "probably current in Athens" at the time (p. 210). For his part, Socrates points out that "factions,...and hatreds and internecine conflicts [quarrels amongst one another]" (351d) tend to flourish, in which case one becomes "incapable of accomplishing anything" (352a). If one accepts this, plus the principle that justice means being "wiser and better and more capable of action than the unjust" (353b), then the rule of might does start to look self contradictory, the worse opinion. So too if one accepts the related principle that justice consists of a genuinely effective capacity for "management, rule, deliberation, and the like" (353d). What Thrasymachus could have said, however, is that this new principle is arbitrary, if Socrates cannot actually prove that it works. Imperfect as any current conception of justice may be, that is all there is. Socrates' opinion turns out to be best only because Thrasymachus is the one to give way. None of this proves Socrates is wrong, but neither is there any assurance that he is right. That is the perennial dilemma with Socrates: he always thinks he's right but he can't ever prove it.

notion of might-is-right is a defective and irrelevant concept (353d-354a). The moment Thrasymachus capitulates, therefore, it looks like a false opinion has been exposed and refuted.

But the downside to this is that no true opinion has been put in its place, nothing that can count as a true knowledge of justice. As Socrates admits, all they did was turn their attention from the original question about what justice is, to the questions as to whether it is "vice and ignorance or wisdom and virtue," and whether it is "more profitable" than injustice. The result is that they still haven't learned anything really substantial (354b-c). They have merely arrived at the agreement that justice must be a specific kind of excellence not describable in terms of some other, more common notion such as Thrasymachus' initial view that justice is the ability of the strong to get what they want. But that only means they have discovered contradictory opinions both of which cannot be true, and agreed to substitute the second for the first. This does not prove that the second opinion is knowledge, only that there are two incompatible opinions and that instead of succumbing to disagreement on this point they eventually decided, thanks to Thrasymachus' capitulation, to share the second. Hence Socrates' admission at the end of the present discussion that he still "knows nothing" (354b).

Taken in its context, this can only mean that he still does not know the essential nature of justice, not that he knows nothing at all about it. The question as to what Socrates really means when he says he 'knows nothing,' is an important one, calling for additional clarification. Clearly, he cannot mean that he knows absolutely nothing at all about the matter at hand; otherwise there would be no reason to suppose that his protestations of ignorance are in any way ironic, nor would there be any point in wondering about the fact that he denies the very knowledge of goodness that he thinks one has to have in order to be good. He would simply be

ignorant, end of story: except, given that he often appears to be quite otherwise, nothing he says would make any sense--he would be just as guilty of the liar's paradox as he would be if his ignorance were simply untrue.⁹ It is important to specify, therefore, exactly what it is that Socrates knows nothing about when he says he 'knows nothing,' and in this regard, careful attention needs to be paid to the context within which the utterance occurs.

In the present case concerning justice in *Republic* I, it is obvious that Socrates is not totally ignorant. He is at least sufficiently cognizant to know what justice is not and, moreover, to have an inkling about what it should be--i.e., it is not the rule of might but instead must be some as yet unspecified excellence of the soul that enables one to be really really good at "management, ruling, deliberation, and the like" (353d). In this context, it is clear that if Socrates 'knows nothing' about justice, it is because he cannot give a detailed essential definition, not because he has no idea whatsoever about the meaning of the word. Thus, although he cannot define justice as such, he does know enough about it to be aware that neither is anybody else capable of defining it better. In a word, he knows enough about it to know that it is not accounted for by any extant definition.

In this regard, consider Vlastos who has a quite similar observation about the *Apology*, where Socrates says:

I am not aware of being wise in anything, great or small (οὔτε μέγα οὔτε μικρὸν σύνοιδα ἑμαυτῷ σοφὸς εἶναι)...It looks as though, while neither of us knows anything [sic] about the good and the beautiful [ἡμῶν οὐδέτερος οὐδὲν

⁹ On the liar's paradox in relation to the possibilities both that Socrates' ignorance might be literally untrue, a deceit therefore, or literally true, see p. 64 including n. 48 preceding. The notion of complex irony is Socrates' salvation in this regard.

καλὸν κάγαθὸν εἰδέναι], he thinks he does; but as for me, while, as in point of fact, I have no knowledge, neither do I think I have any.⁷

The “he” in question is a politician with whom Socrates conversed in the course of his attempt to disprove the oracle by trying to find someone wiser than himself (see 21c-d). In finding this politician even more wanting than himself, Socrates is effectively diagnosing the mistake of those who think they are wise when in reality they are not: they only think this because they still fail to realize their fundamental ignorance. In comparison to everyone else, then, Socrates finds that he himself has no such pretensions just because he does not make the mistake of thinking he knows more than he does. If we read *Apology* 21b-d properly, Vlastos explains, we should not jump to the conclusion that Socrates is saying he knows absolutely nothing, only that he is not aware of knowing anything.⁸ This distinction is important because on one reading Socrates would be saying too much, thereby contradicting every positive belief he has ever acknowledged, while in fact he is merely clarifying the scope of what he knows.

What Vlastos could have made more clear in this instance, however, is the exact thing which Socrates says he is denying when he says he ‘has no knowledge.’ Specifically, Socrates is saying that he knows nothing about καλὸν κάγαθόν, the “good and the beautiful” (21d4). Vlastos misses this because he glosses over καλὸν κάγαθόν with the translation “worthwhile,” which is far too vague (let alone inaccurate) a rendition to support the point clearly that Socrates is professing ignorance in a very specific way, just as we saw him doing in *Republic* I when he

⁷ See p. 82, Vlastos (1991): *Apology* 21b, d as translated by Vlastos, save for the amendment “about the good and the beautiful” in place of Vlastos’ “worthwhile” for καλὸν κάγαθόν (see n. 9 below).

⁸ See n. 4, pp. 82-83: Vlastos (1991).

professes ignorance about justice as the ability to rule excellently.⁹ If Socrates protests ignorance about justice, goodness or beauty, therefore, and goes so far as to say he knows nothing about any of these things, he is hyperbolizing. In reality, he means that his intuitions about the essential nature of these things do not constitute true knowledge of them. In regard to the good and the beautiful, to virtue and to truth as such, he has, not knowledge, but hard won beliefs, opinions that have withstood the trials of the elenchus but which are also entirely tenuous, always open to the possibility of refutation.¹⁰

But that means that so long as Socrates can only rely on the opinions of others and of himself, it is unlikely that any argument, neither his nor anyone else's, will ever satisfy him so completely as to force him to abandon his ignorance. His ignorance is characteristic of human fallibility generally, which no amount of insistence can obviate and which any astute critic can always expose whenever someone attempts to posit a moral claim that is supposed to be universally true. That is why, in the *Gorgias*, Callicles' criticisms--aside from the mistaken accusation of mockery--turned out to be well-founded: so long as Socrates is himself not able to

⁹ At n. 3 p. 82, Vlastos (1991) points to Grube (1986) as a precedent for his translation of καλὸν κάγαθόν; cf. also Hugh Tredennick's (Hamilton and Cairns) "It is only too likely that neither of us has any knowledge to boast of...." But consider Jowett (*The Works of Plato*): "I do not suppose that either of us knows anything really *beautiful and good*."

¹⁰ This is not to say that Vlastos (1991) would disagree with the point being made here. Given his n. 4, pp. 82-83, it is clear that he acknowledges that Socrates is not denying having any knowledge, just that in this instance he knows what he does not know. Also, cf. Vlastos' n. 7, p. 83, concerning *Laches* 186e, where Socrates "averts that he has no knowledge of the matter"--the "matter" being, specifically, the "art of virtue" (186c). As Vlastos presents it, it seems clear that he knows very well that Socrates is disclaiming knowledge in a particular way, not that he is disclaiming knowledge altogether. The only objection here is that he would have been more clear in making his point if, in his citation of *Apology* 21b-d, he had indicated the precise meaning of καλὸν κάγαθόν. It is the particularity of Socrates' admissions of lack of knowledge which leave room for the possibility that he has some other kind of expertise; and for the likelihood, therefore, that instead of being self-contradictory his protestations of ignorance are characteristically ironic. The more clearly this is spelled out, the better it looks for Socrates. There is no point muting a clear textual example with a less than clear translation.

guarantee that others will become better, his opinion that he is the true political artist (521d) is scarcely more well-founded than is Gorgias' opinion that opinion is good enough to do the job (454e-455a, 459c-460a). It is also why Socrates often admits to the problem himself, and concludes so many of his discussions about virtue by protesting his lack of knowledge. So long as the search for truth relies on mere opinion, and so long as he is willing to be honest about this, he has to admit that nothing can be known with irrevocable certainty.

ii) **Complex irony and *aporia***

But herein, Vlastos has observed, lies "our best clue to what Socrates meant by declaring that he had no knowledge." He is uttering a "'complex irony'--a statement meant to be true in one sense, false in another."¹¹ such that "what is said both is and isn't what is meant."¹² Thus, whenever Socrates repetitively protests ignorance about moral knowledge, he is admitting, at the same time in the same utterance, that "there is not a single proposition he claims to know with certainty," and that "there are many propositions he does claim to know."¹³ We have already noted instances in the dialogues where Socrates appears to speak just an irony. While Socrates clearly believes that there should be an art of rhetoric which, like "medicine" to the body (501a), aims with "forethought for what is best for the soul" (501b), he cannot come up with any relevant example to substantiate the point. No matter whether one looks to the present for examples from

¹¹ p. 83; Vlastos (1991)

¹² See p. 31, Vlastos (1991); the conception was first reached by Vlastos in his 1985 article, "Socrates' Disavowal of Knowledge." At that time, he maintained a distinction between "knowledge_C" and "knowledge_E," knowing with absolute certainty versus knowledge as true belief, of which only the latter survives the elenchus (see p. 18). The idea was repeated again in Vlastos (1987, p. 80).

¹³ p. 32; Vlastos (1991)

amongst the living (503a-b), or to the past for examples from amongst the dead (503b-c), all one ever finds are practitioners of the pseudo-skill of “flattery” (503a). For all Socrates’ conviction about the purpose of this “special art”¹⁴ there is no one either he or Callicles can think of who satisfies the criterion of a rhetoric that promotes “only those desires, the satisfaction of which makes man better” (503c-d). Similarly, although Socrates argues with conviction that there is an art of bringing “order and discipline” to the soul (504b) that is analogous to the manner in which “physical trainers and doctors give order...to the body” (504a), he also admits in the course of the discussion that “I do not speak with any pretense to knowledge, but am searching along with you” (506a). All the more strangely, however, this lack of knowledge is no prevention against Socrates claiming, eventually, that “I am...the only one engaged in the true political art...of all men today I alone practice statesmanship” (521d). Clearly, Socrates does not think that lack of certainty is equivalent to lack of moral competence. He can know a lot about virtue even if he fails to know its most essential feature.¹⁵ Imperfect, human knowledge is not entirely without

¹⁴ Alternatively, “political art” (464b, 521d) which in the *Gorgias* is the basic term covering all instances of a moral art that watches over and improves souls. See the diagram from the *Gorgias* presented and discussed at pp. 22ff. chapter one preceding.

¹⁵ Cf. pp. 114-115; Vlastos (1991): this is a typically Socratic conception of knowledge according to Vlastos, characteristic of “that peculiarly Socratic figure of speech [Socrates’ irony as “complex irony”] in which the speaker both does and does not mean what he says,” and in respect of which Socrates’ lack of epistemic certainty is no obstacle to him admitting of “justifiable true belief.” Also see pp. 19-20, including n. 46, Vlastos (1985). It should be noted that although Vlastos, at least in the 1985 article, thinks his conception of Socratic irony differs significantly from the view that Socrates’ ignorance disclaims knowledge but reclaims opinion, in fact the difference seems to be very subtle indeed. See Vlastos discussing pp. 39-40, Irwin (1977), but also Santas (1979) and Penner (1992), as discussed at n. 14 chapter two preceding. The common thread in all four of these commentators is that Socrates disclaims knowledge and reclaims true belief. For Vlastos, this means “knowledge_c,” epistemic certainty, versus “knowledge_e,” opinions that are true insofar as they have withstood the test of the elenchus (see n. 12 preceding). But what exactly is the difference between “knowledge_e” and true belief? Both appear to stand for the fruits of the elenchus and both are consistently described by Vlastos et. al. as true belief.

value, so long as one does not take it to be absolute knowledge and thereby make the mistake of confusing the one with the other.

The occasion on which Socrates explains most clearly this difference between partial and complete knowledge is in the *Apology*, when he undertakes to explain to the jury the source of the ill repute that caused him to be brought to trial in the first place:

I have gained this reputation, gentlemen, from nothing more or less than a kind of wisdom (σοφίαν τινᾶ). What kind of wisdom do I mean? Human wisdom (ἄνθρωπίνην σοφίαν), I suppose. It seems that I really am wise in this limited sense.¹⁶

It was in regard to wisdom (or knowledge) conceived of as a limited sort of human wisdom, Socrates explains, that the oracle meant he was a wise man, wiser than any other. At first, however, Socrates admits that the message of the oracle left him greatly “perplexed” or “at a loss” (ἠπόρουσιν, 21b7):

When I heard the oracle’s answer, I said to myself, What does the god mean? Why does he not use plain language? I am only too conscious that I have no claim to wisdom, great or small. So what can he mean by asserting that I am the wisest man in the world (σοφώτατον)? He cannot be telling a lie; that would not be right for him. And, for a long time I was at a loss (πολὺν χρόνον ἠπόρουσιν) concerning what he meant. [Then] I set myself at last with considerable reluctance to check the truth of it in the following way.¹⁷

¹⁶ *Apology* 20d; for Vlastos (1991), this text is the key for making sense of the contradiction in Socrates’ complex irony (pp. 238-239). Here, however, the basis for an explanation is *Apology* 20d in conjunction with 21b and 23a-b. Matters seem to stand clearer that way.

¹⁷ *Apology* 21b: Tredennick’s translation (Hamilton and Cairns) save for “And, for a long time I was at a loss concerning what he meant,” for καὶ πολὺν μὲν χρόνον ἠπόρουσιν, τί ποτε λέγει (21b7), in place of Tredennick’s “After puzzling about it for some time....” The point is to stress ἠπόρουσιν, the long-time aporia that motivated Socrates to begin investigating the oracle, thus starting out on the philosophical life, in the first place. Cf. Fowler (Loeb), “And for a long time I was at a loss as to what he meant;” also Jowett (*The Works of Plato*) “After long consideration....” Fowler’s translation is the one followed in this instance; it more clearly retains the special sense of ἠπόρουσιν.

Thence follows the story (21b-22e) of Socrates' attempt to refute the oracle by interviewing the classes of politicians, poets, and craftsmen. Eventually, however, after comparing himself to everyone else, he came to realize both that he was indeed unique and that "it was better for me to be as I am" (22e). Because

...real wisdom is the property of god, and this oracle is his way of telling us that human wisdom (ἡ ἀνθρωπίνη σοφία) has little or no value (ὀλίγου τινὸς ἀξία ἐστὶν καὶ οὐδενός). It seems to me that he is not referring literally to Socrates, but has merely taken my name as an example (παράδειγμα), as if he would say to us. The wisest of you men (ὕμῶν, ὃ ἄνθρωποι, σοφώτατος) is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless (ἔγνωκεν ὅτι οὐδενὸς ἀξιόσ ἐστὶ τῆ ἀληθείᾳ πρὸς σοφίαν).¹⁸

The startling result of Socrates' attempt to disprove the oracle is that it was the very "perplexity" engendered by the oracle that made him deserving of the accolade 'wise man.' Not only that, however; he also learned that he was the wisest of all, a paradigm of human wisdom (or knowledge) whom others would be well-advised to emulate. The sense of being 'perplexed,' 'at a loss,' or 'helpless' (ἠπόρουσ, 21b7) upon which human wisdom depends should be considered the condition of humanity generally. The only option is whether or not one is willing to acknowledge this and cling to it as the one truth that can be known for sure.

But this did not mean that Socrates had to relinquish his most cherished beliefs about the nature of virtue. So long as he professed his point of view adamantly in the same voice, the voice of irony, as he admitted his helpless inability to provide cogent arguments capable of converting certainty-mixed-with-uncertainty into true knowledge, he was quite justified in trying

¹⁸ *Apology* 23a-b: as indicated at n. 16 preceding, while for Vlastos (1991, pp. 238-239) the explanation lies at *Apology* 20d-e, it seems even clearer if we factor in 21b and 23a-b as well. Then 1) we have Socrates claiming a limited human wisdom (20d), 2) claiming that he is wisest (21b), and 3) explaining that he is wisest because he claims human wisdom but not divine wisdom (23a-b). One needs all three passages, 20d, 21b, and 23a-b, to make the best sense of the matter.

to convince others to believe as he did. That is to say, Socrates could continue to express great certainty so long as he did so ironically, saying that he both is and is not wise, does and does not know virtue, on the understanding, in light of *Apology* 20d, 21b, and 23a-b, that there is a fundamental difference between human and divine wisdom. Hence, when Socrates says he is ignorant, he means that he lacks knowledge in the superhuman sense of the word. He can claim human wisdom but he must disclaim godly wisdom. He cannot say he knows nothing, but neither can he say he knows everything. The truth lies somewhere in between. The result is irony, an economical way for Socrates to state, simultaneously, the scope and the limits of both his knowledge and his ignorance: an economical way, that is, for him to express the *aporia* that puts him at the point where knowledge and ignorance, human wisdom and divine wisdom, intersect.

II: The application of complex irony

i) The clue at *Gorgias* 508e-509a

Usually this irony is merely implicit in the dialogues, and it would require considerable interpretation and explanation of the context within which Socrates' professions of ignorance occur in order to see exactly what sort of knowledge he is denying and not denying. Such would be the case with most of the instances of Socrates' ignorance that we saw previously in the *Protagoras*, *Gorgias*, *Laches*, *Euthyphro*, *Charmides*, and *Republic* I. Occasionally, however, and very rarely, there is a rather more explicit manifestation. Most notable in this regard is the aforementioned, very paradoxical profession of both ignorance and knowledge at *Gorgias* 508e-509a, in the context of Socrates' attempt to convince Callicles that virtuous people are always

better off than vicious people and it is better to suffer than to commit injustice. On the one hand, Socrates confidently states.

These facts, which were shown to be as I state them some time earlier in our previous discussion, are buckled fast and clamped together...by arguments of steel and adamant.

while on the other he admits.

I know not the truth in these affairs, but I do know that of all whom I have ever met either before or now no one who put forward another view has failed to appear ridiculous.¹⁹

¹⁹ *Gorgias* 508e-509a: so sweeping is this paradoxical admission of certainty and ignorance that, in effect, Socrates is rendering ironical his claim that he is possessed of the political art, and that such an art is necessary and sufficient for virtue. At this point it should be noted that there is a procedural difference between the way Vlastos attributes complex irony to Socrates, and the way it is attributed here. First, Vlastos does not, as is the case here, collapse the irony that Socrates is and not political into the more fundamental irony that he does and does not have knowledge. See pp. 237, 240-241, Vlastos (1991): appealing to *Gorgias* 521d for Socrates' avowal of doing politics, and to *Apology* 31d-e and *Gorgias* 473e for the disavowal, Vlastos' view is that complex irony resides in the fact that Socrates does not do politics in the conventional sense but that he does pursue what he means by "political art," the art by which he hopes to improve "the moral character" of his fellow citizens (pp. 237, 240). For Vlastos, therefore, Socrates' attitude towards politics is a unique instance of complex irony which does not directly involve the complex irony of knowledge and ignorance. Second, when Vlastos attributes complex irony to Socrates in relation to his disavowals and avowals of knowledge, he does not include within the scope of that irony Socrates' belief that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue (see pp. 237-238)--doubtless because he has already concluded that the doctrine is false (see pp. 43ff preceding). Thirdly, while for Vlastos Socrates' disavowals and avowals of teaching are another unique instance of complex irony, that is not the case here. There is a sense in which Vlastos is right of course. Socrates does categorically deny that he teaches in the conventional sense admitted to, e.g., by Protagoras at *Protagoras* 328b--i.e., unlike the sophists he does not pretend to be a teacher of virtue himself, nor does he charge a fee for his services. This is Vlastos' point at p. 241, though his reference is different, namely *Apology* 20b, but also see *Apology* 31c (for more passages in the dialogues, a historical account of teaching for pay, and Socrates' opposition to the practice, see David L. Blank, 1985). But Socrates does teach in another sense: he pursues gratis his divinely appointed mission to alert his fellow citizens to the welfare of their souls (p. 242, Vlastos citing *Apology* 30a; but also see 28e-29b, d, 30a-b, 30e-31c). In view of the foregoing argument, in chapter one, however, that Socrates' ambivalence about teaching can be explained to mean that virtue is teachable in principal, if one has knowledge, but not teachable in fact, if one does not have knowledge (see pp. 9ff preceding), the preference here is to let the subject of teaching turn on the more fundamental irony that Socrates is certain about things he lacks the knowledge to explain. That is to say, if Socrates' ambivalence towards teaching derives from his unwillingness to say teaching is impossible just because there happen to be no teachers--according to Socrates' unique understanding as to what a teacher is--then it is not in and of itself ironical that he would say virtue both is and is not teachable. The real irony is not that Socrates teaches and does not teach. Rather, it is that as a teacher he models the truth that he does and does not have the knowledge that makes for a teacher. Here is perhaps a clearer way to make the point: Socrates' disavowal of teaching is not both true and false in a manner characteristic of irony; rather, it is true so long as his irony remains true, and false if that irony should ever be dissolved. This is quite different from his ironic protestations of ignorance, which are *both true and false* so long as the irony persists. This is not to say that Vlastos is wrong to say teaching is another example of complex irony, just

The argument is winding down at this stage. Callicles has all but accepted Socrates' dictum that no evil comes to someone good, and so, that a good person is always more willing to endure a wrong than to commit one.²⁰ Commenting on this passage, Vlastos says this is "the most paradoxical aspect" of Socrates' disavowal of knowledge. "Its unique, absolutely unparalleled, feature," is that "it may be voiced at the conclusion of an entirely successful elenctic argument in which Socrates has to all appearance, proved his thesis to the hilt."²¹

This is probably the clearest, most explicit example in all the dialogues of Socrates actually protesting his ignorance in the form of a complex irony.²² The foregoing passages from the *Apology*, where Socrates says he has human wisdom (20d), makes "no claim to wisdom great or small" (21b), and admits that human wisdom is "really worthless" in comparison to godly wisdom (23b), all help to explain what exactly this sort of irony means. As such, they help explain why it is not contradictory to suppose that Socrates says, both, that he does and does not

that there may be another interpretation according to which Socrates' paradoxical attitude about teaching ultimately derives from the complex irony consisting of two different standards of knowledge. (For a similar view to the one advanced here, that Socrates' attitude on teaching is not fundamentally paradoxical and ironic, cf. Penner (1992) discussed at n. 18 chapter one preceding.)

²⁰ I.e., the ironic profession of ignorance/knowledge occurs in the context of a rather longish speech by Socrates (507a-509c), prior to which Callicles had stopped contending and was content to let Socrates to continue on and conclude his argument (506c, 507a), and subsequent to which he says, quite simply, "[y]ou are right" (509c). Admittedly, it looks like Callicles has simply grown weary and has lost interest in the argument (see 505c). As Vlastos says, however, p. 84 cited following, *Socrates* thinks he has proven his thesis. That is the point of saying "these facts...are buckled fast and clamped together...by arguments of steel and adamant." Another observation: although Callicles was worn down by Socrates, he did put up a good fight, better than most other interlocutors. Socrates was thus challenged to the point where he had to state himself in very definite terms, so much so that his usual expression of aporia would not make for a very coherent conclusion. Hence not only a more adamant conclusion than usual, but also a more paradoxical one, a statement of total certainty followed by a clear admission of ignorance, resulting in the most vivid expression of complex irony as can be found anywhere in the dialogues.

²¹ p. 84: Vlastos (1991)

²² p. 84: Vlastos (1991): "Where in all the annals of Western thought shall we find a philosopher saying in all seriousness that he has produced ultra-strong proof for his thesis--has tied it down by 'arguments of adamant and iron'--and does not know if that thesis is true? Certainly not in any of Plato's dialogues after the *Meno*." Surely in the early dialogues as well, though, given that this is the clearest example.

have moral knowledge. Socrates' ignorance is in the form of a complex irony, and there is not contradiction because he denies knowledge in one sense, the sense of godly wisdom, and reclaims in another sense more limited than godly wisdom. While the *Apology* explains what complex irony means, the foregoing passage from the *Gorgias* demonstrates that this explanation does indeed apply in the context in which Socrates' ignorance typically occurs.

The complex irony in question is climactic to a long argument that goes back as far as 473a, where Socrates announced his intention to try to get Polus to "share" the opinion that it is "worse to do than to suffer wrong." This is the central point of disagreement between Socrates and Polus, and it provides the subject-matter for the discussion until Callicles finally interrupts with the vitriolic critique already noted at 482c-486c. Following this interruption, Socrates continues to press his point, this time with Callicles as the interlocutor. Then comes the further interruption at 489d-e, the aforementioned episode during which Socrates offered to become Callicles' pupil, Callicles accused Socrates of mockery, and Socrates rejected the accusation. After that, the argument picks up again, with Socrates sticking fast to his position, until, finally, evidently all too aware that his knowledge is not up to the strength of his convictions, he makes the famous proclamation at 508e-509a. Complex irony, as explained via the *Apology*, thus becomes, as Vlastos notes, an expression of certainty-mixed-with-uncertainty whereby Socrates effectively says, on the one hand, that an elenctic argument has been entirely successful, and on the other hand, that it has also failed. Socrates is as certain as he is uncertain that the unjust are always worse off than the just, and that it is better to do than to suffer wrong. Nowhere in any of the dialogues is there quite so clear and explicit a manifestation of the paradoxical nature of Socrates' ignorance. That plus the fact that this paradox, this complex irony, is the conclusion of

an entirely typical. Socratic argument serves to show that complex irony is characteristic of Socrates' ignorance generally.

The only thing we should keep in mind is that the irony or mockery or sarcasm uttered at 489d-e is totally different from this, and, accordingly, should be isolated and distinguished from it. Vlastos would probably disagree because for him mockery is so transparently disingenuous, it is an important indicator that Socrates' irony is not characteristically deceptive.²³ But this is premised on the assumption that Callicles was right to think Socrates meant to mock, and that, we have already seen in the previous chapter, appears to be doubtful. Socrates was probably entirely serious in his offer to switch roles with Callicles. To deliberately make a central feature of his character--namely his perennial willingness to be the pupil whenever an elenctic conversation shows signs of getting nowhere--an occasion for mockery would be fatal to his credibility, an act that is not just juvenile but also downright deceitful. For notwithstanding that mockery can be quite transparent, if Socrates were to indulge in it at such a serious juncture, in relation to such a genuinely Socratic disposition, he would be covering up the difficulties of the occasion with intentional, childish play.

It is important to make this clear, in order to prevent the impression that in the events leading up to the complex irony at 508e-509a, Socrates is anything other than totally serious and quite sincere. For if nonchalant mockery is the name of the game at 489d-e, what is to stop one from supposing that same spirit of disregard applies to, and explains, that extremely paradoxical admission of ignorance later on at 508e-509a? In circumstances such as these, a playful, juvenile Socrates only obscures the clue about the meaning of Socratic irony provided for at *Gorgias*

²³ On this, see n. 5 chapter five following.

508e-509a. On the other hand, if there is good reason to suppose that Socrates is entirely sincere in the events leading up to this paradox, then the episode at 489d-e merely stands as an instance in which Socrates tries, but fails, in his usual tactic of exchanging roles with his interlocutor. It would simply be indicative of the difficulties he sometimes encounters when contending with hostile interlocutors.

In this regard, the full substance of Socrates' reply to Callicles' accusation seems very much to the point:

No it is Zethus, Callicles, by whom you furnished yourself just now to be exceedingly ironical towards me *earlier on* (...πολλᾶ εἰρωνεύου πρὸς με), but come, tell me, whom do you mean by 'the better'?²⁴

Notice that in rejecting the accusation *immediately, in the same breath with no time wasted*, Socrates is very quick indeed to get things back on track with the question at hand. Recall that the topic, immediately prior to the interlude, was Callicles' claim that the just are better than the unjust because they are more powerful, and that Socrates had asked him to clarify what exactly he meant by "better, since you do not mean the stronger" (489d). This request was, as already noted, framed in the context of an offer by Socrates to be Callicles' pupil, an offer that Callicles misconstrued as a mockery. In reintroducing the question exactly as he put it before the accusation, and in the same sentence in which he rejects the supposition that he mocked, it seems that Socrates wanted to waste absolutely no time in getting back to serious discussion. If Callicles misunderstood him, and did not want to try his hand at being the master, so be it. Better have done with this mockery stuff quickly, and get on with the matter at hand. No point in

²⁴ *Gorgias* 489e: same translation as before, simply completed this time, with no additional modifications to Woodhead other than those already noted earlier at n. 6 chapter three preceding.

dwelling on Callicles' misapprehension, thereby giving it sufficient air-time to reenforce the wrong impression, namely that a quintessentially Socratic inclination to switch roles could suddenly become an occasion for mockery. To dismiss the point out of hand, rather than dwell on it, seems like the best way to belie the possibility of thinking that perhaps the conversation is partially juvenile and playful, and that the extremely paradoxical outcome at 508e-509a might just be another example, something to be taken not seriously but lightly. Socrates' reply in full, to the accusation of mockery, seems to indicate that the little interlude at 489d-e was, if anything, just an unfortunate occurrence indicative of the difficulties that he is facing while contending with Callicles. It started with an offer in keeping with his usual outlook, but things quickly went sour and there was the risk that an unperspicacious observer might, as did Callicles himself, get entirely the wrong impression. It is as if Socrates himself took a hand in seeing to it that the complex irony at 508e-509a stands out as the necessary, entirely sincere conclusion of an equally sincere (albeit difficult) conversation.

This difference aside, we are in agreement with Vlastos on the more important point that *Gorgias* 508e-509a is the clearest evidence that Socrates' ignorance is characteristic of complex irony.

The preceding interpretation accomplishes a two-fold purpose. First, it yields a clear instance of Socrates uttering a complex irony. Second, it links this utterance to the popular understanding that Socrates is habitually ironic, but in such a way as to show that so far as he is concerned his irony is more like complex irony than like deceit or mockery. These two aims are not so different from what Vlastos tries to prove in order to attribute an explicit utterance of

complex irony to Socrates.²⁵ But this is not Vlastos' only example. In addition to the foregoing passage from the *Gorgias* (508e-509a), he also turns to Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*, where Alcibiades functions as third-party witness telling us that Socrates' irony is characteristic of complex irony. In what follows, we shall, to complete the picture, trace out the same course (in respect of which, it should be noted, the interpretation will differ from that of Vlastos²⁶ in that instead of arriving at a complex irony consisting of the discrepancy between Alcibiades' ordinary external beauty versus Socrates' extraordinary inner beauty or nobility, the irony in question will turn more fundamentally on Alcibiades' recognition that despite Socrates' inability to define beauty or goodness as such his views are still the only ones in the world that make any sense).

ii) *Symposium* 216d-e, 218d-219a

Alcibiades' speech is the last in the *Symposium*, and it differs from all the rest in that instead of praising eros, as all the other speakers have done, he feels compelled to deliver a eulogy to Socrates, the principal object of his affections.²⁷ There are two places in his speech where Alcibiades explicitly calls Socrates ironic. The first occurs at 216d (Alcibiades speaking):

²⁵ Save for the fact that Vlastos has nowhere stated these two aims so explicitly; however, it certainly appears that this is what he tried to accomplish, particularly via his own treatment of Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* (see pp. 33-37, Vlastos 1991; also, regarding the difference between Vlastos' approach and the present one, namely that Vlastos emphasizes the nature of the erotic link between Socrates and Alcibiades whereas here the emphasis is on irony in relation to the nature of Socrates' ignorance, see n. 33 following).

²⁶ Both because the current presentation will be more detailed, based on more extensive citations and discussion of the relevant texts, and, as noted at n. 33 following, because here the focus is more squarely on Socrates' irony in relation to the knowledge and ignorance of how to improve others, rather than on knowledge and ignorance in regard to the apprehension of beauty.

²⁷ Because, he explains, he cannot talk about love without talking about Socrates; he is so besotted, the two have become indistinguishable so far as he is concerned (see *Symposium* 214c-d). However inadvertently, Alcibiades has understood the point of Diotima's teaching that love *is* the persona of Socrates, the two being the same because Socrates is the closest thing there is to its ideal manifestation in humanity.

Notice...how Socrates is attracted by good-looking people (τῶν καλῶν), and how he hangs around them, positively gaping with admiration, and again, how he is altogether ignorant (ἀγνοεῖ πάντα) and knows nothing (οὐδὲν οἶδεν), while the appearance is otherwise (ὡς τὸ σχῆμα αὐτοῦ)...he perseveres his whole life in being ironical (εἰρωνευόμενος, 216e4) and playing the child towards his fellow-man.²⁵

At first glance, it may appear that Alcibiades is simply repeating the popular assumption, as did Thrasymachus and Callicles once, that Socrates' irony is merely a life-long habit of deception, perhaps even mockery. Indeed, this has been a popular view amongst scholars, apparently themselves subscribing to the popular notion that this is the meaning of Socratic irony generally.²⁶ However, this does not square with Alcibiades' admissions, subsequent to his realization that Socrates would have nothing to do with him as a corporeal lover (219c), that 1)

²⁵ *Symposium* 216d-e; translation is that of Michael Joyce (Hamilton and Cairns) save for the following modifications: 1) for καὶ αὐτὸς ἀγνοεῖ πάντα καὶ οὐδὲν οἶδεν, ὡς τὸ σχῆμα αὐτοῦ (216d4-5), "and again, how he is altogether ignorant and knows nothing, while the appearance is otherwise" in place of Tredennick's "Then again, he loves to appear utterly uninformed and ignorant..." and 2) for εἰρωνευόμενος δὲ καὶ παίζων πάντα τὸν βίον πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διατελεῖ (216e4-5), "he perseveres his whole life in being ironical and playing the child towards his fellow-man" in place of Tredennick's "he spends his whole life playing his little game of irony, and laughing up his sleeve at all the world." In both cases, the object is to maintain a neutral attitude toward the irony in question, not jumping the gun with the assumption that it is playful or whatever, but rather letting meaning come out in the accompanying interpretation (see n. 29 following).

²⁶ E.g., as already noted, Joyce's (Hamilton and Cairns) "he spends his whole life playing his little game of irony, and laughing up his sleeve at all the world." Also, Lamb (Loeb): "he spends his whole life in chaffing and making game of his fellow-men;" and Jowett (*The Works of Plato*): "mankind are nothing to him: all his life is spent in mocking and flouting at them." See also Vlastos' summary of the tradition, pp. 33-34 (1991). But note, too, that a counterproposal--i.e., that Socrates is not habitually deceptive because, if he is totally honest, he has no choice but to express his knowledge and ignorance ironically--is provided for via *Symposium* 218d-219a, to be discussed shortly. But the traditional interpretation becomes suspect even sooner, in respect of Alcibiades' perplexity (ἠπόρουσεν) at 219e3. If Alcibiades is perplexed about Socrates, surely that must mean that he finds something seriously unsettling about the man, that he takes Socrates seriously, perhaps seriously enough to doubt that his irony can be accounted for simply as the indulgence of deceit or mockery (cf. pp. 139ff chapter five following). Another point: so long as Alcibiades is perplexed about Socrates, it doesn't seem likely that he would be prescient enough to pronounce the exact sense of Socrates' irony, i.e., to say that it is deceit or mockery precisely. That would explain his rather more stumbling attribution of a different sort of irony at 218e-219a. Although he does not fully understand, he does know it isn't just all mockery or deceit. He provides enough doubt about that, and enough clues about some other meaning, to make complex irony look like a good possibility.

Socrates ultimately made him feel “perplexed” or “at a loss” (ἠπόρουσιν).³⁰ and 2) Socrates’ words, enigmatic though they be, are the only ones in the world that make any sense (222a). We have already seen that Socrates himself experiences perplexity when confronted with the revelation that he is a wise man his ignorance notwithstanding.³¹ Alcibiades shares the feeling apparently, except that in his case the source of confusion is not a divine revelation but rather Socrates himself: and, somehow, he thinks it makes sense to be perplexed by the words of a man who is fundamentally ironic.³²

These sentiments are quite different from those of a Thrasymachus or a Callicles, who find that Socrates does not make any sense but are nevertheless quite certain that he is habitually deceptive (let us not forget, however, that we saw Socrates taking issue with the latter accusation). When Thrasymachus and Callicles accused Socrates of being ironical, the meaning was, in the former case, that in reality Socrates is knowledgeable but deliberately chooses to appear ignorant, and, in the latter case, that he is not in fact given to relinquishing his authoritative, leading role to his interlocutor. There is some similarity between Alcibiades and Thrasymachus. Like Thrasymachus Alcibiades also thinks that there is an ironic discrepancy between knowledge and ignorance on the part of Socrates. However, Alcibiades differs in that he seems to know he is not prescient enough to pronounce whether this means that Socrates is

³⁰ *Symposium* 219e

³¹ I.e., *Apology* 21b, discussed just above.

³² As Paul Shorey (1933) has observed, despite proclaiming that Socrates “lifelong irony” is a “pretense of ignorance...a satyric trait,” Alcibiades himself recognizes “a deep seriousness beneath it all...Alcibiades has seen the images of the gods within” (p. 196).

also deceptive. For the first time, we have someone other than Socrates hinting that the characteristic Socratic irony is not fundamentally some kind of lie.³³

But if Socrates' dalliance with pretense is not deliberate deception, how exactly is he ironic? Alcibiades' speech continues--with a candid description of his attempt to seduce Socrates, ostensibly so that in return for the gift of his own physical attractions he might enjoy the advantage of whatever it was that Socrates did know (217a). All of Alcibiades' wives proved to be entirely fruitless, however, and eventually in an apparent last-ditch effort to stave off total defeat he explained to Socrates that

...nothing is of more importance to me than that I become the best, and in this regard I think there is no partner/accomplice (συλλήπτορα) more capable than you. (218d)

Thence comes Socrates' reply, reproduced by Alcibiades with the surprisingly prescient prefatory remark that we are about to witness a typical Socratic irony first hand:

He heard me out, and then said with that characteristic ironical simplicity (μάλα ἔιρωνικῶς καὶ σφόδρα ἑαυτοῦ τε καὶ εἰωθότως, 218d5-6) of his, My dear Alcibiades, I've no doubt there's a lot in what you say, if you're right in thinking that I have some kind of power that would make a better man of you, because in that case you must find me so extraordinarily beautiful (κάλλος) that your own attractions (εὐμορφίας)³⁴ must be quite eclipsed. And if you're trying

³³ Note that in the current interpretation, and in what follows, the focus is on Socratic irony as a discrepancy between knowledge and ignorance. This differs somewhat from Vlastos' interpretation which focuses more on the features of love and beauty as they pertain, respectively, to Socrates and Alcibiades--i.e., true love and beauty fall within the scope of Socrates' sense of moral certainty but beyond the province of his ability to know for sure, and Alcibiades' speech inadvertently makes this clear as a consequence of his misguided attempt to barter physical attractiveness for an inner wisdom which, Socrates says, was never there to begin with (see pp. 36-37, Vlastos 1991). The main reason for the difference in approach at this point is to keep the present topic of 'complex irony' centred on the discrepancy between knowledge and ignorance, and to avoid having it confused with the subject-matter of eros, or the particular knowledge (beauty) coincident with the apprehension of oneself as eros. This difference notwithstanding, however, the present interpretation still agrees with Vlastos that εἰρωνευόμενος, at 216d, cannot mean deceit (cf. pp. 33-43, Vlastos 1991).

³⁴ Having to do with the visible beauty of form (Liddell and Scott), εὐμορφίας refers to Alcibiades' apparent physical beauty, which Socrates is contrasting against κάλλος, beauty or goodness as such.

(ἐπιχειρεῖς) to barter your own beauty for the beauty (κάλλος ἀντι κάλλους) you have found in me, you're driving a very hard bargain, let me tell you. You're trying (ἐπιχειρεῖς) to exchange the semblance of beauty for the thing itself--like Diomedes and Glaucus swapping bronze for gold.³⁵ But you know, my dear fellow, you really must be careful. Suppose you're making a mistake, and I'm not worth anything at all. The mind's eye begins to see clearly when it attempts to see from the pinnacle of sight--but you are still far away from these things (ὅταν ἢ τῶν ὀμμάτων τῆς ἀκμῆς λήγειν ἐπιχειρήῃ· σὺ δὲ τούτων ἔτι πόρρω).³⁶

Alcibiades reports Socrates' warning that the attempt to barter beauty for beauty, his external charms for Socrates inner merit, could prove to be disappointing because in reality Socrates might be quite worthless. In this context, the verb ἐπιχειρή is significant. Alcibiades is trying to obtain a greater abundance of beauty by wooing Socrates. But he does not understand the significance of struggling to realize value in his own right. Instead of making the difficult attempt to learn about beauty and goodness with some initiative of his own, he simply wants to appropriate them from Socrates. His confusion is his failure to realize that goodness cannot simply be appropriated as if it were already there, ready-to-hand for the plucking. He is too caught up with appearances and he does not understand the importance of struggling for the sight of the mind, for a kind of comprehension which begins to sharpen only when the eyes cease to

³⁵ A reference to Homer's *Iliad*, Bk. VI, 232-236, where Glaucus foolishly "exchanged with Diomedes golden armour for bronze, a hundred oxen's worth for the value of nine" (see p. 123; *Homer: The Iliad*, translated by E.V. Rieu, Penguin Books 1950).

³⁶ *Symposium* 218d-219a: translation is that of Joyce (Hamilton and Cairns) save for two emendations: 1) "with that *characteristic* ironical simplicity of his" rather than "with that ironical simplicity of his" for μάλα ἐίρωνικῶς καὶ σφόδρα ἐαυτοῦ τε καὶ εἰωθότως (218d6-7), thus accounting somewhat more literally for εἰωθότως (adverb of εἶωθα, for which Liddell and Scott give "in customary wise, as usual"), in order to make it clear that whatever Alcibiades thinks Socrates' irony means, he is reporting what he believes to be a characteristic example; and 2) for the last two lines, 219a3-4, ὅταν ἢ τῶν ὀμμάτων τῆς ἀκμῆς λήγειν ἐπιχειρήῃ· σὺ δὲ τούτων ἔτι πόρρω, "The mind's eye begins to see clearly when it attempts to see from the pinnacle of sight--but you are still far away from these things," the idea being to capture the sense of ἐπιχειρή and so, after the fashion of Lamb (Loeb), to indicate that Socrates thinks Alcibiades is as yet quite unaccomplished rather than, as Joyce has it, that he is. Cf. Lamb's "but you are a long way yet from that time" versus Joyce's "and I fancy yours are still pretty keen." πόρρω seems to be the source of the difference between Lamb and Joyce. But see Liddell and Scott on πρόσω, of which πόρρω is a late Attic form: an adverb of place or time, the sense of which is 'distance from' more than 'nearness to' something. That would make Lamb's translation preferable.

focus exclusively on what is immediately apparent and more easily perceived. In this regard, the verb ἐπιχειρέω, “to put one’s hand on a thing or to a work, to work at, attempt, endeavour, make an attempt on.”³⁷ seems significant--i.e., ἐπιχειρεῖς at 218d6 and ἐπιχειρή at 219a4. If Alcibiades really understood Socrates, he would know it is misguided simply to attempt a trade of apparent for true beauty. Instead, he needs to understand that beauty and goodness have to be worked out, discussed, and struggled for in one’s own right (doubtless in difficult, elenctic conversations so far as Socrates is concerned³⁸). In this regard, consider *Phaedo* 69a-b, where Socrates advises Simmias that it is not right to attempt to trade “one degree of pleasure or pain or fear for another, like coins of different values.” Rather, he says:

There is only one currency for which all these tokens of ours should be exchanged, and that is wisdom. In fact, it is wisdom that makes possible courage and self-control and integrity (ἀνδρεία καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ δικαιοσύνη) or, in a word, true goodness (ἀληθῆς ἀρετῆ), and the presence or absence of pleasures and fears and other such feelings makes no difference at all, whereas a system of morality which is based on relative emotional values is a mere illusion, a thoroughly vulgar conception which has nothing sound in it and nothing true (τε καὶ οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς οὐδ’ ἀληθές).³⁹

³⁷ Liddell and Scott (1995)

³⁸ Cf., e.g., *Protagoras* 361c-e, where Protagoras eventually admires a Socrates who, instead of delivering a decisive account of virtue, has finished off a long, difficult discussion about virtue by saying that he is all confused and all the more determined to continue inquiring about it; also *Laches* 194b where, in response to Laches’ admission not to know what courage is, Socrates advises, “But, my dear friend, should not the good sportsman follow the track, and not give up?” This is the sort of example Alcibiades needs to model. Socrates cannot deliver on anyone’s expectations to be instructed as if he already had the knowledge, the fulfilment, they desire. Rather, they need to realize as he does how imperative it is to struggle for fulfilment.

³⁹ Regarding ἀληθῆς ἀρετῆ, translated by Hugh Tredennick (Hamilton and Cairns) as “true goodness,” and τε καὶ οὐδὲν ὑγιὲς οὐδ’ ἀληθές, “nothing sound and nothing true,” ἀληθῆς has the sense of “true” as opposed to “false” (ψευδής). Accompanied by the article this becomes “the truth” as with τὰ ἀληθῆ or in the neuter τὸ ἀληθές. Cf. the sentence immediately following the present citation (69b-c): “The true moral ideal (τὸ ἀληθές), whether self-control or integrity or courage (καὶ ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ δικαιοσύνη καὶ ἀνδρεία) is really a kind of purgation from all these emotions (τῶ ὄντι ἢ κάθαρσις τις τῶν τοιούτων πάντων), and wisdom itself is a sort of purgation (καὶ αὐτῆ ἡ φρόνησις μὴ καθαρμός τις ἦ). In this context at least, the notion of truth seems to be similar to that of virtue on the criterion that both signify catharsis, overcoming a pseudo relativistic or emotive morality with a true morality based on sound-minded wisdom (σωφροσύνη). (See Liddell and Scott on ἀληθής;

What is remarkable, however, is that Alcibiades' lack of prescience regarding Socrates' inability to provide what he was looking for is no obstacle to his having an accurate presentiment about the meaning of Socrates' irony. However inadvertently, despite his confused hope that Socrates could be like some sort of magic formula capable of satisfying his yearning to become better, he manages to notice that Socrates' ignorance, his professed inability to provide beauty on the spot, is not a deceit. For Socrates' words are still the only ones that make any sense (222a), and Alcibiades does think that Socrates is the best person with whom to associate in order to become better (218d). Add to that Alcibiades' report of Socrates referring to himself as worthless, and it we have, once again, an indication of complex irony. Clearly Socrates is not worthless in the full sense of the term. He does make sense, and he does inspire Alcibiades to want to become better. Socrates is ironic, therefore, in the sense of complex irony. He both does and does not have the ability to improve Alcibiades. On the one hand Alcibiades presents Socrates as the best man there is, and his best hope to become better (218d). On the other hand, however, he presents a Socrates who takes hope away, disclaiming his ability with the warning that he is worth nothing (218e-219a).⁴⁰ In calling this disclaimer a characteristic irony of Socrates, while at the same time stubbornly maintaining that Socrates is far from worthless, Alcibiades has presented a Socrates' whose irony is complex irony; a Socrates, that is, who both is and is not possessed of the ability to make someone else better. For all his confusion,

regarding wisdom and $\sigma\omega\phi\rho\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta$ as the antidote to $\acute{\alpha}\phi\rho\sigma\upsilon\nu\eta$, "senselessness," see pp. 167ff section II.v chapter five following.)

⁴⁰ In view of the way this disclaimer seems reminiscent of *Apology* 23a-b and, as observed earlier (see, e.g., pp. 95, 98ff preceding), that Socrates is always nothing--i.e., knows nothing--only with regard to some specific object, one should note that in this instance it is beauty/goodness as such which are beyond his ken.

Alcibiades was prescient enough to recognize and publically announce this as *the* characteristic Socratic irony.

CHAPTER FIVE

Complex Irony and Socrates' Goodness

I: The possibilities and limitations of complex irony

i) The significance of complex irony

Regardless whether it is thought of as a pedagogical device, deceit, mockery, or complex irony, all of the preceding descriptions of Socratic irony have in common the supposition that Socratic irony occurs because of the way Socrates *speaks* about his ignorance. That is, when Socrates disclaims moral knowledge, what he says is not literally true: in reality he means to say that he is *not* ignorant.

In literary criticism, the standard term for such irony is "verbal irony," described by M. H. Abrams as "a statement in which the speaker's implicit meaning differs sharply from the meaning that is ostensibly expressed."¹ Sometimes, Abrams remarks, such irony is quite simple, straightforward, and not difficult to spot, the circumstances in which it occurs providing ample clues about the apparent versus real meaning of what is said.² At other times, however, it is

¹ p. 90; Abrams (1985). Also, cf. pp. 215-216; Laurence Perrine (1974).

² Cf. p. 31; Vlastos 1991): "In 'simple' irony what is said just isn't what is meant: taken in its ordinary commonly understood, sense the statement simply is false." Such irony typically entails deliberate deception. According to Vlastos, the "intention to deceive" would have been the original meaning of irony (*erōnia*) for ancient Greeks. In this regard, see Burnet (1911, n. 5 pp. lv-lvi): "The proper meaning of εἴρων is 'sly', 'cunning', *malin*, and εἴρωνεῖα is not regarded as exactly a good quality. The Scots words 'canny' and 'pawky' [cunning, sly] express something similar. Demosthenes speaks of it as a bad trait in the Athenian character (*Phil.* i. 7, 37)." Vlastos

...very complex: the meaning and evaluations may be subtly qualified rather than simply reversed, and the clues to the ironic counter-meaning under the surface statement may be indirect and unobtrusive. That is why recourse to irony by an author carries an implicit compliment to the intelligence of readers, who are invited to associate themselves with the author and the knowing minority who are not taken in by the ostensible meaning. That is also why many ironists are misinterpreted and sometimes...get into serious trouble with the obtuse authorities. Following the intricate and shifting maneuvers of great ironists like Plato....is an ultimate test of skill in reading between the lines.³

To understand the distinction between simple and complex verbal irony in the present context, we need only remind ourselves of the difference between the standard, dictionary definition of Socratic irony, and Vlastos' far more sophisticated concept of 'complex irony.' The gist of the standard view is that Socrates' protestations of ignorance are fundamentally a lie: ostensibly he does not have moral knowledge though in reality he does.⁴ But understood as complex irony, Socrates' protestations of ignorance are not simply false. Rather, they are both false and true, because Socrates is articulating two different senses of knowing, informing those perspicacious enough to understand him that while he is convinced he is right that there is such a thing as moral knowledge, he cannot assure anyone, not even himself, that his convictions are undeniably true and sensible. By recognizing this important difference between simple and complex verbal irony, Vlastos was able to correct the misinformed, standard view, still current in most dictionaries and still pervasive throughout the scholarship, that Socratic irony is but a pretense of ignorance.

agrees, with one important exception. Unlike Burnet, he does not believe Socrates' opponents. With Socrates, the traditional meaning of the word changed, the "run-of-the-mill *sophistike* practiced by ordinary sophists" becoming, with Socrates, the more "complex irony" whereby Socrates both did and did not mean what he said (pp. 23, 29, 31). (Further to this, regarding the attribution of deception to Socrates by hostile detractors, see n. 46, chapter two preceding.)

³ pp. 91-92; Abrams (1985)

⁴ See p. 49 preceding.

In this regard, the most salient feature of complex irony is that Socrates is no longer presumed to be guilty of deceit when he disclaims moral knowledge. As Vlastos has put it, there is no longer any reason to suppose that Socrates is guilty of “willful misrepresentation.”⁵

In chapter two, we saw that if Socratic irony means that Socrates lies about what he thinks, saying that he does not have moral knowledge when in fact he does, then he violates the stipulation such as at *Gorgias* 495a-b, for example, that one must not speak contrary to what one thinks in discussions about morality--or about ‘the right way to live,’ in Vlastos’ parlance.⁶

However, if Socrates is sincere when he disclaims moral knowledge, then complex irony saves him from the damnable inconsistency that goes along with supposing, as with the traditional view, that he withholds his knowledge while at the same time believing that he should tell the truth, saying what he really thinks. If Socrates’ irony is a simple verbal irony, then his protestations of ignorance are simply false and he is lying about the fact that he thinks he does have moral knowledge. But if Socrates’ irony is complex irony, then Socrates is truthfully saying both that he does and that he does not have moral knowledge: on the one hand he is

⁵ p. 27; Vlastos (1991); this, in fact, is one reason why Vlastos is so interested in the possibility that Socrates indulged in mockery with Callicles at *Gorgias* 489d-e. If mockery was the name of the game, then the *double intent* in question is of such an obvious kind it has to be distinguished from the pretense, deceit, or shamming at *Republic* 337a: it has “metastasized into irony” (p. 28), and therefore bears a striking resemblance to “complex irony” in that it is innocent of deceit (see pp. 24ff). However, surely mockery should be distinguished from complex irony on a more fundamental criterion, namely that it is not characteristic of the complex situation in which Socrates is serious in saying, both, that he is and is not ignorant, or is and is not knowledgeable. For one thing, it is still the case that what is said is not what is meant. That makes mockery look more like a simple irony--what is said isn’t what is meant, and the statement is literally false (p. 31 Vlastos 1991). Furthermore, if Socrates indulges in mockery, as Vlastos supposes he does at *Gorgias* 489d-e, he obfuscates a rather important personal trait, his willingness in principal to exchange roles with an interlocutor. As chapter three preceding argued, this is too important a situation in which to play such juvenile games: in which regard it is fortunate for Socrates that he does not mock--i.e., if the argument of chapter three concerning *Gorgias* 489d-e is correct, namely that Callicles may think mocking is going on but that there is no reason to suppose Socrates thinks the same, then in this situation Socrates is not mocking or indulging in any kind of irony: he just means he is willing to be the pupil, and he just means that Callicles might have intended to mock him earlier on, at 485eff.

⁶ See pp. 53ff preceding.

attesting that he has strong convictions about what the knowledge of virtue should consist of, while on the other hand he is saying that he does not have the knowledge of virtue itself, the knowledge by which he might be able to prove that his convictions are true.

In the two sections immediately following we shall consider, respectively, first the limitations and then the possibilities afforded by the insight that Socrates' ignorance is characteristic of a complex irony. From this, we shall then be in a position to observe, in part two of this chapter, that Socrates can be considered good because of his irony. On the one side, Socrates' irony expresses epistemic deficiency. In that regard, it is still the case that he fails to measure up to his own ultimate expectations about goodness. On the other side, however, his irony does allow for a kind of moral certainty that prevents him from being completely without any moral expertise. It is on the strength of his moral intuitions, rather than moral knowledge as such, therefore, that we shall conclude that Socrates may have been right to consider himself a good man.

ii) **Limitations imposed by complex irony**

Complex irony is of limited value for explaining SG to the extent that we now know Socrates really does lack a definitive moral expertise. For although it is no longer a given that he is guilty of dissembling about what he knows and does not know, the fact that he is so brilliantly honest about the scope and limits of his knowledge means that he still fails his own ultimate standard of goodness. He still lacks precisely that knowledge which he believes one must have in order to be sure that one is good. That is, he lacks the moral knowledge (ἐπιστήμη) or moral

craftsmanship (τέχνη)⁷ consisting of the knowledge of good and evil that he thinks makes one better, capable of being virtuous not only with regard to just one virtue or another but with regard to all the virtues;⁸ and he also lacks the “political art” (πολιτική), analogous to the trainer of gymnastics (γυμναστική) and the practitioner of medicine (ιατρική), that makes one capable of ensuring the spiritual and intellectual well-being of others, and the political solidarity and well-being of the polis.⁹ The very fact that Socrates is sincere about his ignorance means that he is not in violation of the requirement to speak honestly. However, his honesty comes at the expense of the robust sort of knowledge by which he believes anyone can be good, but without which he believes there is no way to be sure of being good.¹⁰

Hence Socrates’ admission in the *Apology* (23a-b) that his mere human wisdom makes him ‘worth nothing’ in respect of divine wisdom; and his warning to Alcibiades in the *Symposium* (218d-219a) not to miss noticing that Socrates himself is of limited help to satisfy Alcibiades’ yearning to be made better. If mere human wisdom were a sufficient indicator of what Socrates thinks moral knowledge should consist of, there would be no need for him to have persisted as he did in professing his ignorance. Rather, he could have said something like ‘divine wisdom escapes me, as it does everyone else who is honest enough to admit it, but no matter; we

⁷ See *Gorgias* 506d, previously discussed at pp. 15ff chapter one about when ἐπιστήμη and τέχνη appear to be synonyms. Keep in mind, however, the more general argument following in that chapter, showing that the synonymity rests on the analogy with medicine and gymnastics. It isn’t just any τέχνη that’s equivalent to ἐπιστήμη. It has to be that ever-elusive *moral* τέχνη.

⁸ Regarding the knowledge of virtue as the knowledge of good and evil sufficient to make one better, see e.g., *Protagoras* 352c-d, *Gorgias* 460b-c, *Charmides* 169d-e, *Euthydemus* 281a-b; that this makes one capable of being wholly virtuous, possessing not just one virtue or another but all the virtues, *Protagoras* 329c, 330a, 331a-b, 332b-333c; *Gorgias* 507b-c; *Laches* 198c-d, 199c-d, e.

⁹ *Protagoras* 357b; *Gorgias* 518e, 519a

¹⁰ See *Protagoras* 360e-361b; *Laches* 194d; *Charmides* 164a.

can be perfectly satisfied that human wisdom is good enough to do the job.’ Instead, however, he remains essentially unsatisfied. As we have seen elsewhere, while Socrates wants to achieve the knowledge of goodness, he is always forced to settle for opinions.¹¹ In this regard, consider the following exchange from the *Meno*. The topic is right opinion (ὀρθὴ δόξα, 97b4) versus knowledge (ἐπιστήμη, 97b4-5). Socrates proposes to Meno:

So right opinion is something no less useful (οὐδὲν ἥττον ὠφέλιμόν) than knowledge (ἐπιστήμη).

And Meno replies:

Except, Socrates, that the man with knowledge (ὁ τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχων) would *always* hit the mark (ἀεὶ ἂν ἐπιτυχᾶνοι) while the man with right opinion (τὴν ὀρθὴν δόξαν) would hit the mark *at one time but not at another* (τοτὲ μὲν ἂν τυγχᾶνοι, τοτὲ δ’ οὐ).¹²

In the ensuing discussion, Socrates admits that when true opinion results in actions that are good, “right opinion is no less useful than knowledge, and the man who has it is no less useful than the one who knows.” However, this is only true in a very practical sense, where it just happens to be the case that one has gone right and not wrong.¹³ True opinion is not itself a

¹¹ See pp. 62, 93ff preceding.

¹² *Meno* 97c: Guthrie’s translation (Hamilton and Cairns) save for modifications to Meno’s reply, to achieve a more literally apparent contrast between the sense in which right opinion is less reliable than knowledge. I.e., the substitution of “...would always hit the mark while the man with right opinion would hit the mark at one time but not at another, for ὁ μὲν τὴν ἐπιστήμην ἔχων ἀεὶ ἂν ἐπιτυχᾶνοι, ὁ δὲ τὴν ὀρθὴν δόξαν τοτὲ μὲν ἂν τυγχᾶνοι, τοτὲ δ’ οὐ (97c6-8). Guthrie has “Except that the man with knowledge will always be successful, and the man with right opinion only sometimes.” Somewhat more literally, Lamb’s (Loeb): “...that he who has knowledge will always hit on the right way, whereas he who has right opinion will sometimes do so, but sometimes not.”

¹³ *Meno* 98c: Vlastos (1991) takes this to mean that knowledge is no longer essential for Socrates, and so that we are now encountering the figure of the middle, more Platonic Socrates, for whom the dictum the ‘unexamined life is not worth living’ was no longer important (p. 125). What seems to militate against this, however, is that Socrates specifies that it is only in cases where opinion actually does guide action aright that it can be considered as good as knowledge. Just as Vlastos says, he is talking about *true opinion*. But this is not to say, as Vlastos concludes, that Socrates is satisfied and has therefore abandoned his attempt to discover the knowledge of virtue. Socrates’ last words in the dialogue indicate otherwise: “...we shall not understand the truth of the matter until, before asking how

reliable enough source of conviction to guarantee every case, nor is it enough for Socrates to be able to ensure that those who have it are able to make others better.¹⁴

We have already seen this problem with regard to the difficulty that Socrates has in convincing Calicles that his opinion that good people are always better off is well-founded. But the problem is even more apparent in the *Apology*. Socrates will not have anything to do with the possibility that he might survive the trial if he agrees either to go into exile (37c-e) or to recant (37e-38a). The success of his defense depends entirely, therefore, on whether he can convince the jury to accept his opinion that his mission to alert others to the welfare of their souls really is the best way to live, the greatest good that has befallen the polis to date.¹⁵ Of course, Socrates did not succeed. He was condemned not exonerated. This did not dissuade him from believing that he was right. Even after being found guilty, he argues that he has every reason to think that he is better off for choosing to live as he did.¹⁶ But Socrates wanted more than this. He wanted his opinion that people are better off, if they live as he does, to be a shared opinion.¹⁷ As convinced as he was that his convictions are right, he had little more success in getting the jury to adopt any of them in the *Apology* than he had in convincing Calicles in the *Gorgias*.

men get virtue, we try to discover what virtue is in and by itself." (Recollection doesn't change this because it isn't knowledge either.)

¹⁴ *Meno* 99b

¹⁵ *Apology* 30a-b and 37e-38a cited and discussed respectively at pp. 130ff and pp. 131ff following.

¹⁶ *Apology* 28b-29b, 41c-d, cited at pp. 150ff following; Socrates' fate is not a bad thing, even though he is destined to die, for two reasons--there is no reason to fear death and he believes that he has lived well.

¹⁷ See *Apology* 23a-b, cited and discussed at pp. 102ff preceding; Socrates was the paradigm of human wisdom, an example by which the oracle said in his name what everyone should be capable of.

While Socrates firmly believes that “knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion,”¹⁸ he is also acutely and honestly aware that it alone is not a reliable guide for action. Hence, in the *Meno*, he maintains, just as he did in the *Protagoras* (320b), that virtue cannot be taught (99b, 99e-100a). Rather, it comes about, if it comes at all, by means of “divine dispensation” (θεία μοίρα).¹⁹ an idea which in the *Meno* means “the spontaneous recovery of knowledge,” otherwise termed “recollection.”²⁰ Other than that, there is only true belief or right opinion (ὀρθῆ δόξα, 97b-4).²¹ Socrates’ complex irony is a denial of true knowledge that allows for moral certainty at best. As such, it allows for a kind of self-knowledge, the kind of knowledge which, Socrates explains in the *Charmides*, enables one to be aware both of what one knows and what one does not know (172b-d). Socrates does go so far as to suggest that such knowledge might be equivalent to the virtue of “temperance” (σωφροσύνην, 172b1, c1); and he even toys with the idea that such wisdom/temperance might be a “great thing,” good enough for “the conducting of government in homes and cities” (172d). In the end, though, he remains essentially unsatisfied because, valuable as such intuitions are, they are not enough to ensure his

¹⁸ *Meno* 97e-98a: “True opinions are a fine thing and do all sorts of good so long as they stay in their place, but they will not stay long. They run away from a man’s mind; so they are not worth much until you tether them by working out the reason....That is why knowledge is something more valuable than right opinion. What distinguishes one from the other is the tether.”

¹⁹ *Meno* 99e6, 100b2-3

²⁰ *Meno* 85d

²¹ Cf. n. 63 p. 165, Penner (1992) who takes “the *Meno* to be ironic in its suggestion that there could be virtue based on true belief rather than knowledge.” Also p. 114, Vlastos’ (1991), the distinction between knowledge and “justifiable true belief;” and p. 69, Santas (1979), “Socrates repeatedly says that he does not know the answers to these questions [i.e., “what is virtue?” “is virtue teachable?”], and there is no reason to doubt this, especially when we remember that he distinguishes between knowledge and true opinion or belief, so that his ‘I don’t know’ does not exclude ‘I have a belief or opinion or hypothesis’.” Although only Vlastos is explicit in calling this complex irony, the common factor is that in all three cases Socrates claims knowledge in one sense (the weak sense of opinion or true belief) while disclaiming it in another (the strong sense of knowledge, ἐπιστήμη).

belief that "whoever acts knowledgeably would be acting well and would be better off" (173d). Complex irony allows for a kind of human wisdom consisting of the self-knowledge whereby one admits of what one knows but also what one does not know. However, because such wisdom is not up to the task of explaining exactly what moral knowledge is, and why it supposedly guarantees results each and every time, it does not satisfy the Socratic requirements concerning the knowledge of virtue as such. As brilliant and as economical an admission of the discrepancy between human and divine wisdom as it is, therefore, the complex irony yielded by a Socratic inquiry still means that Socrates does not in fact measure up to the standard of a thorough-going knowledge of virtue.²²

Even though Vlastos is not directly concerned with anything like the problem of Socrates' goodness (SG) as it is conceived of here, he is by no means unaware that there is a problem in this area. In concluding his latest version of his discussion of Socratic irony, he states:

...in the course of this inquiry I stumbled upon something I had not reckoned on at the start:...Socrates could have deceived without intending to deceive. If you are the young Alcibiades...you are left to your own devices what to make of his riddling ironies. If you go wrong and he sees you have gone wrong, he may not lift a finger to dispel your error, far less feel the obligation to knock it out of your head. If this were happening over trivia no great harm would be done. But what if it concerned the most important matters....He just says he has no knowledge, though without it he is damned, and lets us puzzle out for ourselves what that could mean.²³

²² Cf. pp. 44-45, Julius A. Elias (1984): "Socratic dialectic....may be thought of as laying down some necessary conditions for the use of the abstract terms characteristically brought under its scrutiny, but as a despairing of the sufficient conditions."

²³ pp. 43-44; Vlastos (1991)

In so many words, this is to say, just as Callicles said already in the *Gorgias*.²⁴ that Socrates is of little use to anyone else when he cannot even help himself. Callicles was indeed a prescient critic. Although he was wrong to think that Socrates' irony was gratuitous mockery, he was quite right to notice that ignorance threatens Socrates' entire philosophical enterprise. While the conception of complex irony brilliantly absolves Socrates from looking like a liar, it makes it even more difficult to defend the Socratic persona and mission in life against such astute criticism.

iii) Possibilities afforded by complex irony

But complex irony does not imply a state of total ignorance on the part of the ironist. It allows for moral intuitions and in so doing actually acknowledges, albeit in a limited essentially unsatisfactory sense, the very wisdom that it disclaims.²⁵ Vlastos' way of putting this was to say, while "there is not a single proposition that he [Socrates] claims to know with certainty," at the same time "there are many propositions he does claim to know."²⁶ Alternatively, Vlastos says, while Socrates' ignorance consists of epistemic uncertainty, it does not mean that he has

²⁴ I.e., as we saw at *Gorgias* 455b-486c, Callicles accused Socrates of childish babblings quite unbecoming to a mature adult, while at 508c-d, Socrates took the criticism to be saying, in effect, that if he is ignorant, then "I am not able to help myself or any of my friends and relations, or to save them from the gravest perils." (See the discussion of this point in the context of Socrates' difficulty in getting Callicles to share with him the view that the good are always better off than the bad, pp. 29ff preceding.)

²⁵ We already saw that Socrates' ignorance does not literally mean that he knows nothing at all about the matter at hand at *Apology* 21b, with regard to his disclaimers about knowing the "good and beautiful," and at *Republic* I 354b-c concerning justice (see pp. 95, 98 ff preceding). We are merely reaffirming this point now to show that Socrates' ignorance, because it is ironic, actually affirms a kind of knowledge that allows for a more limited kind of goodness than that which would be supported by moral knowledge (*ἐπιστήμη*) as such.

²⁶ See p. 32; Vlastos (1991).

disclaimed “moral knowledge absolutely.” Although the “highly fallible method of elenctic argument” necessarily entails the “renunciation of certainty,” in no way does this

...deter Socrates from using that method day in, day out....to vindicate the great theses on whose truth he stakes his life. The chanciness of his method does not cause the least wavering in his conviction that those theses are true.²⁷

When Socrates says he is ignorant, he is not saying that what he believes is untrue. It is not that he is uncertain whether his beliefs are true or not. Rather, as Alan R. Drengson has put it, he is saying that he does not “have knowledge of a certain sort.”²⁸ In other words, instead of implying that what he believes might possibly be false or nonsensical, Socrates’ ignorance implies *that* what he believes is true, but also that he is not able to explain *why* exactly he knows this.²⁹ There is a sense in which Socrates actually affirms the very thing he denies, his ongoing moral certainty diminished not a whit by his perennial epistemic uncertainty.³⁰

²⁷ See pp. 114-115; Vlastos (1991); Vlastos then follows up with these citations from the *Gorgias* (Socrates speaking to Polus): “So I spoke *the truth* when I said that neither I nor you nor any other man would rather do than suffer injustice;” and (regarding “the parallel thesis that to do injustice is *ispo facto* to forfeit happiness”), “Has it not been proved (ἀποδεδεικται) that what I said was *true*?” (Vlastos’ translations, emphases are Vlastos’ own).

²⁸ p. 238; Drengson (1981)

²⁹ The distinction between knowing *that* versus knowing *why*, in relation to Socrates’ ignorance, comes from Brickhouse and Smith (1990; see pp. 173, 177-178).

³⁰ That is to say, as observed already in light of the foregoing discussion of *Meno* 97c (pp. 123ff preceding) he has opinion (δόξα), which he takes to be true opinion (ὀρθή δόξα) but not knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). Vlastos’ characterizes this as “complex irony.” But also see p. 34, Crombie (1963): this “fundamental distinction between *doxa* and *epistēmē*...[the] contrast between two intellectual levels...is very pervasive in Plato’s writings from the *Gorgias* to the *Laws*” (p. 34). Crombie also offers related terms, relevant to this contrast: while the “lower level” of knowledge is generally characterized by *doxa*, “in the *Gorgias* (454, 462-5 and 501) *pistis* (‘conviction’) and *empeiria* (‘experience’) turn up instead;” similarly, while “[*e*]pistēmē is commonly used for the higher level....we also find its near-synonym *gnōsis*, and also such words as *nōēsis* (which rather implies ‘understanding’) and *sophia* (commonly translated as ‘wisdom’)” (p. 35). Via the notion of “two intellectual levels,” Crombie seems to be at least implicitly aware of the kinds of contrasts which Vlastos characterizes and makes explicit as “complex irony.”

Earlier on,³¹ we saw for ourselves that it was Socrates' ability to hold onto his certainty despite even his own strongest doubts that enabled him to be such a master practitioner of the elenchus. Although his own views no less than anyone else's are only a matter of opinion, as opposed to well-founded knowledge, he does not hesitate to say what he thinks; nor does he attempt to prevent his interlocutors from saying what they think as well. Quite the opposite in fact. He stipulates that both he and his interlocutors must say whatever they think. Despite his perennial dissatisfaction with anything less than true, epistemic certainty, Socrates still places a high value on opinion, on the mere 'human wisdom' of which he is capable (*Apology* 23a-b). He understands that one does not need absolute certainty in order to have meaningful discussions about moral knowledge. Socrates is therefore quite willing and able to encourage discussions that are based solely on opinion, and quite justified in thinking that such discussions end coherently just when they end on a commonly shared opinion or sense of certainty--on "justifiable true belief" as Vlastos puts it.³²

The question for us, then, is: Can the importance of opinion or moral intuitions that are characteristic of the limited, human wisdom that Socrates does possess be a basis for saying that he is good, notwithstanding the fact that he still denies having the knowledge without which he seems to think goodness is impossible? In what follows, the answer to this question will be 'yes'

³¹ See pp. 62ff preceding.

³² p. 114. Vlastos (1991): cf. p. 3. Gulley (1962): "The rules of the Socratic method [i.e., the elenchus, Socrates' "question-and-answer method"]...indicate that its aim is to promote consistency of opinion between the speakers. The rules are that there should be no disagreement between questioner and answerer, and that any opinion expressed should not conflict...with any other opinion which is held just as strongly." In this regard, see especially *Crito* 49d, mentioned at n. 32 chapter three preceding. This one object of the elenchus. The other, as Santas (1979) explains, is that Socrates means to alert his interlocutors to what they know and do not know (p. 72). Similarly also, pp. 447-448. Guthrie (1969).

though in a limited sense only, according to a lesser standard of goodness whereby Socrates considers himself to be good because he is better than anyone else, and as good as it is possible for him or anyone else to be given that he is still sure that he does not know all he thinks he needs to know.³³

II: Socrates' imperfect, limited goodness

i) Socrates' insistent devotion to the life of reason

Despite his insistence, in the *Apology*, that the human wisdom of which he is capable is very limited, certainly by no means up to the standard of divine wisdom (20d-e, 23a-b), Socrates does think that he has spent his life in obedience to a divine command and that his service in this regard has been the "greatest good" to date that has befallen the polis:

This, I do assure you, is what my God commands, and it is my belief that no greater good has ever befallen you in this city (οὐδέν...μείζον ἀγαθὸν γενέσθαι ἐν τῇ πόλει) than my service to the God. For I spend all my time going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls, proclaiming as I go, Wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state.³⁴

In this regard, the argument will resemble that of Brickhouse and Smith (1990): although Socrates' "life is clearly deficient," to the extent that he lacks definitive moral knowledge, he is still a good man in that he lives consistently with his convictions. Important too is the fact that he never mistakes his beliefs for definitive knowledge. This makes him "immeasurably better off than the multitude of Athenians, who needlessly labour under a variety of mistaken notions about virtue" (see pp. 173, 175, 177-178). The difference, however, will be that while Brickhouse and Smith have it that Socrates is good but not virtuous--because he doesn't have the knowledge of virtue (p. 177)--the present argument will add that Socrates' beliefs about virtue do allow for a lesser standard of virtue than that which goes along with knowledge as such.

³⁴ *Apology* 30a-b; Socrates' willingness to submit to divine compunction is, according to Brickhouse and Smith, one of a number of important criteria of goodness not undermined by his ignorance. Others include the inspiration from oracles, dreams, divinations, and, above all, the guiding influence of the famous *daimonion* (see, e.g., *Apology* 20eff, 22c, 29d, 31d, 33c, 40a-b)--the latter of which we shall return to shortly, when we consider the manner in which Socrates measures up to the virtue of piety. See pp. 127-128, Brickhouse and Smith (1984); regarding the *daimonion* in particular, pp. 518, 523, Brickhouse and Smith (1986); also pp. 249, 253, Brickhouse and Smith

The divine compunction to spend his life alerting his fellow citizens to the importance of their spiritual or intellectual welfare is, Socrates explains, crucial to the task of promoting individual and collective prosperity. This is, no doubt, the consequence of his belief, which we already witnessed in the *Gorgias*, that the knowledge of virtue is the only reliable guide for the well-considered provision of food, clothing, and shelter for the body, and harbours, ships, walls, dockyards, and revenues for the state (517c-e, 519a).³⁵

Of course, the actual knowledge of good and evil still escapes Socrates. Hence his ignorance, and his admission that human wisdom is no match for the lofty expertise of divine wisdom. The wisdom of which Socrates is capable clearly falls short of his own ultimate expectations about moral knowledge. At the same time, however, his knowledge of the difference between human and divine wisdom denotes an astute self-criticism that he thinks should become the attitude of everyone.³⁶ The task of generalizing such wisdom is Socrates' *raison d'être*. As he explains, at *Apology* 37e-38a, even though he is frequently misunderstood it is the one thing that he cannot desist from, not even at risk to his own life:

Perhaps someone may say, But surely, Socrates, after you have left us you can spend the rest of your life in quietly minding your own business. This the hardest thing of all to make some of you understand. If I say that this would be disobedience to God, and that is why I cannot 'mind my own business,' you will not be convinced by me, by my being ironical (εἰρωευομένῳ).³⁷ If on the other

(1989). Against the idea that Socrates gets real information from such phenomena, however, see chapter six, Vlastos (1991), for whom this is at best an opportunity for Socrates to deploy his critical faculties on some new proposition or intuition: in which case, all of this is secondary to the use of reason. On the *daimonion* in particular, see pp. 170-171; also Vlastos' extensive consideration of the nature of Socrates' daimonic messages in his additional note 6.1, pp. 280-287.

³⁵ See pp. 24ff at chapter one preceding.

³⁶ See *Apology* 23a-b, cited at p. 102 preceding.

³⁷ Translation modified at this point from that of Tredennick (Hamilton and Cairns). The phrase in question is οὐ

hand I tell you that to let no day pass without discussing goodness (περὶ ἀρετῆς) and all the other subjects about which you hear me talking and examining both myself and others is really the very best thing (τυγχάνει μέγιστον ἀγαθὸν ὃν ἄνθρωπῳ τοῦτο) a man can do, and that life without this sort of examination is not worth living (ὁ δὲ ἀνεξέταστος βίος οὐ βιωτὸς ἄνθρωπῳ), you will be even less inclined to believe me. Nevertheless that is how it is, gentlemen, as I maintain, though it is not easy to convince you of it. Besides, I am not accustomed to think of myself as deserving punishment. (37e-38a)

This passage occurs after the verdict of guilty but before the sentence, in a speech during which Socrates is allowed to propose his own penalty.³⁸ hopefully one less severe than the death penalty initially requested by Meletus (36b). One of the most likely possibilities in this regard is that he might escape with his life if he agrees henceforth to desist from his elenctic mission and the philosophical lifestyle for which he is presently being censured. But that would be the greatest evil for Socrates.

This passage is one of the most famous and well-known statements of the Socratic disposition in all the dialogues.³⁹ Elsewhere, in the *Protagoras* (333c) and the *Gorgias* (506a), we saw that for Socrates the elenctic enterprise consists of a kind of cross-examination that puts both the master and his interlocutors equally under review. But now Socrates adds to this his

περίσσοθέ μοι ὡς εἰρωνευομένῳ (38a1), translated here as “you will not be convinced by me, by my thus dissembling,” as opposed to Tredennick’s “you will not believe that I am serious.” Cf. Fowler (Loeb), “jesting and will not believe me:” and Jowett (*The Works of Plato*) “you will not believe that I am serious.” The object with the present more literal rendition is to provide a clear indication, in light of the occurrence of εἰρωνευομένῳ (38a1), that for Socrates it would be fatal to be ironical in this way. We should be reminded of his rejection of this sort of irony at *Republic* 337a. As discussed at p. 64 including n. 48 preceding, if Socrates is habitually ironical in this way, he would be embroiled in the liar’s paradox and everything he says would be suspect. At *Apology* 38a1, he is simply making the point quite explicit.

³⁸ It was allowed by Athenian law that someone found guilty could propose an alternate penalty to the one demanded by the prosecution. The practice is alluded to as well at *Republic* I 337d where, in response to Thrasymachus asking, “if I show you another answer about justice...., a better one, what penalty do you think you deserve?” Socrates says, “Why, what else....than that which it befits anyone who is ignorant to suffer?...to learn from the one who does know.” See n. 1 p. 18, Desmond Lee (1987).

³⁹ E.g., pp. 217-218, Thomas G. West (1979): “Socrates’ most lucid recapitulation in the *Apology*, and indeed anywhere in the Platonic dialogues, of his own way of life” (p. 217).

conviction that a life devoid of this practice of self-scrutiny and the scrutiny of others is simply not a life worth living, neither for himself nor for anyone else. As he says, there is “no greater good” (οὐδέν...μείζον ἀγαθόν, 30a5-6) for humanity than this. So convinced is he that he will not change his mind. Even if he might not be understood or believed, even if he is likely to die, he will not accept the possibilities of exile or recantation. Either of those alternatives would make the Socratic life so conventional, whatever remained would have ceased to be anything recognizably Socratic. All that would be left would be the uninspired routine of the unphilosophical everyman.

Socrates’ *raison d’être*, the “greatest good” (μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, 38a2) of which he is capable, is to encourage ongoing discussions about virtue--as he puts it, “to let no day pass without discussing goodness (περὶ ἀρετῆς)...examining both myself and others” (38a). Come what may, this is the one thing, he insists, that he will never renege on:

And so, gentlemen, I would say, You can please yourselves whether you listen to Anytus or not, and whether you acquit me or not. You know I am not going to alter my conduct, not even if I have to die a hundred times. (30b-c)

Though he lacks the knowledge of virtue, Socrates does not renounce his commitment to the search for knowledge. As Joseph Claude Evans has explained, in this regard Socrates’ life is at the very least totally devoted to the “radical activity of examination and self-examination which is *the source* of human virtue.”⁴⁰ Even though he lacks a cogent set of “moral beliefs,” the human wisdom of which he is capable enables him to demonstrate “the full seriousness of the life devoted to reason.”⁴¹ In this regard, Socrates is capable of understanding that the sort of life he

⁴⁰ p. 107; Evans (1990); emphasis my own

⁴¹ See pp. 91, 107, 109, Evans (1990). Also pp. 170-171, Vlastos (1991): Socrates subjects everything to critical

has lived is an important precondition for the achievement of full-fledged moral knowledge. It is as if, in being totally caught up with the search for the good, he is on rails, in little danger of going astray just because his mind is stuck so firmly to the goal of the good. One might say, therefore, that Socrates possesses a kind of preliminary goodness (as it were) a disposition that functions as a necessary, albeit not wholly sufficient, condition for goodness as such.

Precisely because his ignorance is ironic, Socrates is still capable of some pretty significant moral intuitions. Limited though they may be, those intuitions are still an important source of moral information. They allow for Socrates to be good at least to the extent that he has satisfied some important conditions that have to obtain, if there is to be any hope at all of achieving full-fledged moral knowledge--namely, a willingness to be open to new ideas, a resolution to avoid the conceit of pretending to know more than he does, and a desire to encourage others to adopt the same set of dispositions in their own right. So long as Socrates does not actually have moral knowledge, this is the maximal goodness that is possible for him. What is particularly interesting is that far from being undermined by his ironic ignorance, this sort of goodness *depends on it*. That is to say, in the absence of moral knowledge, coupled with the recognition, nevertheless, that knowledge *is* necessary and sufficient for goodness, the only way actually to be good is to have the sort of disposition that willfully professes ignorance in the form of a complex irony. While Socrates' ignorance still negates the possibility that he can be considered a good man on the basis of knowledge of the good, precisely because this ignorance is expressed as a complex irony, it signifies a moral attitude indicative of the possibility of being

scrutiny, including any divine inspirations or intuitions afforded by his *daimonion*. In this regard, the *daimonion* indicates the extent to which he deploys his critical reason. The scope is virtually unlimited, not even the divine or sacred falls outside its purview.

as good as it is possible for a mere mortal to be. It denotes goodness as a superlative, an absolute comparison relative to the difference between Socrates and the rest of humanity in his time (at least so far as he was acquainted with it). Socrates says this himself, subsequent to finding that the oracle was right, that he was indeed the wisest man of all. Although he did not have godly wisdom, precisely because he recognized this, "it was best for me to be as I was" (*Apology* 22e). If Socrates cannot be considered good on the basis of a thorough-going knowledge of the good, he can at least be thought good via the next best thing where there is nothing better, the fact that his life is overwhelmingly characterized by love of the good.⁴²

In what follows, we shall try to flesh out this general devotion to the life of reason by paying particular attention, first, to the way in which complex irony expresses and relies on the Socratic *aporia* as the fundamental criterion of the disposition towards goodness, and then to the way in which this enables Socrates actually to possess the virtues so far as that is possible for him.

ii) The significance of *aporia*

Aporia is a state of mental unrest, a sense of "embarrassment, difficulty, hesitation, or perplexity,"⁴³ which Socrates experiences, and which his more perspicuous interlocutors sometimes experience as well, whenever yet another inquiry into virtue ends with an admission of ignorance. Socrates' ignorance is ironic, and *aporia* appears to function like an inner

⁴² Cf. pp. 438, 444, Strycker (1966); also, p. 187, Cushman (1976): for Plato it is always the case that "the essential man is one in whom *nous* is controlled by love of essential Being," for so long as true knowledge remains elusive, "[p]lainly, that which distinguishes the philosopher in the first instance is not learning but love of it, not profession of truth, but aspiration for true reality."

⁴³ See Liddell and Scott on *aporia* in regard to Plato (1995, 7th ed.).

expression of this irony. As such, it denotes a kind of “psychological” know-how, as one commentator has put it, whereby Socrates’ overriding understanding of himself is that he is neither totally ignorant nor fully knowledgeable.⁴⁴

As we have seen already, Socrates first experienced *aporia* upon learning that the oracle proclaimed him to be the wisest of men: from the very beginning, he doubted his ability for knowledge, and thus endured a sense of confusion or consternation upon being told that he was in fact the wisest of all.⁴⁵ We also saw Alcibiades confessing to this experience at *Symposium* 219e, when he tried to get intimate with Socrates but ended up confounded and befuddled by Socrates’ aloofness. We are told that Meletus experiences the same thing as a result of Socrates’ cross-examination in the *Apology*. In regard to the first charge, corruption of the youth, Meletus is “tongue-tied and cannot answer” Socrates’ question as to who actually makes the youth better.⁴⁶ Then, in regard to the second charge, which simply specifies the most serious instance of corruption, namely that, specifically, Socrates misleads the youth by encouraging them to adopt his own novel spirituality in favour of state-sanctioned religion.⁴⁷ Socrates concludes his

⁴⁴ MacKenzie (1988): as “the recurrent state of Socrates’ mind” *aporia* is the “psychological dimension” of knowledge for Socrates (pp. 333-339; p. 333 for textual references similar to those provided here). The other dimension is “epistemological,” the elenctic program that specifies the conditions of knowledge and the extent to which Socrates meets those conditions (pp. 331-333). But according to MacKenzie the two come together in Socrates’ disavowal of knowledge, which ultimately reduces everything to the self-knowledge or self-consciousness (she uses these terms disjunctively like this) of the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (p. 337).

⁴⁵ See *Apology* 21b, cited and discussed at pp. 101ff preceding.

⁴⁶ I.e., Socrates speaking (24d6-8): “Speak up and inform them who it is that has a good influence upon the young....[Don’t] you see, Meletus, that you are tongue-tied and cannot answer (Ὁρᾶς, ὦ Μέλητε, ὅτι σιγᾶς καὶ οὐκ ἔχεις εἰπεῖν)?”

⁴⁷ I.e., *Apology* 26b, Socrates speaking: “...tell us, Meletus, in what sense you make out that I corrupt the minds of the young. Surely the terms of your indictment make it clear that you accuse me of teaching them to believe in new deities (δαίμονια καινὰ, 26b5; also see 24c1) instead of the gods recognized by the state (θεοὺς οὓς ἡ πόλις νομίζει, 26c4-5; also 24b9-c1). Is that not the teaching of mine which you say has this demoralizing effect?”

refutation saying, "Meletus, there is no avoiding the conclusion that you brought this charge against me as a test of my wisdom, or else in despair (ἀπορῶν) of finding a genuine offense of which to accuse me."⁴⁸

These are explicit examples, but implicit ones abound as well, such as at *Lysis* 222a-223a, for example, where Socrates shares with Lysis and Menexenus a feeling of foolishness upon realizing that they still consider themselves friends even though all their efforts to define friendship have failed; or at *Laches* 199e-201c, where Socrates, Nicias, Laches, and Lysis all concur that because they have utterly failed to define courage they must all be willing to go back to school no matter how ridiculous this might look for men of their ages. And, in the *Protagoras*, even the great sophist, Protagoras, accepts the experience eventually. Outplayed by Socrates, totally befuddled concerning the question as to what virtue is and whether it can be taught, by the end of the dialogue even the master sophist himself has come on side, applauding Socrates' persistence and way of arguing, and predicting that he will become renowned as a man of wisdom.⁴⁹

In all of these situations, the common factor is that interlocutors who accept the experience of *aporia* typically are not guilty of conceit and do not accuse Socrates of deceit or

⁴⁸ *Apology* 27e3-5: for ἀπορῶν (27e3), cf. Fowler (Loeb), "or because you were at a loss."

⁴⁹ I.e., *Protagoras* 361d-e (Socrates reporting): "I shall applaud your zeal, Socrates, and your way of arguing....and I would not be the least surprised if you should become one of those men famous for wisdom."

mockery when he protests his ignorance.⁵⁰ Rather, they take him seriously enough to be infected with his kind of perplexity. As Socrates explains, at *Meno* 80c-d:

It isn't that, knowing the answers myself, I perplex other people (τοὺς ἄλλους ποιῶ ἀπορεῖν). The truth is rather that I infect them also with the perplexity I feel myself (ἀλλὰ παντὸς μᾶλλον αὐτὸς ἀπορῶν οὕτως καὶ τοὺς ἄλλους ποιῶ ἀπορεῖν). So with virtue now. I don't know what it is.⁵¹

This is quite different from the case of Thrasymachus, who does accept Socrates' aporia to the extent that he thinks Socrates' ignorance is a deception;⁵² nor is it like that of Calicles who,

⁵⁰ This is not to say that the experience can cause moral improvement in and of itself. In the *Apology*, Meletus experiences aporia but there is no evidence that he also accepts it and thereby experiences its corrective function. The reason, Socrates explains (25b-c), is that Meletus doesn't really care whether the indictment is fair (26a-b), nor does he actually care about the state of the youth. See p. 140 n. 8, West 1979, who observes, in light of various forms of μέλω--to be concerned or have a care--no less than six occasions on which Socrates makes it a point of his defense to show that Meletus is not concerned whether the charges are fair: i.e., 24c8, 24d4, 24d9, 25c3 (ἀμέλειαν, μεμέληκεν), and 26b2. The charges are prejudicial, grounded ultimately on what Socrates calls the early charges (18a-e), and against which he defends himself first of all (19b-24b) before getting down to the indictment itself. Insofar as these early charges represent a common prejudice against philosophy, they substantiate the indictment in such a way that it is difficult for Socrates to defend himself. Socrates knows, for example, that the enmity instigated by the wealthy young men of leisure, who practiced Socratic refutation at the expense of their influential forebears, is the real basis of the charge of corruption (23c-d); similarly, the sentiment popularized by Aristophanes in the *Clouds*, that philosophers are sky-hung sophists seeking divinity in the material realms of air and under the earth (19b-c; cf. *Clouds*, pp. 160-161, Rogers 1955), functions as a convenient basis for a charge of atheism (cf. pp. 82, 126-133, West 1979). As Socrates admits, he is facing "stock charges against any philosopher" (23d). He has a bad reputation already, and that's all Meletus needs for a successful prosecution (cf. p. 162, Friedländer 1964). All of which is to say, Meletus isn't seriously affected by the aporia induced at *Apology* 24d and 27e, because he still does not care about taking Socrates seriously. He is sure of his ground and in no way disposed to let aporia be of any real benefit. Socrates can reduce Meletus (or any other interlocutor) to confusion but the rest is not up to him. The other aspect of taking aporia seriously, aside from experiencing befuddlement, is that the interlocutors have to care enough about the issues Socrates raises to doubt themselves at least as much as they do Socrates. That's where it becomes up to the individual.

⁵¹ Could this be the spirit in which one should take Socrates' claim that he is divinely appointed to be like a gadfly, sent to stir a lazy city from its droning (*Apology* 30e-31a)? What this passage from the *Meno* suggests is that Socrates is most provocative for those who take him seriously, not doubting his *aporia* but seeing through it to the consolation of the wisdom that lies beneath. Cf. Jay Farness (1987) who remarks, in regard to the conception of Socrates as gadfly, "to be simultaneously stung and assuaged is a true legacy of the *Apology*" (pp. 41-42).

⁵² I.e., at 337a, Thrasymachus does not believe Socrates when he says "you see it is our lack of ability that is at fault." Rather, he thinks Socrates is contriving to avoid answering questions himself (337d-e). So long as this attitude persists, it is quite unlikely that an interlocutor will take Socrates at his word and wonder at the true sense of an ironic admission like "I know nothing" (354c). Admittedly, Thrasymachus does eventually come on side, although only grudgingly--cf. 352b, "Revel in your discourse, he said, without fear, for I shall not oppose you, so as not to offend your partisans here." At the same time, however, at the end of Book I, he still cannot shake the impression that this is just all "entertainment" for Socrates--i.e., "Let this complete your entertainment, Socrates, at

astute critic that he was, still remained too convinced of his own ideas about justice and about the ineffectiveness of philosophy to doubt himself rather than Socrates, and to presume in respect of that doubt that Socrates was given to indulge in mockery. Contrast this with Alcibiades who took Socrates seriously enough to be perplexed (ἀπόρουσιν, *Symposium* 219e3) and so, despite his confusion, managed to attribute to Socrates a kind of irony which, far from looking like an accusation of deceit or mockery, had the possibility that it could be interpreted as complex irony. Evidently, you first have to be capable of self-doubt, and be willing to take Socrates' ignorance seriously before you can be beneficially affected by it and thereby experience the corrective function of *aporia*.

To experience *aporia* is to experience the helpless ignorance that goes along with the realization that your ideas are not borne out as knowledge (ἐπιστήμη), but are still worthwhile as opinion--so long as one does not make the mistake, as Gorgias did, of supposing that opinion is sufficient grounds to claim moral expertise.⁵³ While *aporia* indicates that one lacks knowledge, it can also be the basis by which one is willing to become an avid student of virtue. Earlier on, in chapter three,⁵⁴ we saw that as the elenctic master Socrates' *modus operandi* was to play the role of the critical teacher so long as his interlocutors were still able or willing to come

the festival of Bendis" (354a). With such an ambivalent attitude, it isn't likely that he is going to understand fully Socrates' concluding profession of ignorance. It's a case of Socrates getting a lot less than he was hoping for. He has successfully refuted Thrasymachus but in this case the bargain doesn't include a wholly sympathetic interlocutor.

⁵³ See *Gorgias* 454e-455a, 460a, discussed at p. 16ff preceding; and compare this with the *Protagoras* 320b, 361b and *Laches* 190b-c (pp. 9ff preceding), where we saw that for Socrates no one is qualified to teach virtue because no one has the requisite knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). This is one of the most important differences between Socrates and the sophists: while they too rely on opinion, only they confuse opinion with knowledge and thereby mistakenly think opinion is good enough to do the job of making others better.

⁵⁴ See pp. 72ff preceding.

forth with opinions that could be tested, but that he tended to relinquish the role of teacher and adopt that of the eager pupil just when ignorance and *aporia* intruded, threatening to spoil the day. In Socrates' case, *aporia* is the indicator of a restless, dissatisfied adherent to the search for the good life. It assures Socrates that he is wise and good at least to the extent that he is innocent of the one sort of wrongdoing that one should always be able to avoid, the "culpable" ignorance of supposing that one knows what one cannot know. This is enough for Socrates to think that he is a better man, someone to whom other should listen and by whom they should be persuaded.

...this ignorance (ἄμαθία), which thinks that it knows what it does not, must surely be ignorance most culpable (ἐπονείδιστος). This, I take it, gentlemen, is the degree, and this the nature of my advantage over the rest of mankind, and if I were to claim to be wiser than my neighbor in any respect, it would be in this-- that not possessing any real knowledge of what comes after death (περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου).⁵⁵ I am also conscious that I do not possess it. But I do know that to do wrong and to disobey my superior (τῷ βελτίονι), whether God or man, is wicked and dishonourable (κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρόν).... (29a-b)

It is "wicked and dishonourable" (κακὸν καὶ αἰσχρόν) to fail to allow oneself to be persuaded by someone better (τῷ βελτίονι). The obvious implication is that it is evil to fail to be persuaded or instructed by Socrates, since, as a result of his investigation of the oracle, he regards himself as the one who is wisest and most capable of promoting the greatest good.⁵⁶

⁵⁵ Regarding περὶ τῶν ἐν Ἅιδου (29b5), literally "about things in Hades;" Fowler (Loeb) has "about the other world," while Jowett (*The Works of Plato*), W. D. H. Rouse (*Great Dialogues of Plato*), and Tredennick (Hamilton and Cairns) all give a more literal connotation of "under world" or "Hades" for Ἅιδου. As we shall see shortly, the literal basis for Socrates' courage is, of course, that he does not know enough to fear death. By the same token, however, he is wisest in the more general sense that he alone does not pretend to have a definitive knowledge about anything otherworldly. See *Apology* 28b-29b cited and discussed at pp. 150ff following.

⁵⁶ As Guthrie (1975) points out, Socrates' "ignorance has its limits" (p. 88). While he lacks knowledge, that is by no means to say that he also lacks conviction or moral certitude. Guthrie's reference points are both *Apology* 38a, and 29b, in the former case of which examination of himself and others is, for Socrates, the "best thing that a man can do," in the latter of which he is innocent in that his ignorance does not extend to the point of culpability, the hopeless state of not even knowing that one doesn't know.

What Socrates really wants to persuade or instruct others about is, of course, the knowledge of virtue. But he does not have that knowledge, just the conviction that there is no greater good for humanity than to devote one's life to making speeches about virtue--in short, his commitment to the dictum that for humanity the unexamined life is not worth living (*Apology* 38a). The immediate effect of this task, for Socrates, is *aporia*, that mental state or 'psychological' know-how by which he knows that he is alert to the discrepancy between human and divine wisdom.

Surely this should remind us of the distinction between knowledge-how and knowledge-that, discussed in chapter one with regard to the craft analogy for moral knowledge.⁵⁷ Knowledge-how was not enough, of course; theoretical expertise has to accompany practical expertise, if one is to be a truly capable moral artisan. However, knowledge-how is certainly necessary, since it indicates that one can indeed put whatever it is that one knows into practice. Perhaps this is the nature of Socrates' special expertise. If he cannot persuade anyone about knowledge, he can at least attempt to foster the same mental state in others, the same attitude that he has about how important it is to keep the idea of the perfect good in the forefront, while not pretending that one is what one is not. For Socrates, this is the same as to be wise and good, at least to the extent that wisdom and goodness are possible given the lack of moral knowledge as such.

In 1961, in an essay entitled "Thinking as a Hobby,"⁵⁸ William Golding described three stages of thinking, a "third-grade" level characteristic of unacknowledged "prejudice, ignorance,

⁵⁷ See pp. 18-20 preceding.

⁵⁸ In *The Norton Reader* (1984), pp. 174-180.

and hypocrisy;" a "second-grade" level characteristic of the ability to spot the conceit in third-grade blindness; and a "first-grade" level characteristic of the ability to move from criticism to the construction of new ideas. (Golding's point is to note, with regret, that first-grade thinking is extremely rare and that the third-grade thinking is overwhelmingly typical.) If we consider this demographic observation in relation to Socrates--solely for the sake of illustration--then the elenctic master would be a competent second-grade thinker who also tenders new ideas in the context of critical discussion in order to achieve knowledge worthy of a first-grade thinker. One might wonder whether we do Socrates any credit by rating him as a predominantly second-grade thinker. However, since Socrates does have his eye out for a first-grade thinker who might enlighten him,⁵⁴ it is clear that he does not consider himself to have achieved the highest grade. Even if he is not a first-grade thinker himself, he does try to become one. Moreover, if *aporia* is indicative of the state of mind of someone like this, then he has a criterion by which he is able to pick out a first-grade thinker. It would be anyone who fails to experience *aporia*, not because of a conceit of knowledge but because this is an interlocutor who manages to stand up to an elenctic

⁵⁴ Cf. the discussion in chapter three about Socrates' willingness to exchange roles with his pupils, a disposition premised, essentially, on a perennial openness to the possibility that there might be someone wiser than he who can therefore enlighten him. Also, consider the same attitude applied in the *Protagoras* to the contention that virtue cannot be taught (319b-320b): if Socrates thinks virtue cannot be taught just because there are in fact no teachers, then clearly he is open to the possibility of someone coming along to prove him wrong. In the *Gorgias* as well, Socrates is on the lookout for a competent rhetorician, someone truly possessed of the "special art" (503d) or "political art" (464b) who, unlike the flatterer given to "shameful mob appeal," knows about and promotes "only those desires the satisfaction of which makes man better" (503a-d). Likewise, see *Meno* 89e. Socrates speaking: "All I can say is that I have often looked to see if there are any [teachers of virtue], and in spite of all my efforts I cannot find them, though I have had plenty of fellow searchers, the kind of men especially whom I believe to have most experience in such matters." This problem occupies a considerable portion of the *Meno*, figuring prominently in the dialogue from 89e right up to the end where, finally, Socrates is forced to conclude that without any real example of "the kind of statesman who can create another like himself," the most that can be said is that "whoever has it [virtue] gets it by divine dispensation (θεῖα μοίρα, 99e6, 100b2-3) without taking thought" (100a).

scrutiny.⁴⁰ Socrates is a second-grade thinker because his ignorance prevents him from substantiating his opinions as knowledge. But he is also one of the best such thinkers because instead of mistaking his opinions for knowledge he holds onto the ideal of becoming better. Since *aporia* signifies the inner certainty that one cannot be virtuous without a thorough-going knowledge of virtue, it denotes the abilities of a second-grade thinker. But it is a good rather than a bad thing that Socrates might only be a second-grade thinker and knower. He can be considered a good man in this regard to the extent that he does not overreach himself and because, in the course of conscientiously professing his lack of knowledge of the good, he is totally dedicated to the next best thing, the search for the good.

Thus far, we have the general contention that Socrates is good, not in the sense that he actually knows the good, but rather in the sense that he has a strong sense of moral conviction that causes him to devote his life to promoting the good in a manner that can reasonably be construed as good. That is, we have found that complex irony is an expression of a fundamental state of *aporia* which functions as grounds for thinking that Socrates is good in that 1) he does not succumb to the conceit of knowledge, and is thereby innocent of the "culpable" ignorance of presuming to know more than he can know (*Apology* 29a-b); 2) he does the best that a man can do when he lives according to his conviction that no greater good has come about for the polis than his divinely inspired mission to alert others to the welfare of their souls and to the importance of inquiring about virtue (*Apology* 30a, 38a); and 3) it is reasonable for him to be resolved not to quit his enterprise to get others to act and think as he does, not even at the risk of

⁴⁰ Cf. p. 341: MacKenzie (1988)--in the state of mind of *aporia* there inherently "rests the ability to pick out first-order knowers."

his own life (*Apology* 30b-c). In this regard, we have offered a quite general sort of argument to the effect that Socrates can be considered a good man, without offering any specific reasons for thinking that he might, albeit in a limited sense, also be considered actually virtuous. But we are now in a position to observe the extent to which, because of rather than despite Socrates' *aporia* and ironic ignorance, the cardinal virtues--justice, courage, piety, temperance, and wisdom--might be said to apply to him as well.

iii) Justice, courage and piety

Justice: Socrates thinks that a proper definition of justice will explain exactly what excellence of the soul it is by which "the just appear wiser and better and more capable of action" (σοφώτεροι καὶ ἀμείνους καὶ δυνατώτεροι πράττειν οἱ δίκαιοι φαίνονται) than "the unjust" (οἱ ἄδικοι).⁶¹ Of course Socrates' ignorance prevents him from being able to proffer the required definition. Nevertheless, that is no obstacle to him thinking of himself, in the *Apology*, as a genuine champion of justice⁶²--nor does it prevent Phaedo from attributing the same designation to him for the sake of posterity.⁶³

What is the basis on which Socrates could think he is just after all, even though he says he does not know what justice is? The answer: he is himself the wisest, best, and most capable of action because he has promoted the "greatest good" (μέγιστον ἀγαθόν, *Apology* 38a2) that

⁶¹ *Republic* I 352b7-8 (see the discussion at pp. 38ff preceding)

⁶² I.e., at *Apology* 32a1, further to explaining why he avoided politics, Socrates self-styled himself as a "true champion of justice" (τὸν τῷ ὄντι μαχοῦμενον ὑπὲρ τοῦ δικαίου). His reasoning? It wouldn't be healthy for a true champion of justice such as he to do politics in the conventional sense. The one time he did get involved, he came very close to a sticky end. The current government fell before Socrates did, it was that close (32bff).

⁶³ See *Phaedo* 118a, p. 1 preceding.

is possible, service to the polis by means of an overriding concern for the good of the polis. Not only that, but in a manner perfectly consistent with his conviction, contrary to what his interlocutors thought in the *Republic* and *Gorgias*, that justice cannot be defined as the rule of might,⁶⁴ or as favouring only one's friends and not one's enemies,⁶⁵ he did this for the sake of everyone, detractors and friends alike. Hence his determined effort to bring the unfriendly Callicles on side in the *Gorgias*,⁶⁶ the equally unsympathetic Thrasymachus on side in the *Republic*,⁶⁷ and, above all, his attempt to convince a predominantly hostile jury in the *Apology* that it is in *everyone's* best interests that he be judged innocent of any wrongdoing, on the grounds that he did not succumb to the greatest evil of all--reneging on his untiring, divinely appointed mission to spend his life alerting others to have a care for their spiritual and intellectual, as well as their material, welfare (30a-b, b-c; 37e-38a). For Socrates, this mission is not merely his own, human invention. It is both human and divine in that it is his own, personal construal as to how best to live according to the revelation of the oracle that he is the wisest of all because he alone understands that human wisdom is not divine wisdom.⁶⁸ That is to say, he gets his sense of moral purpose from the personal conviction that he is attending to the business of the gods.

⁶⁴ Thrasymachus' view at *Republic* I 338c; Callicles' at *Gorgias* 483a-484c.

⁶⁵ Polemarchus' view at *Republic* I 335a

⁶⁶ By correcting what was to him, the mistaken view that justice consists in might is right; see n. 51 chapter one preceding.

⁶⁷ See pp. 59, 93ff preceding.

⁶⁸ See *Apology* 28e, 31a-b, 37e. Concerning Socrates construing it as a matter of divine command that he make himself a public nuisance in this way, esp. 28e: "...God appointed me, *as I supposed and believed* (ὡς ἐγὼ ᾤκηθην τε καὶ ὑπέλαβον), to the duty of leading the philosophical life, examining myself and others...."

In the *Euthyphro*, this business of attending to the gods constitutes a definition of justice of which Socrates approves.

Euthyphro: ...Socrates, I think that the part of justice which is religious and is holy is the part that has to do with the service of the gods (τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν, 12e6-7); the remainder is the part of justice that has to do with the service of mankind (τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 12e7).

Socrates: And what you say there, Euthyphro, to me seems excellent (καλῶς). (12e-13a)

Admittedly, Socrates does go on to express reservations. It is still not clear what exactly “service” (τὴν θεραπείαν, 13a1) means. Craft analogies, such as the care of horses, dogs, or cattle do not provide a satisfactory answer because the gods are supposed to be self-sufficient and should not need any of this sort of service (13a-c). The definition is not decisive because the key notion of “service” is still too unspecified. They know the meaning of the “service of mankind” but that is not an appropriate conception of the notion of “service of the gods.”⁶⁹

But that does not stop Socrates from appealing to basically the same idea in the *Apology*. In the first place, he identifies as “service to the God” (τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λατρείαν, 23c1) his constant attempt to undermine the conceit of people who think they are wise when they are not, so that no one remains clinging to the hopelessly false impression of godly knowledge.⁷⁰

⁶⁹ Cf. pp. 100-102, Versényi (1982); pp. 106-107, Guthrie (1975); also pp. 54-58, R. E. Allen (1970), whose analysis of this “third definition” is that it basically fails since “no satisfactory meaning can be assigned to θεραπεία” (p. 56). Allen is right of course. This is an elenctic argument which does, after all, end aporetically (15c-d). The object here, however, is to see what can be salvaged, to see, that is, in what sense Socrates can still be considered good. That is the spirit in which the present definition is referred to. Together with the *Apology* it helps show a modicum of justice on the part of Socrates.

⁷⁰ The word λατρείαν in the expression τὴν τοῦ θεοῦ λατρείαν, at *Apology* 23c1, denotes, as Liddell and Scott explain, “the state of a hired workman, service, servitude,” or “service paid to the gods, worship.” This differs slightly from the sense of τὴν θεραπείαν at *Euthyphro* 13a1 or, alternatively, τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν at 12e6-7. For θεραπεία Liddell and Scott give “service done to the gods, worship, service done to gain favour, a courting, paying court, fostering, tending, nurture, care, medical treatment, service done to the sick, tending, a body of attendants, suite, retinue.” λατρεία seems to be more suggestive of servility, while θεραπεία includes the

Socrates says in this regard that he tries to “help the cause of god” (τῷ θεῷ βοηθῶν, 23b7). At first glance this may seem like a rather strange affirmation. On the basis of what Socrates says about justice as service to the god in the *Euthyphro*, one cannot presume to assist the gods. They are supposed to be independent and self-sufficient, in no need of human aid. Notice, however, the context in which Socrates makes the claim. In the *Apology*, the point of the oracle was to say, via Socrates as the paradigm example (παράδειγμα, 23b1), that “[t]he wisest of you men is he who has realized, like Socrates, that in respect of wisdom he is really worthless” (23b).

Hence, Socrates says,

That is why I still go about seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command, if I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger, and when I think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not. (23b)

The point, then, is that Socrates does not presume to take it upon himself to help the gods. Rather, he is obeying them, helping them at their own behest,⁷¹ as he thinks, to undermine the pretensions of anyone who inappropriately assume the stance of godly wisdom. That is to say, instead of providing some sort of gratuitous service to the gods, Socrates is following through on what he takes to be a fundamental “religious duty” (21e), the task of ensuring that the place of the gods will not have the appearance of being usurped by fools, people puffed up with the conceit of wisdom, inadvertently pretending to be like gods themselves. He is following through

notions of charity, nurture, and tendance of someone needy. One can see what Socrates means though: the common factor is “service to the gods” and probably “worship.” It may even include paying homage, currying favour, and servility, but not anything suggestive of “fostering, nurture, or tending.” The point, in the *Euthyphro*, is that while this may constitute service to humanity it is not appropriate in the case of gods who are supposed to be self-sufficient. As we are about to see, Socrates seems to adhere to that qualification in the *Apology* in that he is serving the gods by being obedient to a divine command. As discussed at n. 73 following, see also τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν at *Apology* 30a6-7 vs. ὑπηρετικῇ at *Euthyphro* 13d9, d10 e1, e7, and ὑπηρετίας at 13e11.

⁷¹ See also *Apology* 22a: “...I pursued my investigation at the god’s command...”

on a conception of justice which does not displace, but rather prioritizes, isolates, and distinguishes from humanity, the positions of the gods.⁷²

Secondly, Socrates identifies as “service to my god” (τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν, 30a6-7) the task of “going about trying to persuade you, young and old, to make your first and chief concern not for your bodies nor for your possessions, but for the highest welfare of your souls.”⁷³ This is Socrates’ paramount occupation. He pays no attention to mundane affairs, like the public life of politics and even his own personal security. Instead, he self-styles himself the “stinging gadfly” (30e), a “father or elder brother” figure, someone “sent to this city as gift of god,” totally preoccupied with “urging you to set your thoughts on goodness” (31b). Again, all this is service to the god in the sense of obedience to a divine command (23b, 28e, 29d, 30a, 30e). Socrates is not a paradigm of justice in the sense that he ‘helps’ the gods. Rather, it is that he *serves* them, as someone sent by them out of concern for the less enlightened members of the Athenian populace (31a).

⁷² Cf. pp. 30-31, Santas (1979), who explains that this is actually a fundamental basis of Socrates’ defense both against the religious charge (24c, 26b), and against the associated old prejudice that philosophers are basically ungodly, given to “teaching...about things in the heavens and below the earth, and to disbelieve in gods, and to make the weaker argument the stronger” (23d).

⁷³ *Apology* 30a-b; concerning ὑπηρεσίαν (30a7), in τὴν ἐμὴν τῷ θεῷ ὑπηρεσίαν (30a6-7). Liddell and Scott give “service.” But see also ὑπηρετικός, introduced in the *Euthyphro* subsequent to the discussion of θεραπεία (ὑπηρετική, 13d9, d10 e1, e7), and also ὑπηρεταίς (13e11), both of which also connote the basic idea of service, especially in the sense of it being menial; i.e., service of “the kind that slaves give to their masters,” as Euthyphro says, or “a kind of waiting on the gods,” as Socrates puts it. For R. E. Allen (1970), θεραπεία and ὑπηρετική are “nearly synonymous,” this just being a slight “shift in vocabulary” from the idea of “ministry” to that of “service” (p. 56). As Versényi (1982) notes, however, “[u]nlike the previous sense of *therapeia*, *hyperetike* no longer implies any superiority on the part of the person rendering it. On the contrary, it suggests a decidedly inferior status; it is hard labour engaged in by an inferior being who performs in almost unquestioning obedience what his master bid him to do” (p. 140). It is, in fact, a new definition in the *Euthyphro*, offered in an attempt to overcome the problem that θεραπεία did not properly distinguish between “service of the gods” (τὴν τῶν θεῶν θεραπείαν, 12e6-7) and “service of mankind” (τὴν τῶν ἀνθρώπων, 12e7). In any event, here in the *Apology* it seems clear enough that Socrates means service to the gods in the sense of obedience to a divine command.

One can say that Socrates is capable of justice to the extent that he has lived his life in perfect conformity with his moral intuitions about justice. As we saw earlier on, in *Republic I*, although he never was able to say what justice is, he did labour to get Polemarchus and Thrasymachus at least to drop the presupposition that justice is the rule of might (338c), and to share with him instead the view that it is an art of “management, rule, deliberation, and the like” (353d) that tries to make everyone better off, not just one’s friends. This is the substance of Socrates’ service to the gods, the notion of justice offered by Euthyphro of which Socrates approved, and to which he proves he conforms in the *Apology*. Admittedly, this was not, in the *Euthyphro*, by any means a perfectly well articulated definition of justice. The notion of “service” was too vague to count as knowledge.⁷⁴ Nor is there much more information in the *Republic*, just the vague idea that justice consists of being as good to one’s friend as to one’s enemies and knowing how to rule effectively. Notwithstanding the fact that he cannot really explain what justice is, however, Socrates did conform to what was for him a reasonable conception as to what he thought it should be like. While this is all quite vague, and not a little bit subjective, that is not in and of itself any reason to suppose that Socrates has no capability whatsoever of being just. It only means that his capability is grounded on a kind of certainty that does not count as knowledge. The result is a kind of expertise which is both sufficient and deficient: good in the sense that some basic intuitions about justice are borne out in practice, but not-good in that these intuitions are not robust enough to support a general theory of the virtue.

⁷⁴ Cf. pp. 104-106. Versényi (1982): as *therapeia* the notion of “service” was defective in that it always seems to imply a quite ungodlike neediness on the part of the one being served (see *Euthyphro* 13c); and *hyperetike* failed to address the problem because there is no way to know what exactly is the work of the gods that one should be doing (see *Euthyphro* 14a-b). In a similar vein, R. E. Allen (1970), p. 58.

Courage: The same sort of thing holds for the virtue of courage. In the *Laches*, we saw that courage, properly understood, would consist of the “knowledge of the grounds of hope and fear” (196d). Again, Socrates’ ignorance prevents him from being able to explain exactly what this knowledge should consist of, such that one is courageous in each and every instance.⁷⁵ In this instance, however, Socrates’ ignorance actually seems to be the source of his courage.

You are mistaken...if you think that a man who is worth anything ought to spend his time weighing up the prospects of life and death. [There] is only one thing to consider in performing any action--that is, whether [one] is acting rightly or wrongly, like a good man or a bad one (πότερα δίκαια ἢ ἄδικα πράττει, καὶ ἀνὸρὸς ἀγαθοῦ ἔργα ἢ κακοῦ)...This being so, it would be shocking inconsistency on my part, gentlemen, if....when the God appointed me, as I supposed and believed, to the duty of leading the philosophical life, examining myself and others, I were then through fear of death or of any other danger to desert my post. That would indeed be shocking (δεινὰ), and then I might really with justice be summoned into court for not believing in gods, and disobeying the oracle, and being afraid of death, and thinking that I am wise when I am not. For let me tell you, gentlemen, that to be afraid of death is only another form of thinking that one is wise when one is not; it is to think that one knows what one does not know. No one knows with regard to death whether it is not really the greatest blessing that can happen to a man, but people dread it as though they were certain that it is the greatest evil... (28b-29b)

⁷⁵ See *Laches* 191c-e; he wants, for example, a definition that will explain not just the courage of infantrymen, but of cavalrymen and all other kinds of soldiers, plus sailors and, even more generally, of anyone who is stalwart when beset by illness, poverty, political turmoil, pain, fear, and the overwhelming desire for pleasure. In short, Socrates wants to be able to say “the one thing which it [courage] is in all cases (τί ὄν ἐν πᾶσι τοῦτοις ταῦτόν ἐστιν),” thereby to satisfy in full Nicias’ proposal that “courage is the knowledge of that which inspired fear or confidence in war, or in anything” (195a). Cf. Penner (1992): while Socrates accepts Nicias’ proposal at 195a (also 196d; this is a starting point for a definition which Socrates accepts at 199c, adding that knowledge of the virtue must also include “nearly every good and evil without reference to time”), this is by no means to say that he has satisfied the dictum that “[t]o know anything at all about human goodness, one will have to know everything about it” (p. 142). That’s the condition of having ἐπιστήμη and not just opinion. Penner refers to Frege to help explain what Socrates’ problem is in this regard (p. 147): the “comprehensive knowledge” that Socrates seeks is the “reference of courage,” the ability (in Frege’s words) “to be able to say immediately whether any given sense belongs to it. [But] [t]o such knowledge we never attain” (as cited by Penner, p. 58, Frege 1960--here 1970 ed.). Equally to the point, perhaps, is the following comment of Frege on definitions: “without complete and final definitions, we have no firm ground underfoot, we are not sure about the validity of our theorems...” (p. 166, 1970). Cf. n. 57 chapter one preceding, the discussion of Ross (1951) on οὐσία, φύσις, ἰδέα, and εἶδος, the notions of “‘Idea’” and “‘class’” in the *Euthyphro* and elsewhere which, for Socrates, denote the basis for complete definitions.

Socrates' insistent pursuit of his mission to alert his fellow citizens to the welfare of their souls has put his life at risk. But no matter, he is resolved to continue come what may. What is particularly interesting is that his courage in this regard derives from the fact that he is so honest with himself about what it is possible for him to know and not know, he finds no reason to consider death anything fearful. There are no grounds to fear death, not because Socrates knows it is nothing fearful, but because he does not know it is anything fearful.

Even more than this, though, he is also justified in thinking that it might be something good:

You too, gentlemen of the jury (ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί), must look forward to death with confidence, and fix your mind on this one belief, which is certain--that nothing can harm a good man either in life or after death, and his fortunes are not a matter of indifference to the gods. (41c-d)

This speech occurs much later than the previous one, subsequent to the sentence of death; and there is an important difference between it and all the ones that went before. Up until now, Socrates always addressed himself to the jury as whole, to ὧ ἄνδρες Ἀθηναῖοι, "O gentlemen of Athens."⁷⁷ But now, with the expression ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί, Socrates is addressing himself to just one part of the jury, "to those who voted with pleasure to acquit me" (Τοῖς δὲ ἀποψηφισαμένοις ἠδέως), to "you who are like friends" (ὕμῖν γὰρ ὡς φίλοις οὖσιν), favouring these people alone with the title of δικασταί, "judges."⁷⁷ δικαστής is also the word for jurymen, the two having been one and the same in the Greek court.⁷⁸ This is the first time in

⁷⁷ See, e.g., *Apology* 28a2

⁷⁷ *Apology* 39e-40a; alternatively ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί at 41c-d.

⁷⁸ Prompting one commentator, therefore, V. Tejera (1984) to claim that the term applies to *all* the jurors, and that Socrates is being ironic when he reserves the title for those who voted in his favour (see p. 10). But the text shows that this is patently false. Not once before this has Socrates used the term "judge," and when he finally does it is

the dialogue that Socrates has called any of the jurymen by the title of "judge," and when he finally does use the term, it is clear that so far as he is concerned, after he has made his defense and the judgements have been handed down, only those who ended up expressing sympathy for philosophy really deserve the designation. "...o gentlemen judges, for judges of goodness I would rightfully call you...."" Socrates has effectively usurped the title of a judge of right and wrong,⁸⁰ reserving it for those whose judgements are sympathetic to, perhaps even guided by, his own particular philosophical disposition.

In this regard, the present speech is an important corollary to the previous one at 28b-29b, even though it comes much later and is addressed to a narrower audience. Courage is supposed to be the knowledge of the grounds of both hope and fear. The contention that death is nothing to fear addresses the aspect of fear. Now, however, Socrates has gone the additional step of providing a reason to think that it is grounds for hope. The fact that he addresses himself to a select group only, the 44% of the jury that found him innocent,⁸¹ does not make his remarks any less significant in this regard. Quite the opposite, actually. Having made his defense already, and the judgements having already been handed down, Socrates is now providing words of

quite clear that in his mind the designation rightfully belongs only to those who found him and philosophy tolerable.

⁸⁰ *Apology* 40a2-3: translation my own for ...ὧ ἄνδρες δικασταί--ὕμᾶς γὰρ δικαστὰς καλῶν ὀρθῶς ἂν καλοῖην, the idea being to give the more explicit sense of "judge," since in this case it is as judges of good and evil that Socrates thinks only those who voted in his favour are deserving of the accolade. Cf. Tredennick (Hamilton and Cairns) who is less explicit on this point: "Gentlemen of the jury--for *you* deserve to be so-called (emphasis on "you" is Tredennick's). Fowler (Loeb) is better with, "For, judges--and in calling you judges I give you your right name." Likewise Jowett (*The Works of Plato*), "O my judges--for you I may truly call judges."

⁸⁰ Cf. n. 123, p. 66; West (1979).

⁸¹ I.e., if the jury numbered 501 (see Fowler, Loeb, p. 64) and Socrates was guilty by just 30 votes (*Apology* 36a), he lost by a remarkably narrow margin, just 6% of the total jury representative of Athens ($30 \div 501 = .00598802$). Hence, if we subtract this margin from a bare majority of 251, it turns out that his defense earned him a near 44% ($[501 - 251 - 30] \div 501 = .439$) approval rating.

comfort to those who he thinks have agreed with him that he is innocent of any wrongdoing. To those to whom it would matter the most, and who are most likely to find what he says plausible, therefore. Socrates is offering his well-known, positive conviction that no evil ever comes to a good person, not even in death.³² In the absence of definitive knowledge indicating otherwise, not only does Socrates have no intelligent grounds for fear, he feels quite justified to believe that his fate might actually be something to look forward to, and to offer this comforting opinion to those who are most likely to find it plausible enough to share with him in common.

The truly surprising thing about Socrates' courage is that it comes about precisely because his profession of ignorance is ironic. There is a fundamental complex irony here. On the one hand, Socrates is ignorant about what lies beyond the grave. It is because this ignorance is true that he has no grounds to fear death. In some sense, however, this ignorance is also false. Socrates feels quite justified in publically professing, to those whom he thinks might be most sympathetic to his point of view, that something good lies in store beyond the grave. He offers to his friends the positive conviction that death can be profoundly reassuring, the means by which a life spent in arduous service to the gods will finally be rewarded. In this instance, the complex irony resides in a double meaning of the term 'ignorance.' It is both true and not true that Socrates knows nothing about death. If a fearless and hopeful demeanour towards death is a fair indication of the presence of courage, then it is true to say that in the case of Socrates,

³² Socrates' courage, in light of his inability to fear death, has sometimes been regarded as a very traditional sort of heroism, according to which one's personal, bodily welfare is simply irrelevant in comparison to the importance of a higher moral purpose (e.g., p. 165, Friedländer 1964; also pp. 12-13, Tejera 1984). This would be true insofar as the heroic means that it is more honourable to die than to act otherwise than as one thinks is right. But one should be careful not to conclude, as do the above mentioned commentators, that Socrates therefore had no care whatsoever for his own, personal welfare. While heroes often choose to accept death rather than compromise themselves, this is not to say that they all live according to a death wish. Cf. *Apology* 31c-e, where Socrates explains to the jury that his *daimonion* barred him from entering public life out of concern for his personal welfare.

courage is the result of a complex irony having to do with an ignorance about virtue that both is and is not strictly speaking true.

Piety: In the *Euthyphro*, we saw that for Socrates an adequate definition of piety would explain the “essential form” (ἐκεῖνο αὐτὸ τὸ εἶδος) of piety, the “one idea” (μὴ ἰδέα) “by which unholy things are all unholy, and by which all holy things are holy” (ὧ πάντα τὰ ὅσια ὅσια ἔστιν).⁸³ Socrates wants knowledge of the “essence” (τὴν οὐσίαν, 11a7) of piety, that which makes a thing “cherished” (φιλεῖσθαι, 11a2) because it is known to be holy, not that which is merely considered holy because it is cherished.⁸⁴ As with the other virtues, however, this is precisely the knowledge that escapes him, in which case, if he is capable of piety, it would have to be in a somewhat less satisfactory way, on the basis of an opinion which is not itself true knowledge.

Socrates is accused of impiety in the *Apology*, but he defends himself against the charge and in the process gives us some clues as to how the virtue might be possible in this lesser way, based on conviction or moral intuition rather than on knowledge as such. The charge itself is as follows:

...the terms of your indictment make it clear that you accuse me of teaching them [the youth] to believe in other new-fangled spirituality/spiritual effects (ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινὰ) instead of the gods recognized by the state. I teach not to believe in the gods which the state believes in, but in some other new-fangled spirituality/spiritual effects.⁸⁵

⁸³ *Euthyphro* 6d10-11

⁸⁴ *Euthyphro* 10a-11a

⁸⁵ *Apology* 26b: Tredennick’s translation (Hamilton and Cairns) save for “other new-fangled spirituality/spiritual effects” (see Liddell and Scott, 1995) instead of “new deities” for ἕτερα δὲ δαιμόνια καινὰ (26b5). The reason for this change is to emphasize more clearly the distinction Socrates makes between his spirituality versus state religion, in which regard he elicits from Meletus the agreement that this difference is not the issue (26c). At least Meletus will not say so overtly despite Socrates’ invitation at 26c. But Socrates’ new-fangled spirituality does

This is the formal charge as Socrates reproduces it, and Meletus agrees that he has got it right.⁸⁶

But Socrates immediately asks Meletus to clarify:

...I appeal to you, Meletus, in the name of these same gods about whom we are speaking, to explain yourself just a little more clearly to myself and to the jury, because I cannot make out what your point is. Is it that I teach people to believe in some gods--which implies that I myself believe in gods, and am not a complete atheist (παράπαν ἄθεος), so that I am not guilty on that score--but in different gods from those recognized by the state, so that your accusation rests upon the fact that they are different? Or do you assert that I believe in no gods at all, and teach others to do the same? (26c)

And Meletus responds:

Yes, I say that you disbelieve in gods altogether. (26c)

To which Socrates retorts:

Well, do you answer that I believe and teach others to believe in spiritual effects (δαίμονια)? It does not matter whether they are new (καινὰ) or old (παλαιά). The fact remains that I believe in them (δαίμονιά), according to your statement; indeed you solemnly swore as much in your affidavit. But if I believe in spiritual effects (δαίμονια), it follows inevitably that I also believe in spiritual beings (δαίμονας). Is not that so? It is. I assume your assent, since you do not answer. Do we not hold that spiritual beings (τοὺς δαίμονας) are either gods (θεούς), or children of gods (θεῶν παῖδας)? Do you agree or not? [Meletus:] 'Certainly.' Then if I believe in spiritual beings (δαίμονας), as you assert, if these spiritual beings (οἱ δαίμονες) are gods in any sense, we shall reach the conclusion which I mentioned just now when I said that you were testing my intelligence for your own amusement, by stating first that I do not believe in gods, and again that I do, since I believe in spiritual beings (δαίμονας).⁸⁷

possibly amount to anarchy nonetheless in that it does challenge state-sanctioned religion. There is a way to view this as the basis for the charge despite the fact that Meletus was inveigled into missing the point (see p. 95, A. E. Taylor 1975; also p. 17, Paul Ciholas 1980). In this context, Socrates' defense could be regarded as an attempt to rebut an accusation of anarchy by offering the *daimonion* as a new, more insightful spirituality which everyone can and should accept regardless what was customary before.

⁸⁶ Since the *Apology* begins only after the indictment has already been read, it is but a partial re-enactment of the trial, consisting exclusively of the part of Socrates' defense (even in the brief elenctic exchange at 24d-27e, Meletus' answers are as reported by Socrates). Hence there is no formal indictment as such in the *Apology*. We can only reproduce what Socrates said they were.

⁸⁷ *Apology* 27c-d: Tredennick's (Hamilton and Cairns) translation save for following amendments: 1) "spiritual

To defend himself against the charge, and trap Meletus into a contradiction, Socrates has just drawn a distinction between believing in spirituality or spiritual effects (δαίμονια), believing in spiritual beings (δαίμονας), and believing in gods (θεούς). As the neuter accusative plural of δαίμονιον, δαίμονια can mean, variously, “an inferior divine being,” a “demon,” and “evil spirit,” or, more abstractly, as is most likely the case here, some sort of divine intervention, effect, or spirituality as such.⁴⁸ On the other hand, δαίμονας is an accusative plural of δαίμων, which more concretely suggests a “divine being” such as the human soul, or even a god or goddess in which case it would be a synonym for θεός, “god.” At first glance, the interplay between these three terms looks quite confusing.

However, if we pay close attention to the passage, we should notice that it begins with repetitive instances of the word δαίμονια--three times in succession to be exact--with no mention initially of δαίμονας or θεούς. To answer Meletus, Socrates first stresses the fact that he believes in, and has formally been accused of believing in, some kind of new-fangled (καινὰ) spirituality or spiritual effects (δαίμονια). Only after making this point abundantly clear, does he then add that “it necessarily follows that I also believe in δαίμονας (spiritual beings),” which, he concludes, must be either “gods or children of the gods” (θεούς...ἢ θεῶν παῖδας). Hence, precisely because it has been acknowledged that he believes in the effects of the gods

effects” in place of “supernatural activities” for δαίμονιά at 27c5, c6, and c8; 2) “spiritual beings” instead of “supernatural beings” for δαίμονας at 27c8, 27d1, d4, d5 (οἱ δαίμονες), and d7. This is not in order to say that Tredennick is wrong. In fact Tredennick more clearly distinguishes between the meanings of the two terms than does, e.g., Fowler (Loeb) with “spiritual beings” and “spirits.” Clearer still is Jowett (*The Works of Plato*), “spiritual or divine agencies” vs. “spirits or demigods.” In the present instance, the idea is merely to preserve a slightly more spiritual as opposed to scientific or cosmological (“supernatural”) connotation, in keeping the following discussion of these terms in relation to the question of piety.

⁴⁸ See Liddell and Scott (1995, 7th ed.).

(δαίμονια), it must also be admitted that he believes in divine beings (δαίμονας), and even in gods themselves (θεούς). All that is required, for the charge to be incoherent and for him to be innocent of impiety, is the initial contention, according to the charge, that he believes in “spiritual effects” or “spirituality” as such (δαίμονια).⁸⁹

The concept of the δαίμονιον suggests a kind of human spirituality that is not altogether characteristic of divinity but not altogether temporal either. It should make us think of Socrates' own, inner voice which he describes with exactly the same term, δαίμονιον, at *Apology* 31d and 40a-b. In the former instance, the δαίμονιον assured Socrates that he was right to avoid public office, while in the latter it is “something wonderful” (θαυμάσιόν τι γέγονεν, 40a3) on account of the certainty it affords that his impending death is not anything to fear. It also occurs at *Phaedrus* 242b, alerting Socrates to the fact that his first speech denouncing eros was bad and that he must recant with a more sincere one in praise of eros. None of this indicates that the *daimonion* actually tells Socrates what is right and wrong, acting like a sort of moral conscience, a substitute for moral knowledge, as it were, such that Socrates does know, after all, exactly what it means to act well or badly in any given instance. Rather, it is more like a spiritual consciousness that occasionally comes to the forefront as an indicator that Socrates is a temporal person possessed, at the same time, of some capacity to mingle with divinity.⁹⁰

⁸⁹ That Socrates so easily reduced the charge of impiety to a contradiction has sometimes been taken as an indication that in this part of the defense Socrates was just playing games. See, e.g., p. 164, n.9 p. 331, Friedländer (1964): it was once standard to consider the charge “spurious” (as in extraneous or irrelevant to the defense, presumably; Friedländer doesn't elaborate). Friedländer admits to having held this view once himself, along with a host of other commentators. An alternate viewpoint, however, is that perhaps Socrates dealt with the charge so easily because no one other than himself believed in or was aware of δαίμονια as the basis for his ‘new-fangled’ spirituality (cf. p. 144, West 1979).

⁹⁰ Or, that he has “the temperament of the visionary,” p. 46, n. 1 p. 47, Taylor (1975).

In this regard, Socrates' δαίμόνιον should remind us of the concept of ἔρωσ (love) from the *Symposium*, especially at 202e, where, in the process of defining ἔρωσ as the basis of humanity self-consciously situated in the middle region between heaven and earth, Diotima slips in the term δαίμόνιον (202d13) for that of ἔρωσ (202d8), thereby indicating a sense in which the two terms seem to mean the same thing:

Socrates: What, then, I asked, might Love (ὁ ἔρωσ) be? A mortal?

Diotima: A great Spirit (Δαίμων μέγας), Socrates, for the whole of the spiritual (πᾶν τὸ δαίμόνιον) is between divine and mortal.⁹¹

Notice that while Socrates asked Diotima to define the term Love (ἔρωσ) the actual definiendum in her reply is πᾶν τὸ δαίμόνιον. This is an abstract reference to "the whole of the spiritual," a general capacity for intercourse between the gods and humanity. As such, it is not literally a definition of the *Socratic daimonion*.⁹² That is to say, instead of describing the *Socratic daimonion* as such, it is more likely that Diotima's definition refers to a general spirituality of which the *Socratic daimonion* just happens to be a characteristic example. As

⁹¹ *Symposium* 202d8, d13-e1; see Lamb's (Loeb) note to his translation of the passage concerning the substitution of the term δαίμόνιον for ἔρωσ: "Δαίμονες and τὸ δαίμόνιον represent the mysterious agencies and influences by which the gods communicate with mortals" (p. 179, note appended to τὸ δαίμόνιον, "spiritual," at 202d13). Since the terms ἔρωσ and δαίμόνιον can, so far as Plato is concerned, be interchanged in this way, and the human capacity for love is, generally speaking, a capacity for the admixture of mortality and divinity, it would appear that with the concept of ἔρωσ Plato's object may have been to assist Socrates (as it were) in generalizing his spirituality as a feature of human nature generally.

⁹² Cf. pp. 164-165: Friedländer (1964): "There are hints in Plato's *Apology* that will be developed in the *Symposium*...of a philosophical-mythical nature, when Diotima assigns the demonic to the region 'in between' the human world and the divine (202D *et seq.*). We seem to hear an anticipation of this when, a little later in the *Apology* (31CD), Socrates calls his inner voice something 'divine and demonic'." Instead of *Apology* 27c-d, Friedländer is referring to the expression μοι θεῖόν τι καὶ δαίμόνιον γίγνεται, "something divine and spiritual/demonic has happened to me," at *Apology* 31c-d to *Symposium* 202d8, d13-e1. Friedländer does not actually reproduce the important text at *Symposium* 202d-e; rather, he just provides the general remark that this is something Plato eventually developed further at 202ff. In this regard, the current presentation is supported by Friedländer, but also indebted to him for the impetus to make the analogue between the δαίμόνιον and ἔρωσ more explicit. Also cf. p. 101, Grube 1968, a passing reference to the similarity of the δαίμόνιον and ἔρωσ as an intermediary principle at *Symposium* 202e.)

Diotima goes on to explain, she is defining an ability on the part of humanity generally to mingle the mortal with the divine:

God with man does not mingle: but the spiritual is the means of all society and converse of men with gods and of gods with men, whether waking or sleeping. Whosoever has skill in these affairs is a spiritual man (δαίμωνιος ἄνθρωπος). (203a)

Based on this, it would seem that the δαίμωνιον represents Socrates with a spiritual consciousness, the erotic, philosophical Socrates to be exact, at the height of human self-consciousness where mortality mixes with divinity, and ignorance finds a remedy in a sense of moral certainty which, although it falls far short of genuine divine knowledge, still enables Socrates to proceed with the conviction that his intuitions about an essential basis for piety are true even though still essentially unproven.³³ For Socrates, believing in new-fangled spiritual effects (δαίμονια καινὰ) seems tantamount to his believing that the concept of the δαίμωνιον is not exclusively a Socratic phenomenon but rather is an example of the possibility of human spirituality generally.³⁴ By believing in, and promoting, these intimations of human spirituality, Socrates is not impious. The indictment says he is impious because he promotes a new-fangled conception of human spirituality. But Socrates takes this to mean exactly the opposite, that he is *pious*.

³³ Cf. p. 44; Gould (1984): as “the mean between ignorance and knowledge,” love/the *daimonion* was the one thing about which Socrates did have certain knowledge. His profession of ignorance, if it signified any positive convictions at all, did so in that it signaled his awareness of love. In this regard Socrates regards love as 1) the self-knowledge of personal ignorance and 2) the desire for knowledge. As Gould puts it, “Really to understand one’s ignorance and what that implies is thus to understand all about the *daimon* of love.”

³⁴ Taylor (1975) remarks that while “[t]his is commonly interpreted as evidence for the presence of a mystical tendency in Plato himself....in view of the marked elimination of this strain from the later dialogues in which Socrates has ceased to be prominent, it seems more reasonable to infer that the mysticism of such works as the *Symposium* and *Phaedrus* belongs in the first instance to Socrates” (p. 47). The similarity noted here between the δαίμωνιον of the *Apology* and the ἔρωσ of the *Symposium* (and *Phaedrus*) seems to bear this out: ἔρωσ seems to be Plato’s conception of the Socratic spirituality, the δαίμωνιον.

In what sense could this be true, given that Socrates disclaims the knowledge of piety? Once again, one has to appeal to a predominantly subjective or human (as opposed to godly) standard of knowledge. In the *Euthyphro*, in a manner that seems reminiscent of the idea that the *daimonion* denotes interaction between divinity and mortality, Socrates tenders the definition that piety is “a mutual art of commerce between gods and men.”⁹⁵ Admittedly, immediately afterwards, he expresses distaste for this definition because it still does not settle the question as to what the holy really is. The gods are supposed to be self-sufficient and commerce suggests that humanity might have something of utility for them (14e-15a). Hence, the question still turns on the need to identify that which is pleasing to the gods because it is holy, not merely considered holy as a matter of opinion--according to what humanity might think is pleasing to a god. However, this problem does not dissuade Socrates, in the *Apology*, from alluding to just such a standard as the basis for claiming that a life (his kind of life) spent examining oneself (himself) and others about the question of virtue is the best way to live. Socrates’ authority for this claim is the oracle which, he realized, after extensive investigation (21b-22e), must have meant to say that he was a model (παράδειγμα, 23b1) representing on behalf of all humanity the need to recognize a fundamental discrepancy between human and divine wisdom (22d-23b).

The authority for this claim is not just a matter of divine inspiration. The ideal lifestyle that Socrates advocates comes about as a result of an interaction between divinity and humanity. It was the divine revelation of the oracle *combined with* human investigation on the part of

⁹⁵ *Euthyphro* 14e: this is just one definition of several that Socrates tenders. R. E. Allen (1970) has documented and discussed the arguments in this regard, showing that they’re all trial balloons that fail. Hence Socrates’ lament at the end of the dialogue that Euthyphro has not managed to help resolve his ignorance about piety (15e-16, cited and discussed previously at pp. 37ff chapter one).

Socrates that led Socrates to understand exactly why he is fundamentally incapable of achieving a thorough-going knowledge of virtue. By the same token, however, Socrates also found his mission, a divinely appointed task to alert the rest of the world to what he has discovered about the difference between gods and humanity. Thus, instead of lapsing into a committed scepticism about the possibility of knowledge, Socrates goes about "seeking and searching in obedience to the divine command" (23b), looking for knowledge while at the same time making it known that the ultimate product of this search is no more than the realization that human wisdom is quite different from, and quite inferior to, divine wisdom. As we already saw, in the foregoing discussion about justice, this is an all-important task for Socrates, sufficiently so that he labels it "service to the God" (23b):

...if I think that anyone is wise, whether citizen or stranger, and when I think that any person is not wise, I try to help the cause of God by proving that he is not.
(23b)

This dovetails rather neatly with Euthyphro's initial definition of piety: "what is pleasing to the gods is holy and what is not pleasing to them is unholy."⁹⁶ In assuming that he is under the auspices of a divine command, Socrates assumes that he is doing what is pleasing to the gods. He conforms to a common-sense notion of piety, a conception of virtue that is neither but also both divine and human, which functions as a second best alternative to whatever piety might turn out to be had he the godly wisdom to define it properly.

This makes Socrates' piety a somewhat vague and doubtless not altogether reliable conception of the virtue. His only service to the gods seems to be that he fails to find godly knowledge: that he simply proves, therefore, that there is indeed an unbridgeable chasm between

⁹⁶ *Euthyphro* 6e-7a

human and divine wisdom. At the same time, however, we have already seen that this is precisely what makes Socrates good. He is wiser and better than anyone else because he alone is not guilty of that “ignorance most culpable” whereby one tends towards the conceit of wisdom. In that regard, he is at least more humble than anyone else, and less inclined to be pretentiously dogmatic. In a word, at the same time that piety constantly proves that true knowledge is impossible, it also makes him more open to knowledge. Once again, we see that Socrates manages to manifest a virtue not despite, but precisely because he finds a way to do so in a limited way, in a manner compatible with the necessary truth that he is not able to specify exactly what the exercise of the virtue would be like were it based on true knowledge.

iv) Temperance

In the *Charmides*, we have seen Socrates describe the virtue of temperance⁹⁷ variously as “the doing of good actions” (τὴν γὰρ τῶν ἀγαθῶν πράξιν σωφροσύνην εἶναι),⁹⁸ “a science of itself as well as of the other sciences” (αὐτὴ [σωφροσύνη] τε αὐτῆς ἐστὶ καὶ τῶν ἄλλων ἐπιστημῶν ἐπιστήμη),⁹⁹ or a “knowledge of knowledge” (ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμη) that presides over all other sciences including that of virtue itself.¹⁰⁰ In this regard, temperance is a very important virtue, the knowledge of which consists in the science of virtue as such. But we have also seen that in the end, Socrates remained ignorant of this virtue no less than any other

⁹⁷ See pp. 37 ff preceding.

⁹⁸ *Charmides* 163e10

⁹⁹ *Charmides* 166e6

¹⁰⁰ *Charmides* 169b1

(175a-b). The problem, as usual, is not that Socrates is uncertain whether or not such a virtue exists, but rather that

...even if it does undoubtedly exist, I should not acknowledge it to be temperance (σωφροσύνην), until I can also see whether such a science would or would not do us any good.¹⁰¹

Socrates' inability to define a general application of his belief about the benefits of temperance means that he is no more capable of temperance as such than he was of any of the other virtues. As with the other virtues, therefore, he has to settle for the description of a weaker form of temperance:

May we assume then....that temperance (σωφροσύνην), viewed in this new light as a knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (τὸ ἐπιστήμην ἐπίστασθαι καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσύνην), has this advantage (τὸ ἀγαθὸν)--that he who possesses such knowledge will more easily learn anything which he learns, and that everything will be clearer to him, because, in addition to the several objects of knowledge, he sees the science (τὴν ἐπιστήμην), and this also will better enable him to test the knowledge which others have of what he knows himself, whereas the inquirer who is without this knowledge may be supposed to have a feebler and less effective insight?¹⁰²

This passage is in the form of a question that Socrates puts to Critias, a rhetorical question therefore, posed on the expectation that this is at least one point on which he and Critias are

¹⁰¹ *Charmides* 169a-b: Jowett's translation (Hamilton and Cairns), except for "temperance" in place of Jowett's more undecided "temperance or wisdom" for σωφροσύνην. Occasionally Jowett appears more decided, with "wisdom" as at 172c8-9 or "temperance" as at 176b6. The occasions of apparent indecision and decision will be noted as they occur in citations following. As we shall see shortly, there is a sense in which wisdom can be thought of as the same as temperance. However, the preference both here and in the following citations from the *Charmides* is to stick to the Greek quite literally, without presuming to interpret during translation, and to take it that the dialogue is primarily about "what is temperance." See editors' introduction to the *Charmides*, p. 99, Hamilton and Cairns; Lamb (Loeb), whose translation consistently preserves the word "temperance" for σωφροσύνην; n. 69 p. 166, Penner (1990), who has it that with temperance as its subject-matter, the *Charmides* parallels the *Laches* (about courage) in that total knowledge is the object of the search. Also, similarly, p. 11, Ross (1951); and the hint at n. 12 pp. 47-48, Vlastos (1991).

¹⁰² *Charmides* 172b: Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns) save for the substitution of "temperance" in place of Jowett's "wisdom" for σωφροσύνην.

likely to agree--as indeed they do immediately following, at 172c. In the absence of the "science of science" (ἐπιστήμης ἐπιστήμην), a sweeping full-scale knowledge of virtue as such, they hazard that it is an advantage or good (τὸ ἀγαθόν) to possess the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance (τὸ ἐπιστήμην ἐπίστασθαι καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσύνην). At least, according to this more limited conception of knowledge of the virtue, one becomes more insightful about the science of virtue. One can be acutely aware of the difference between knowledge and ignorance, and of knowledge as something to keep in one's sights. While the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance is nothing like true knowledge, it does provide a glimpse of true knowledge as the object to be sought.

Obviously, this does not measure up to Socrates' highest expectations about knowledge and virtue. The sort of temperance in question has the status of being an object of consensus¹⁰³ rather than an object of knowledge, a conception that Socrates and Critias agree to accept provisionally while realizing that they have not arrived at anything more definitive. As such, it is a well-founded opinion, in keeping with the object of the elenchus¹⁰⁴ but not by any means a totally satisfactory conception of the virtue. As we have already seen,¹⁰⁵ Socrates was eventually forced to admit that even if someone has the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance, there is no way even to know if it is true that knowledge is sufficient for being good:

¹⁰³ I.e., this is something that Socrates and Critias agree on, at least provisionally, at 172c.

¹⁰⁴ Whose conclusions can never be anything more than provisional. On the elenchus as a truth-seeking device that cannot yield certainty, but nevertheless is coherent when it ends provisionally, on a note of agreement see pp. 62, 93 ff preceding.

¹⁰⁵ See p. 126 preceding--at which point, it should be noted, little allowance was made for the possibility that Socrates might have an imperfect but nevertheless significant grasp of the virtue, because the object at that time was to stress Socrates' dissatisfaction, his acute awareness as to how deficient was his conception of the virtue.

But whether by acting according to knowledge we shall act well and be happy (ἐπιστημόνως ἂν πράττοντες εὖ ἂν πράττοιμεν καὶ εὐδαιμονοῖμεν), my dear Critias--that is a point which we have not yet been able to determine.¹⁰⁶

With ἐπιστημόνως (the adverbial form of the adjective ἐπιστήμων) Socrates is referring here not to the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance but rather to the science which truly benefits humanity, the science of virtue itself,¹⁰⁷ the full-fledged moral science (ἐπιστήμη) which escapes him. All Socrates has by way of a knowledge of temperance is the contention that “temperance is the knowledge of what we know and do not know (σωφροσύνην εἶναι, τὸ εἰδέναι ἃ τε οἶδε καὶ ἃ μὴ οἶδεν).”¹⁰⁸ He and Charmides are limited to talking only about “temperance such as we are now defining it (ἢ σωφροσύνη, οὕσα οἶαν νῦν ὀρίζομεθα).”¹⁰⁹ and, unfortunately, not only is that not good enough to ensure that one will be good, it even casts doubt on the core doctrine that “by acting according to knowledge we shall act well and be happy” (173d).

If Socrates is to be considered at all capable of temperance, therefore, it would have to be in the limited sense identified at *Charmides* 172b, where it is beneficial to be conscientiously fallible, aware that there is no guarantee that one will always know how to live well and be better off: for then, at least one is disposed to learning, and has the requisite moral attitude that makes learning possible and more likely. The following exchange at the end of the *Charmides* indicates what Socrates and his interlocutors conclude in this regard:

¹⁰⁶ *Charmides* 173d

¹⁰⁷ *Charmides* 174d5-6: i.e., the science of virtue (ἢ ἐπιστήμη) is “not a science of other sciences, or of ignorance, but of good and evil (οὐ γὰρ ἐπιστημῶν γε καὶ ἀνεπιστημοσυνῶν ἢ ἐπιστήμη ἐστίν, ἀλλὰ ἀγαθοῦ τε καὶ κακοῦ).”

¹⁰⁸ *Charmides* 172c8-9: in Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns), “wisdom” instead of “temperance” for σωφροσύνη.

¹⁰⁹ *Charmides* 173a9: in Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns), “wisdom” instead of “temperance” for σωφροσύνη.

Socrates says of Charmides: ...temperance (σωφροσύνην) I believe to be really a great good (μέγα ἀγαθόν). And happy are you, Charmides, if you possess it. Wherefore examine yourself, and see whether you have this gift and can do without the charm, for if you can, I would rather advise you to regard me simply as a fool who is never able to reason out anything, and to rest assured that the more temperate (σωφρονέστερος)¹¹⁰ you are, the happier you will be.

Charmides replies: ...I am sure that I do not know, Socrates, whether I have or have not this gift of temperance,¹¹¹ for how can I know whether I have a thing, of which you and Critias are, as you say, unable to discover the nature? Yet...I am sure, Socrates, that I do need the charm, and as far as I am concerned, I shall be willing to be charmed by you daily, until you say that I have had enough.

And Critias replies: Very good, Charmides,....If you do this I shall have a proof (τεκμήριον) of your temperance (ὅτι σωφρονεῖς)¹¹²--that is if you allow yourself to be charmed by Socrates, and never desert him in things great or small. (175e-176b)

Socrates does not take issue with Critias' remark. Instead the dialogue closes with tacit consent; he promises not to forsake Charmides.¹¹³ Expressing doubts characteristic of *aporia* to the effect that he is not certain that they have established anything worthwhile, Charmides resolves to cling near to Socrates to continue being advised until such time as Socrates is willing to say he no longer needs instruction. In this regard Critias deemed Charmides to be capable of temperance to the extent that he remains willing to continue exploring the subject with Socrates by his side: a

¹¹⁰ In Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns), "wise and temperate."

¹¹¹ In Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns), "wisdom and temperance."

¹¹² In Jowett (Hamilton and Cairns), "temperance" but not "wisdom."

¹¹³ *Charmides* 176d. The ending is a bit cryptic. 176b-d: first, Charmides and Critias conspire amongst themselves. Charmides promises that he will not desert Socrates, Critias commands him to hold to the promise, and Charmides promises to obey the command (176b-c). It seems like they might have been whispering. Socrates gets suspicious and asks, "You, sirs, what are you conspiring about." Charmides replies that they are not conspiring because "we have conspired already." Socrates, as if sensitive to conspiracies suggestive of legal proceedings against himself, asks, "you are about to use violence, without even giving me a hearing in court?" Charmides protests that he is under orders from Critias and Socrates says, "in the mood of violence, you are irresistible." But he also promises not to resist Charmides, which seems pretty much the same as to say he has promised not to forsake him. Perhaps the allusions to violent compulsion and legal proceedings are just to show how strong an effect a needy and cooperative interlocutor has on him.

point to which Socrates tacitly assents given his promise to stick with Charmides for as long as it takes.

In effect, then, the dialogue closes by endorsing *aporia* as the condition whereby one does, in fact, possess temperance insofar as temperance is possible: it is good to be in the state of *aporia* because that is the mental state whereby one understands the importance of moral knowledge, attempts to discover it, and ends up at a loss, acutely aware as usual of the unbridgeable gap between human and divine wisdom. That is tantamount to claiming that in the absence of the science of virtue as such, it is good to have the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance. Although this falls far short of the knowledge of good and evil that Socrates believes would be sufficient to 'live well and be better off,' it is an important predisposition, a necessary precondition without which one would be far less likely to be of a mind to learn more.

v) **Socrates' wisdom, the antidote to ἀφροσύνη**

In chapter one,¹¹⁴ we noted that in the *Protagoras* wisdom (σοφία) is not just a synonym for knowledge (ἐπιστήμη): it is also a virtue. "the greatest of the parts" (μέγιστόν γε ἡ σοφία τῶν μορίων)¹¹⁵ of virtue in fact, first in line of a list which, in the *Protagoras*, includes as well "justice, temperance, and holiness" (δικαιοσύνη καὶ σωφροσύνη καὶ ὀριότης).¹¹⁶ Wisdom is not just the knowledge of good and evil, it seems: it is itself a kind of

¹¹⁴ See pp. 4 preceding.

¹¹⁵ *Protagoras* 330a2

¹¹⁶ *Protagoras* 329c7-8: this is in regard to the question about the unity of virtue, what parts it includes. The list is repeated again at 330b5-6, and wisdom is added to the list as the "greatest part" (καὶ μέγιστόν γε ἡ σοφία τῶν μορίων) at 330a2.

goodness. The question, then, is ‘What kind of goodness is this, and in what sense is Socrates capable of it?’

Our best clue, perhaps, comes from a discussion at *Protagoras* 332a-332e, which begins with Socrates introducing the word ἀφροσύνην (332a4). Both Fowler¹¹⁷ and Guthrie¹¹⁸ translate the term as “folly,” but Liddell and Scott provide as well, “thoughtlessness” or “senselessness.” Apparently, Socrates is referring to a kind of folly characteristic of someone whose actions are in no way informed by anything like ideas of moral goodness or moral knowledge. His general object, in the discussion at *Protagoras* 332a-332e, is to convince Protagoras that the virtues, even though they seem to be distinct--as the parts of the face are distinct (333a)--should also be regarded as a unity: whoever has moral knowledge has not just one virtue or another but all the virtues.¹¹⁹ It is in this context that Socrates calls wisdom a virtue. He wants to further the argument about the unity of the virtues by discussing with Protagoras the concurrence of wisdom and temperance. To that end he argues, first, that ἀφροσύνη is “altogether opposite” (πάντων ἀντίον) to wisdom (σοφία).¹²⁰ From this, it would appear that ἀφροσύνη and σοφία are mutually exclusive. Whoever is wise is not foolish, thoughtless, or senseless (ἀφροσύνη), nor is anyone who is foolish, thoughtless or senseless wise.¹²¹ It further appears that if wisdom is a virtue, it is because it functions as an antidote to ἀφροσύνη. But Socrates then elicits the agreement from Protagoras that the same holds true with regard to temperance and ἀφροσύνη:

¹¹⁷ *Loeb Classical Library*

¹¹⁸ Hamilton and Cairns

¹¹⁹ On the unity of the virtues, see pp. 5 ff preceding.

¹²⁰ *Protagoras* 332a5

¹²¹ See, e.g., *Protagoras* 332a, 332e

Socrates: ...those who act wrongly act foolishly (ἄφρόνως), and in doing so do not behave temperately (οἱ μὴ ὀρθῶς πράττοντες ἀφρόνως πράττουσι καὶ οὐ σωφρονούσιν οὕτω πράττοντες)?....Then foolish behaviour is the opposite of temperance (Τοῦναντίον ἄρα ἐστὶ τὸ ἀφρόνως πράττειν τῷ σωφρόνως)? (332b-c)

Protagoras assents to both propositions.

In the *Protagoras*, wisdom (σοφία) and temperance (σωφροσύνη) appear to be alike in that they are both mutually exclusive with senselessness (τῇ ἀφροσύνη).¹²² Thus, the dialogue suggests, wisdom is a virtue in the sense that, just like temperance, it functions as an antidote to ἀφροσύνη. Just as, whoever is temperate is not ἀφροσύνη, so too, whoever is wise is not ἀφροσύνη.¹²³

There is another similarity as well. In the *Charmides* we saw that temperance, insofar as Socrates was able to describe it, meant the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance. But in the *Apology*, at 23a-b, exactly the same thing seems to be true of wisdom: the oracle recommends Socrates as the wisest of all men because he alone understands that there is a world of difference between human wisdom and divine wisdom.

Literally, *Apology* 23a-b only provides for two senses for the term wisdom: on the one hand there is human wisdom and on the other there is divine wisdom. Now, however, we see that Socrates also has a third sense, the wisdom which makes him a wiser man than anyone else;

¹²² I.e., *Protagoras* 333b1-2: "though folly is only one thing, temperance as well as wisdom appears to be contrary to it" (τῇ δὲ ἀφροσύνη ἐνὶ ὄντι σοφία ἐναντία καὶ σωφροσύνη αὐφάινεται); and, 333b4-5: "[t]hen must temperance and wisdom be the same" (οὐκοῦν ἐν ἅν εἶη ἡ σωφροσύνη καὶ ἡ σοφία:). These are Socrates' propositions and Protagoras agrees to both.

¹²³ For Socrates, this is the reason to say "temperance and wisdom must be the same" (333b), thus countering Protagoras' view that the parts of virtue are distinct, related to one another only insofar as they all belong under the generic heading of the term, virtue. See 329c-d, but also 329d-330b, Socrates' trap which Protagoras falls for, the example of the face the parts of which are all distinct, related to one another only because there are different face parts.

the wisdom, that is, which consists of *the knowledge of human and divine wisdom*. Clearly, the term σοφία cannot always mean the same thing as ἐπιστήμη for Socrates. ἐπιστήμη always seems to mean the kind of knowledge that neither Socrates nor anyone else has, and which they will likely never have: the godly wisdom that humanity is incapable of possessing. It is in this sense only that σοφία and ἐπιστήμη are synonyms. On the far end of the spectrum from this, there lies the human wisdom that falls far short of godly wisdom. In addition to this, however, there is a kind of wisdom that seems to sit in between these two, a wisdom consisting of the ironic fact that Socrates knows about the difference between human and divine wisdom, and for that reason has neither but also, to some extent, both: in which regard, he is wiser than anyone else. What the foregoing considerations of wisdom and temperance in the context of the *Protagoras* and *Charmides* help make clear, is that underlying the imprecision in the language of the *Apology* there runs the idea that wisdom is a virtue when it is distinct from both human and divine wisdom. This is the 'middle' wisdom (as it were), neither human nor divine but a bit of both, that bears a striking resemblance to temperance. Just like temperance, so too with this sort of wisdom, it is a 'great good' to be in the state of *aporia*. Then one is less likely to be ἀφροσύνη (*Protagoras* 332a, e), and also more likely to be disposed towards learning more about virtue (*Charmides* 172b, 175e-176b).

If *aporia* can be overcome, then this sort of wisdom would no longer exist. It would have metamorphosed into godly wisdom, ἐπιστήμη,¹²⁴ the truly necessary and sufficient condition for virtue. So long as *aporia* persists, however, σοφία is not, in reality, the same thing as

¹²⁴ And so, according to the usual presumption, σοφία would indeed be equivalent to ἐπιστήμη, although only in the most ideal sense. See the discussion with references at pp. 4ff preceding.

ἐπιστήμη.¹²⁵ If this is a plausible assessment, then it is wisdom in the third, middle sense which belongs at the top of the list of cardinal virtues, the “greatest of the parts” of virtue, as Socrates hazards at *Protagoras* 330a. For Socrates, σοφία may be a synonym for ἐπιστήμη just when there is no longer any need for it to be the disposition to want to acquire ἐπιστήμη. Otherwise it remains distinguishable from ἐπιστήμη and more like Socrates’ limited, imperfect appropriation of temperance as a virtue. Like temperance, wisdom would thereby consist of the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance. Solely as a convenience, to distinguish clearly the notion of wisdom as a virtue from the other two senses of human and divine wisdom, we shall from here on call this *Socrates’ Wisdom*.

How does this make Socrates good? First, *Socrates’ Wisdom* is, just like temperance, the antidote to ἀφροσύνη, the one kind of folly that necessarily stands in the way of even the hope of acquiring ἐπιστήμη. So important is this sort of wisdom that in the absence of ἐπιστήμη as

¹²⁵ Perhaps, one might argue, there is no third sense for wisdom simply because it is the human wisdom at *Apology* 23a which applies to Socrates uniquely. The problem is, however, that this wisdom has “little or no value,” and the oracle said Socrates was the wisest, not because he had wisdom in only this limited sense, but because he realized how important wisdom is and that he didn’t have it in the ideal sense. That’s two different things. Being ignorant does not necessarily equate with being worthless. It does not make sense to think that Socrates is a paradigm of a wisdom that has no value. A “really worthless” wisdom does not sound like the sort of wisdom that holds such interesting and effective moral convictions as he does, nor does it seem worthy of anything so portentous as a divine mission. If this were all there is to it, nothing about Socrates make any sense. He would just “know nothing” like he says in the *Republic* (354b). Earlier on, it was said that there has to be more to Socrates than this, otherwise he falls to the liar’s paradox (see n. 48, chapter two preceding; also pp. 95, 98ff). He has to be more than ignorant, just as he has to have less than godly knowledge, if his ignorance is to make any sense in relation to the supposition that he is wiser than anyone else. That’s where an ironic, third form of wisdom comes in. It’s the very thing attested to by the fact that his ignorance is a complex irony. To propose a third sort of wisdom as a sort of middle ground between godly knowledge and worthless human knowledge, a wisdom consisting of the knowledge of knowledge *and* ignorance, seems like a good way to avoid some bad problems. Then there would be 1) human wisdom characteristic of ordinary, low-grade, probably conceited, human opinion generally, 2) Socrates’ wisdom characteristic of his robust beliefs that have withstood the test of the elenchus, and which distinguish him from the common run, and 3) godly wisdom which Socrates knows about more acutely than anyone else, always seeks, but never finds. The middle ground is wherein resides a sensible, not self-contradictory, complex irony.

such Socrates appears to be willing to consider it a virtue in the *Protagoras*. That makes him good according to his own conception of virtue.

Second, and on a more practical level, *Socrates' Wisdom* is the fruit of all his elenctic examinations, the reason why he thinks he is wiser than any other person, and yet not as wise as a god. It is the wisdom that assures him that his opinions, even though not knowledge in the sense of ἐπιστήμη, are better than the unexamined opinions of the common run; and the reason, also, why he always manages to survive an elenctic argument with his own views intact while those of his interlocutors often end up in shambles. *Socrates' Wisdom* assures Socrates that he can take his opinions to be the truth, and that he can therefore try his hardest to get any and all comers in an elenctic argument to believe as he does. For *Socrates' Wisdom* has a built-in safeguard. It is fallible not dogmatic. To have such wisdom one must be innocent of "ignorance most culpable," that pretentious conceit of knowledge "which thinks that it knows what it does not" (*Apology* 29b). To be thus innocent is for Socrates to bear out the truth of the oracle that he is indeed the wisest and best of all people. He is wise enough and good enough to be entrusted with a twofold divine purpose: 1) to lead a philosophical life, examining both himself and others in an effort to spot and correct any instance of conceit whereby one is tempted to overstep, blindly unaware and misguided, into that realm of "real wisdom" which is, properly speaking, the sole "property of god" (23a); and 2) to encourage "real progress towards goodness" by incessantly reminding all those, "young or old, foreigner or fellow citizens" alike, who tend to "give no attention or thought to truth and understanding," that "wealth does not bring goodness, but goodness brings wealth and every other blessing, both to the individual and to the state" (29e-30b). Socrates himself would agree that this sort of wisdom make him good. Although he

does not have ἐπιστήμη, neither is he an ignorant fool given to ἀφροσύνη. He lies somewhere in between. In his own words, he is not a solely human phenomenon. He is a “gift from god” (30d, 31b) who, in spending his life examining both himself and others, on the understanding “that life without this sort of examination is not worth living,” does with his life the “very best thing that a man can do” (38a).

On the face of it, this all looks quite paradoxical. Socrates is a good man because he has wisdom as a virtue, but wisdom as a virtue means a kind of knowledge which is *not* virtue. To put it another way: while wisdom (σοφία) is supposed to be a virtue in the sense that it is a synonym for ἐπιστήμη, it is also a virtue in that it is distinct from ἐπιστήμη. The paradox resolves itself, however, on the understanding that there are different meanings for the term σοφία, most notably that on the one hand it means ἐπιστήμη while on the other it means the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance that falls far short of ἐπιστήμη. There is no paradox in this instance, because both meanings of σοφία cannot apply at the same time. Either one has σοφία/ἐπιστήμη, or one has σοφία in the sense of σωφροσύνη, the knowledge of knowledge and ignorance which functions like an antidote to ἀφροσύνη. There would be a paradox if the disjunction were inclusive. But in fact, the disjunction is *exclusive*: Socrates has to settle for σοφία as a virtue, the antidote to ἀφροσύνη, just because he does not have σοφία as ἐπιστήμη. There is no paradox here. In context, the sense of the terminology seems reasonably clear enough to prevent that.

But there is irony. The different senses of σοφία revolve, ultimately, around the fact that Socrates’ ignorance is ironic; around the fact, that is, that when he says he does not have moral knowledge he means that he does not have ἐπιστήμη but that he does have σοφία. As already

noted, ἐπιστήμη and σοφία are supposed to be equivalent terms, both signifying true moral knowledge. But that is only true in the most ideal sense. Because he has to deny true knowledge Socrates has to disavow ἐπιστήμη and σοφία. At the same time, however, because in his own mind he differs from the common run, he cannot disavow σοφία altogether. He cannot simply say he has that mere human wisdom which is worth nothing in relation to divine wisdom (*Apology* 23a). Thus he reclaims for himself the designation "wise man" via a new meaning for σοφία, a meaning which signifies a lesser standard of goodness than that which is signified by ἐπιστήμη, but a greater standard than that possessed by everyone else. Hence ἐπιστήμη is virtue and σοφία is virtue, although both mean different things. Socrates disavows the possibility of virtue as ἐπιστήμη but reclaims it in another sense, that of σοφία. The result of his ironic professions of ignorance is that he is both good and not-good, neither totally up to, nor totally short of, the standard specified by his doctrine that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. Socrates is wise enough and good enough to come off looking better and wiser than anyone else, but at the same time his goodness and wisdom depend on an ironic kind of ignorance whereby he has to admit that he cannot be truly wise or truly good in the full sense of being altogether virtuous.

The truly ironic thing about Socrates, therefore, is not just that he expresses his knowledge and lack of knowledge, simultaneously and economically, in the voice of irony. More fundamentally even, the truly ironic thing about him is that his unique complex irony denotes a moral disposition which is itself characteristic of both good and not good.

CHAPTER SIX

Revisiting the Question of Cheating

- I: Socrates' willingness to indulge in deceit**
- i) The problem, Vlastos and *Protagoras* 342a-347a**

In chapter two we introduced but deferred for further consideration until now the problematic fact that Socrates sometimes cheats, indulging in the sort of irony whereby he pretends to adopt a standpoint that he himself believes to be misguided. To recapitulate, the problem was that when Socrates indulged in the farcical exegesis of Simonides' poem at *Protagoras* 342a-347a, he violated the rule he adopts at *Gorgias* 495a-b (also 500b-c, *Crito* 49d) that he should not speak contrary to what he thinks when he is involved in discussions about the right way to live. To break the rules in this way, for the sake of convenience, even for some good pedagogical reason, is to cheat. More than this, however, it is also, in this particular instance, to deceive. Why? For one thing, because in the course of cheating Socrates says some things that are false, and does so in such a way that it is not evident to his interlocutors that he does not believe what he is saying. Here are some examples:

1. As one commentator has noted, in delivering his long monologue on Simonides' poem (342a-347a), Socrates "gives the lie to his own previous claim [334c-d] that he is incapable of such long-distance running."¹

¹ p. 199; Goldberg (1983)

2. According to another commentator, Socrates' interpretation is a "'great speech' in answer to the great speech declaimed by Protagoras [320c-328d],"² insincere in that ostensibly Socrates' intention was "to remain within the give-and-take of dialectics"³ while in reality "he ha[d] no such intention."⁴

3. As C. C. W. Taylor points out, Socrates' opening, positive recognition of philosophy in Crete and Sparta (342a-b) is clearly "ironical."⁵ While Taylor does not specify the meaning of "ironical," it seems clear that he is referring to the kind of simple irony where what is said is false because what is said is not what is meant.⁶ As Taylor points out, Socrates does not in fact hold the Lacedaemonians in high regard on account of their inclination towards philosophy. In the *Greater Hippias*, the Lacedaemonians do not seek philosophical education. Instead, they

² p. 128; Patrick Coby (1987)

³ I.e., the compromise worked out at *Protagoras* 338aff.

⁴ pp. 105-106; Coby (1987). Taylor (1991) recommends Coby, incidentally, specifically on the grounds that "much of Socrates' account of Simonides is intended to convey covert criticism of Protagoras" (pp. 224-225). This is in line with Taylor's own view that Socrates meant to illustrate how useless and misguided it is to attempt to settle anything by means of the interpretation of poetry. See n. 5 following on Taylor. Note, however, that it is "covert" criticism. That is the point. There is deception because serious issues are not self-evident during the exegesis itself.

⁵ p. 144; Taylor (1991). Taylor also sees a quite serious point to the speech, namely that in "exemplary fashion" Socrates illustrates "what he regards as the cardinal fault in literary interpretation, viz., the impossibility of definitively establishing the writer's meaning, with its consequent licence to factitious 'interpretation'" (p. 148). This is in regard to Socrates' criticisms about the interpretation of poetry subsequent to the exegesis (347e-348a). Cf. a similar judgement about poetry in the *Lesser Hippias* at 365c-d: since it is impossible to interrogate Homer on the question as to whether Odysseus' skill with words is less admirable than Achilles' preference for straightforward deeds (*Iliad* 9.308ff. cited by Plato at 365a), Socrates advises Hippias that they should restrict their conversation to their own opinions on the matter. In the *Protagoras* there doubtless was a serious issue at stake. But the point was still made in a roundabout way, by cheating according to Socrates' own rules of engagement. One can admit that Socrates did mean to convince Protagoras that it is misleading to think "the most important part of a man's education is to become an authority on poetry" (339a), and still think that he made the point obliquely by outsophisting Protagoras, or by cheating as Vlastos puts it. During the exegesis itself the serious issue was, after all, concealed.

⁶ Just as a reminder, see p. 31; Vlastos (1991): "In 'simple' irony what is said just isn't what is meant: taken in its ordinary commonly understood sense the statement is simply false." This differs from complex irony, Vlastos explains, in that "in 'complex' irony what is said both is and isn't what is meant: its surface content is meant to be true in one sense, false in another."

come to Hippias to “delight in the genealogies of heroes...in all forms of antiquarian lore,” making use of him, therefore, “as children do of old women, to tell them agreeable stories”⁷ (285d-286a).⁸ Vlastos also takes this as an indicator of the character of deceit about the speech.⁹

4. Also significant is Socrates’ rearrangement of the poem at 343c-344a, so that Simonides’ claim that it is hard to become good reads not as a contradiction but as a polemical difference with Pitticus’ doubt that it is hard to be noble. For Taylor, this is a “parody of sophistic methods of interpretation, which Plato must have held guilty of similar perversions of sense.”¹⁰ If Taylor is right, then Socrates is modeling the sophists’ tendency to pervert meaning. If he does this in a deadpan manner, such as suggested by Vlastos,¹¹ then he risks giving the impression that he approves of such sophistry. That is to say, even if the sophistic reconstruction of the poem is ironical, so long as there is no overt hint of the irony, then it has to be interpreted as cheating and deceiving, putting forth the false impression that the exercise is worthwhile.

⁷ Since this is so clearly acultural, just the kind of remark that would be offensive to modern ears, it is worth stressing the underlying, less generally offensive point, namely that Socrates thinks the Lacedaemonians tend to content themselves with pleasing stories, and are not in fact given to the more difficult pursuit of philosophical wisdom.

⁸ Hence, p. 144, Taylor (1991): “Socrates’ reference to philosophy in Crete and Sparta are of course ironical;” for although “many Greeks, including Plato” may have admired “the institutions and...educational systems of the two states,” the *Greater Hippias* shows this was not true of Socrates.

⁹ See p. 136; Vlastos (1991), but also n. 24 on the same page where, with particular reference to p. 126ff, I. F. Stone (1988), he adds, “It is sad to see the spoof mistaken for *confessio fidei* and cited as evidence of Socrates’ laconism.” Also cf. pp. 106-107, Coby (1987), for whom the recommendation of the Lacedaemonians is “startling” and “surprising” since they “have in common with the sophists of old the primary objective of keeping their wisdom secret” (see *Protagoras* 242a-b); therefore, “the tribute paid to Lacedaemon must be “a thinly veiled reproof of Protagoras, who made the publication of his wisdom a matter of policy.” In a similar vein, cf. p. 172, Goldberg (1983).

¹⁰ p. 145; Taylor (1991). Cf. pp. 183-184, Goldberg (1983), for whom this is also ironic, although here Goldberg maintains the impression of “ironic play” rather than of cheating or deceiving. It requires an observation such as Taylor’s to see anything more, i.e., that it is a typically sophistic perversion of meaning, and so characteristic of a role to which Socrates risks giving credit, if he models it too assiduously, in a deadpan manner.

¹¹ pp. 136-137, Vlastos (1991); although not actually one of Vlastos’ examples, his view about deadpan irony being the reason to take irony as deceitful applies to the speech as a whole.

5. Likewise “ironical,” according to Taylor, is Socrates claim at 345d-e that everyone knows “very well that all evil or base action is involuntarily.” To prove the lie, Taylor refers us to *Gorgias* 475e, where Socrates says quite the opposite: that he alone of “all other men” would agree with Polus that no one would rather do than suffer wrong.¹² This is a characteristic example for Vlastos as well, who adds that here is another sophistic perversion of meaning. Socrates uses his false assertion at *Protagoras* 345d-e--that *everyone* thinks evil is involuntary--as the basic premise to clarify Simonides’ ambiguous statement that “all who do no baseness willingly I praise and love (πάντας δ’ ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω ἐκὼν ὅστις ἔρδη μηδὲν αἰσχροῦν).”¹³ Since “everyone knows very well that all evil or base action is involuntary,” Simonides cannot be “saying that he praises whoever does no evil willingly” (345e). For, Socrates reasons, “Simonides was not so ignorant as to say that he praised all who did no evil voluntarily, as if there were any who did evil voluntarily” (345d-e). Rather, [t]he word willingly (ἐκὼν) applies to himself [Simonides],” who must therefore mean “all who do no baseness, I praise and love willingly (ἐκὼν).”¹⁴

¹² p. 147; Taylor (1991)

¹³ *Protagoras* 345d; this is W. K. C. Guthrie’s translation (Hamilton and Cairns). Lamb (Loeb) has “But I praise and love everyone willingly committing no baseness.” The ambiguity lies in the fact that it isn’t clear in the Greek which predicate expression the adverb “willingly” (ἐκὼν) applies to. Guthrie’s rendition seems to preserve the ambiguity by leaving it unclear as to whether the adverb ἐκὼν, “willingly” modifies the predicate expression in “I praise and love” (as in ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω ἐκὼν) or the predicate expression in “all who do no baseness” (as in πάντας δ’...ἐκὼν ὅστις ἔρδη μηδὲν αἰσχροῦν). By comparison Lamb (Loeb) more decidedly starts out with “willingly” (ἐκὼν) as the modifier of “committing no baseness” (i.e., πάντας δ’...ἐκὼν ὅστις ἔρδη μηδὲν αἰσχροῦν).

¹⁴ 345e-346a: since Guthrie (Hamilton and Cairns) reads “all who do no baseness willingly I praise and love,” he preserves the ambiguity by not putting in a comma either before or after “willingly.” But it would take a sharp eye to see the point if it were indicated with no more than a tiny comma. In an attempt to make the point just a little more obvious, I’ve taken Guthrie’s translation and moved “willingly” (ἐκὼν) to the end to highlight the significance of Socrates’ reformulation.

This is pretty tortuous stuff no matter how one looks at it. Socrates contends (contrary to what he believes) that everyone thinks that evil is involuntary. This then functions as the premise for deciding that the adverb “willingly” (ἐκῶν) modifies the predicate in the expression “I praise and love” (as in ἐπαίνημι καὶ φιλέω ἐκῶν), and not the predicate in the expression “all who do no baseness” (πάντας ὃς... ὅστις ἔρῃ μηδὲν αἰσχρόν). For it makes no sense to entertain the possibility that anyone does baseness willingly if no one (Simonides included) thinks anyone does baseness willingly.

So far as it goes, the argument is linguistically valid. The grammar of the premise does support the grammar of the conclusion. But from Socrates’ point of view the argument is also unsound. He’s playing games with grammar to support a conclusion that runs counter to the facts as he believes them. In light of *Gorgias* 475e, it seems pretty clear that Socrates does *not* in fact think that everyone believes along with him that no one errs willingly.¹⁵ As Goldberg notes, in regard to this perversion, “Socrates is the true *eirōn* here” playing out an “elaborately ironic and subversive game.”¹⁶ He perpetuates the contrary to one of his most central doctrines, and then capitalizes on that perversion to demonstrate his remarkably sophisticated argumentative skill--all for the sole purpose of silencing Protagoras and winning accolades for himself.

¹⁵ See p. 136; Vlastos (1991)

¹⁶ p. 199; Goldberg (1983); Goldberg adds that Socrates “expects us to feel that his reading perverts the more sensible reading and that thus his own defense of Simonides, ‘compelled’ by the discourse with Protagoras, is interded to be only partially successful.” Doubtless this is true, especially in light of the view, to be discussed shortly, that Socrates’ object is partly to illustrate that poetic interpretation doesn’t work. However, that is not the same as to say that what is evident to the reader who knows Socrates is also evident in context to the crowd that is being hoodwinked. It is the lack of clear hints on behalf of the characters which proves that Socrates is cheating. He cheats on his interlocutors because he deliberately leads them around by the nose, allowing them to think that he is serious when he isn’t.

6. Most telling of all, however, is that Socrates violates the very injunction he places on Protagoras at 335a, to avoid the prolixity of this kind of monologue. As James Stewart Murray has explained, the requirement to speak briefly (335a) was a quintessentially Socratic attitude, and the crucial standpoint from which he opposed the sophists.¹⁷ If that is the case, then all the more reason to wonder at Socrates' sudden capacity for long-winded oration, notwithstanding his protest earlier on that he has no such ability (334c-d). By acting in exactly the manner that he most disapproves of, not only did Socrates embroil himself in outright falsehood--i.e., it is not in fact true that he is incapable of "such long-distance running" as Goldberg put it¹⁸--he also gave the impression of himself being a sophist, thus obscuring his real view, which is that no one should be a sophist.

It does not matter that underlying this subterfuge there was, as Goldberg points out, the intention "to bring an end to Protagoras' potentially open-ended evasions;" that is to say, to "outdo the sophist on his own ground."¹⁹ The consequence of the view that Socrates meant to outsophist the sophists is, in the first place, that he did cheat, as in deceive. This is Vlastos' point regarding Socrates' intention to outsophist the sophist: while "[p]eople...who knew their Socrates"--e.g., Alcibiades²⁰--would doubtless not be taken in by the masquerade, "others in the company who are not in the know would be easily fooled."²¹ Why? Because, Vlastos explains:

¹⁷ See pp. 126-134; James Stewart Murray (1994).

¹⁸ p. 169; Goldberg (1983)

¹⁹ p. 169; Goldberg (1983).

²⁰ Because he was astute enough to dissuade Hippias at 347b from entering the fray with a theory of his own, Alcibiades thus prevented Hippias from prolonging the whole unfortunate incident.

²¹ p. 137; Vlastos (1991)

No signal of irony would come across to them from the wild constructions Socrates puts on Simonides' verse.²² Nor would they have any sure way of knowing that the tall tale about the Spartans was a spoof. Only at the end of his long speech does Socrates give away the information from which his hearers, if they had the wit, could figure out that he had been putting on an act. For only then does he let on that he thinks the whole of the debate on what Simonides did, or didn't, mean had been an exercise in triviality, a complete waste of time, and a tasteless one...²³

In the course of the speech itself, there is no overt hint that Socrates does not mean what he says. He does not say what he really thinks about poetic interpretation until 347b-348a, well after the discussion about Simonides is concluded. If the speech had been intended only to demonstrate the pitfalls of poetic interpretation, it would have been more effective and less likely to be misunderstood, if Socrates had said *first* what he thought of poetry, and then, only *afterwards*, given a speech to illustrate the point. As it stands, the arrangement of the dialogue suggests that outsophisting the sophist was supposed to look like the primary agenda.

In that regard, Socrates was successful. He did fool at least some of those present. As Vlastos notes, Hippias for one was quite taken in. He thought Socrates' display was "highly meritorious," and he wanted to keep the ball rolling with "an interesting thesis of his own" (347a-b). If Socrates' agenda was to mount a successful challenge to Protagoras, he succeeded very well indeed, so well in fact that Hippias took poetry to be the name of the game, and wanted to play too.

²² Here Vlastos appends a note (n. 29 p. 137) citing pp. 24-25, Friedländer (1964): "the Socratic interpretation is as arbitrary as the sophistic and even surpasses it, in fact, in the consistency with which the speaker misinterprets the text." Vlastos further notes that "Hippias would not have commented so favourably on the interpretation (offering to match it in an epideictic speech of his own, 347a6-b2) if he had so much as suspected that the exegesis had been a spoof."

²³ p. 137: Vlastos (1991)

By the same token, however, if Socrates meant to illustrate how unmeritorious it is to indulge in the interpretation of poetry, he failed pretty miserably. With the kind of irony that he indulged in in this episode, he cheated, and by cheating, he deceived. Vlastos:

It can be hardly be disputed that throughout his performance Socrates is pulling the wool over his hearer's eyes.²⁴ What is his game? Irony, certainly, but irony put to a very special use: mockery elaborately played out in sly concealment of its mocking intent....irony is in its own nature innocent of deceit--so much so that it is *impossible* to use the ironical mode to deceive if the hearer is aware of its irony. But if we do want to use it to deceive we need only conceal the ironical intention....In the case of irony grammar prescribes no special syntax. To give direct notice of it we must resort to extra-linguistic signalling like winking or making a face or shifting to another tone of voice. If we prefer to speak in deadpan the irony must be divined from the content of what is said or from its context. These are fragile matters, easily manipulated to contrive deceitful concealment. So they are by Socrates in this section of the *Protagoras* and at its end he lets us see that this was what he has been doing all along and why he chose to do it.²⁵

Not all irony is deceitful, but it can be if the underlying, intentional meaning of what is said remains concealed.²⁶ Vlastos' point is that this is precisely what Socrates does, since he does not

²⁴ Vlastos appends the following note (n. 27 p. 136): "Particularly in the case of Hippias, not the least astute member of the group: Plato leaves us no doubt that he is taken in (note especially what he is made to say at 347a6-7)." The passage in question refers to Hippias' judgement, subsequent to Socrates' exegesis, that the display was "highly meritorious," and to his eagerness to keep the ball rolling with "an interesting thesis" of his own.

²⁵ pp. 136-137; Vlastos (1991); the emphasis in the citation is Vlastos' own.

²⁶ It is worth noting that in this regard Vlastos is consistent with the dictionary in taking it that cheating can mean deceiving. For "cheat" as noun, *The Random House College Dictionary* gives "a fraud or swindler, an imposter;" as verb, "to deceive, influence by fraud, to practice fraud or deceit." Noun synonyms are "swindler, trickster, charlatan, fraud, imposture, artifice, trick, hoax," while verb synonyms are "dupe, gull, con." Also, under the same definiendum, "cheat:" "CHEAT, DECEIVE, TRICK, VICTIMIZE, refer to the use of fraud or artifice deliberately to hoodwink someone or to obtain an unfair advantage over him;" "CHEAT implies conducting matters fraudulently, esp. for profit to oneself [to wit, as in the *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus* discussed in this chapter, Socrates' cheating to trick an interlocutor to submit to a more elenctic style of conversation, or to adopt a more philosophical disposition];" "DECEIVE suggests deliberately misleading or deluding, to produce misunderstanding or to prevent someone from knowing the truth [to wit, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*, Socrates producing the misunderstanding that he is better and more worth listening to because he is the superior sophist or orator];" "To TRICK is to deceive by a stratagem, often of a petty, crafty, or dishonorable kind [to wit, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*, Socrates strategizing to trick an interlocutor to side with him];" "To VICTIMIZE is to make a victim of [to wit, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*, Socrates making a victim out of the sophist or orator he defeats]." As for "deceit," the dictionary gives not only "the act or practice of deceiving, fraud" but also "cheating," "an act or device intended to deceive," "trick,"

let on that he was not seriously interested in poetic exegesis until *after* the exegesis was finished.²⁷ In the course of uttering the irony, Socrates not only cheated, he was also deceitful in that he effectively gave those listening the impression that the truth being displayed, in the manoeuvre to outsofist the sophist, is that sophistry is not worse than the elenchus. It is okay so long as you are good at it. The status of the elenchus, as the right way to search for knowledge, is thereby put in doubt. Socrates undermines the importance of the rule to be serious, and, along with that, the impression he wanted to give, in the *Apology*, that his mission in spending his life at philosophy, examining both himself and others with all due seriousness (28d-e), is a sacred trust held as a matter of obedience to a god (23b, 29d, 30e). As Vlastos explains, while taking note of the same obligations on the part of Socrates:²⁸

To cheat his partners in this search would be to sabotage the process by which he hopes to discover moral truth himself; to cheat his interlocutors would be to cheat himself....such a thing could not happen within the limits of Plato's characterization of Socrates.²⁹

Vlastos excuses Socrates, however, calling his dalliance in such a pastime in the *Protagoras* "extra-elenctic capers." The subject-matter was poetry after all, not the right way to

"stratagem." Noun synonyms are "deception," "dissimulation," and also "hypocrisy." Also, "DECEIT is the quality that prompts intentional concealment or perversion of truth for the purpose of misleading [to wit, *Protagoras*, Socrates' perversions of Simonides' meaning and, *Protagoras* and *Phaedrus*, concealment of his real thoughts, leading by misleading his interlocutors to the truth]."

²⁷ See p. 137; Vlastos (1991)

²⁸ I.e., on pp. 134-135, he cites *Gorgias* 500b-c and *Charmides* 166c-d where Socrates advises interlocutors on the need to be serious, and *Apology* 28e and 29d where Socrates tells of his divine obligation in this regard. In a similar vein, he could also have added *Gorgias* 495a-b, although he does cite it to much the same effect elsewhere while discussing the nature of the Socratic elenchus (p. 111). Also *Crito* 49d. For the citations of *Gorgias* 495a-b, see p. 51 preceding; for *Gorgias* 500b-c, p. 52 preceding.

²⁹ p. 135; Vlastos (1991)

live.³⁰ Another rationale, offered by Vlastos, is that even if Socrates did cheat or deceive, at the very worst he did so unintentionally. He did not cause the confusion whereby the listeners, Hippias most notably, adopted the false impression that discussing poetry is a good way to talk about virtue. The confusion was already there, and Socrates simply took advantage of it.³¹ Hence, for Vlastos, although the episode of poetic interpretation in the *Protagoras* is the “most elaborate” instance in which Socrates might be construed as “complicated, devious, cunning, and not averse to playing pranks on his interlocutors.”³² there is no problem because, after all, nothing serious is going on, and in any case Socrates did not add anything by way of confusion that was not already there in the first place.

There is no disagreement here with Vlastos on that point that there is cheating and deceit in Socrates’ treatment of Simonides’ poem. However, his claim that it can all be written off as extra-elenctic capering does seem to be less than convincing. The object of the ploy was to get back to the elenchus, to Socrates’ way, the right way, of doing things. This becomes apparent if we pay attention to the fact that Socrates’ object all along is to get Protagoras to submit to the elenchus. At the beginning of the dialogue Protagoras is the great sophist given to long-winded monologues, bent on demonstrating his skill (361b-c), and boastfully claiming that he is an expert at teaching and making others better (319a). Socrates is the challenger and wants to examine the great sophist on the question as to what virtue is and whether it can be taught

³⁰ That is the point of calling the episode extra-elenctic. As Vlastos explains: “when Socrates is searching for the right way to live, in circumstances in which it is reasonable for him to think of the search as obedience to divine command, his argument cannot involve wilful untruth” (p. 134). Exceptions are supposed to be extra-elenctic, to save him from the badness of cheating.

³¹ pp. 137-138; Vlastos (1991)

³² See p. 133 including n. 14, Vlastos 1991; also pp. 53ff preceding. For other examples of the view that Socrates essentially deceives, although to a serious rather than non-serious end, see n. 43 following.

(320b). But not until after he successfully matches Protagoras' great speech (320c-328d) with a long monologue of his own--the dubious exegesis of Simonides' poem (342a-347a)--does Socrates actually succeed in pressuring Protagoras to shut up and conform to the elenchus.³³ In the larger context of the dialogue as a whole, this is the purpose of the cheating. Moreover, it is a purpose at which Socrates succeeds. So well, in fact, that in addition to dissuading Protagoras from long-winded speeches, and from the inclination to discuss poetry, Socrates has, by the end of the dialogue, impressed Protagoras so much that he, the anti-sophist, earns from the great sophist praise for "skill in exhibition," and the prediction that in time he will "become one of our leading philosophers."³⁴

When taken in context, it would appear that Socrates' exegetical monologue was not at all divorced from his concern about the right way to live. The whole point was to initiate a successful elenctic discussion about virtue, to have things proceed his way rather than Protagoras'. While it might be cheating, even deceitful, for Socrates to take on and model the very part of the sophist that he wants to displace, this is no mere game. Cheating was the means by which he turned things around for the better. It may well be a "tasteless" exercise, as Vlastos

³³ Much of the pressure comes from the audience which eventually becomes the adjudicator of the contest, initially at 335c-338b, and again at 348b-c at which point, subsequent to the exegesis, Protagoras is pressured to be Socrates' interlocutor. From then on to the end of the dialogue the conversation is all elenctic.

³⁴ *Protagoras* 361d-e. One could wonder whether Protagoras is being serious here, or whether he is being sarcastic. The question is particularly relevant in that there is no reply from Socrates to indicate how *he* takes the remark. As C. C. W. Taylor (1991) notes, "Socrates' silence in response to this encomium is deafening." For Taylor, this could mean either that Protagoras was insincere, in which case no comment is called for, or that he was not insincere and Socrates was therefore nonplused, taken by surprise at the sudden turnabout--as Taylor puts it, "unable to make a reply which will be both sincere and polite" (p. 215). But Taylor thinks the latter possibility is the more plausible. Same here, although it wouldn't really make much difference since, regardless of Protagoras' attitude, Socrates did manage to discredit the discussion of poetry, and did manage to get Protagoras to submit to the elenchus.

has said, but it is not, as Vlastos also says, a "trivial" matter, "a complete waste of time."³⁵ Quite the opposite. The moment you allow that Socrates' object was in fact to out-sophist the sophist, you have subscribed to the possibility that the cheating in question was for the sake of a genuinely serious--and in this case typically Socratic--objective.

But what about Vlastos' point that the cheating in question was not deceit because instead of *creating* a false impression Socrates merely capitalized on his interlocutors' delusions? Can this be construed as a reasonable excuse? It is difficult to see how. Vlastos is in fact rather confusing on this point. On the one hand, extra-elenctic capering is, as we saw earlier, supposed to denote instances in which Socrates is not actually pursuing his concern about the right way to live.³⁶ It is just a "game," irony "played out in sly concealment of its mocking intent."³⁷ On the other hand, however, Vlastos says the object is to get an interlocutor to "submit to painful elenctic surgery."³⁸ This is where it gets confusing.³⁹ On the basis of what Vlastos says, extra-

³⁵ p. 137; Vlastos (1991)

³⁶ See n. 30 and the associated sentence preceding.

³⁷ p. 136; Vlastos (1991)

³⁸ See pp. 138-139; Vlastos (1991).

³⁹ pp. 138-139; Vlastos (1991). For Vlastos, additional examples of such "extra-elenctic Socratic capers" are the mocking praise supposedly accorded to Euthyphro at *Euthyphro* 15e, to Thrasymachus at *Republic* I 336e-337a, and to Hippias at *Hippias Major* 372a-b. These are all, according to Vlastos, instances of Socrates' "characteristic irony laid on thick," the irony, he explains immediately following, whereby Socrates uses his interlocutors' "self-deceit" against them for corrective purposes. This is where it gets confusing. At the beginning of p. 138, Vlastos is discussing "extra-elenctic Socratic capers" as the sort of irony of deceit, or shamming, that Thrasymachus accuses Socrates of at *Republic* I 337a (Vlastos repetition of 336e-337a includes the statement of ignorance that Thrasymachus found to be deceitful). But this is the irony which Vlastos himself thought was *not* the characteristic Socratic irony. Rather, it was a popular conception of irony *unfairly* and *inaccurately* imputed to Socrates by unperspicacious opponents who did not realize that with him the meaning of the term had changed (see p. 41, Vlasto 1994; pp. 28-31, and n. 32 p. 138, Vlastos 1991). Then, following his citations from the *Euthyphro*, *Republic*, and *Hippias Major*--all as examples of "extra-elenctic Socratic capers...scattered all through Plato's earlier dialogues"--Vlastos then shifts very abruptly from talk of extra-elenctic capers to talk of Socrates' "characteristic irony," the irony which he generally takes to be complex irony. It seems like Socrates' characteristic irony is both extra-elenctic capering *and* complex irony, or simple irony *and* complex irony, or extra-elenctic/simple/complex irony...or whatever? Confusions like this make it difficult to comprehend the sense of this part of Vlastos' chapter,

elenctic capering is not just the use of ironical deceit in instances in which the subject-matter is something other than the right way to live. It also means deliberately capitalizing on the delusion of interlocutors the better to trick them into conforming to the Socratic method of discussion. But that is as much as to say that Socrates cheats or deceives *in order to trick an interlocutor into conforming with the right way to live*. That Socrates might sometimes take advantage of his interlocutor's own confusion does not obviate any of this. He still capitalizes on his interlocutor's frame of mind in such a way that he does not, in point of fact, say what is his own frame of mind. Taking advantage of his interlocutor's confusion simply means that the intention to cheat or deceive is more easily accomplished, not that there is no cheating or deception.⁴⁰ It is cheating or deception, and, moreover, the cheating or deception *is* about the right to live after all!

Again, if one takes Socrates' participation in poetic interpretation, as Vlastos does, both seriously as "a contest with the great sophist"⁴¹ and ironically in the sense of cheating or deception, then one has already committed oneself to the view that Socrates indulges in the ploy

"Does Socrates Cheat?" (As the problem relates to the difficulty of thinking of complex irony as both deliberately pedagogical and as unintentionally deceitful, see also the discussion in the final section of this chapter.)

⁴⁰ Part of Vlastos' argument, against the possibility that Socrates deceives, is that he does so *unintentionally*. Here the rationale is that it is only those who don't know Socrates who are deceived by him (pp. 136-137, 137-138, Vlastos 1991). However, that cannot be an excuse in this instance. It doesn't make sense to suppose that you have to know people in order to be assured that you won't be led around by the nose by them. As this chapter aims to show eventually, deliberate deceit is a feature of simple irony, the irony of saying one thing and meaning another for which Socrates needs a better excuse than that he plays games; but the same excuse isn't needed for complex irony because it isn't intentional.

⁴¹ p. 135; Vlastos (1991)

to a serious end,⁴² namely his concern to show that sophistry after the manner of Protagoras not the right way to live.⁴³

This brings to the fore the problem that Socrates seems to violate the rule of *Gorgias* 495a-b. that one should tell the truth, saying what one really thinks, in serious discussions which concern the right way to live.⁴⁴

ii) Prospectus for a solution

Given that it is difficult to excuse Socrates on the grounds that he was indulging in what Vlastos calls "extra-elenctic capers," the object in this chapter is to attempt to find a different kind of solution: the claim that even though such insincerity is a regrettable ploy,⁴⁵ it is good to

⁴² As Vlastos (1991) observes, about Socrates' distaste for poetic interpretation, 347d, "[h]e is protesting as a cop-out the shift out of question-and-answer argument into poetic exegesis, which Protagoras has instigated" (pp. 137-138). But if Socrates is protesting Protagoras' desire to interpret poetry, in preference to elenctic discussion, surely what is paramount on his mind is the right way of doing things. It's the logical way to regard his participation in the exegesis, if one takes this participation to be, as Vlastos does, "a contest with the great sophist" (p. 135).

⁴³ It is worth noting here that this is a significant difference between Vlastos, and foregoing commentators--i.e., Taylor, Goldberg, and Coby. While all admit, essentially, that Socrates does deliberately play the sophist in his exegesis of Simonides' poem only Vlastos holds that the episode is also spurious. But this sort of view is, according to Goldberg (n. 1 p. 215), the "prevailing attitude." In support of this claim Goldberg cites p. 128, Paul Shorey (1933); p. 251, A. E. Taylor (1963); and p. 227, Guthrie (1975). In the case of Guthrie, however, note that the treatment is self-admittedly brief and incomplete. Also, Guthrie does supplement his remarks with a note referring to Crombie (1962), for whom, although the exegesis is "comic" and "grossly tendentious," there is a serious object "apart from comedy-value," namely Socrates' intention to show that "you can make a poem mean anything you like," and that "reliance on poetry as a means of education is misguided" (p. 234). All of which is to say, if Goldberg is right (Guthrie excepted), then Vlastos aligns with a popular view to the effect that the episode is not a terribly significant factor in the dialogue--just "preliminary sparring" as Crombie puts it (cf. p. 137, Vlastos who writes that for Socrates the whole thing was a "triviality, a waste of time"). While Vlastos' approach is to understand the irony in question on the assumption that it is not serious, contrariwise, Goldberg thinks that taking a serious view of the episode is the way to get a better understanding of its ironic character (see pp. 183-184).

⁴⁴ Hence Vlastos' point (pp. 134-135), via *Gorgias* 500b-c, *Apology* 28e, 29d, and *Charmides* 166c-d, that insincerity is not an option if Socrates' mission in life, and the elenchus, are going to be effective.

⁴⁵ As Vlastos (1991) notes, in the *Protagoras* Socrates entered the fray "reluctantly" (p. 135). He bases this on 339e, where Socrates confesses to having been rocked by Protagoras; if struck by a boxer he "felt giddy and things got dark"--reluctant to come out for another round perhaps? More to the point, perhaps is 335a-b, where Socrates is about to take his leave, reluctant to continue since Protagoras is so uncooperative: "I saw that he was dissatisfied

indulge in it in exigent circumstances which prove that the truth comes out nonetheless--such as it did in the *Protagoras* in that Protagoras did eventually submit to the elenchus, and did eventually endorse a more Socratic disposition in regard to the knowledge of virtue. To that end, we shall turn to an even more striking example of Socrates' insincerity, the untruth that eros is bad, which he argues for in his first speech about love in the *Phaedrus*.

We appeal to this example not only because it is equally if not more striking than the previous one but also because, subsequent to a second, more truthful speech, there is a discussion on language in which resides a distinction between two sorts of deceitful orators that will help explain why Socrates' deceit may sometimes be excusable. On the one hand, there is the bad rhetorician who tries to argue in a purely rhetorical fashion without any apparent knowledge of the subject matter and therefore wallows in a kind of self-deceit, scarcely less confused than the audience. Socrates' judgement is that this sort of bad rhetorician is totally artless. On the other hand, there is the rhetorician who has knowledge and uses this knowledge to sow confusion, thus deceiving without being deceived. Socrates is willing to call this sort of rhetoric art, and this is the art that he practices in his first speech on eros in the *Phaedrus*. Thus, Socrates conforms to the notion of an artful bad rhetorician. He outplayed Lysias, thereby earning the admiration of Phaedrus, by using his more detailed conception of human nature to propound what was, by his own admission, a false conception of love. By means of this ploy, Socrates got Phaedrus interested enough to listen to a more sincere speech about love, and afterwards to participate in

with his own performance in the answers he had given, and would not of his own free will continue in the role of the answerer, and it seemed to me that it was not my business to remain any longer in the discussions." Cf. *Phaedrus* 242a. Socrates' inclination to leave before he goes to even "greater lengths," prior to the *daimonion* appearing to indicate recantation instead. But also 237a, Socrates' shame.

an elenctic discussion about language. With this in mind, the object will be to argue that Socrates does sometimes indulge in an irony of deceit but that this indulgence can be regarded as a justifiable pedagogical device, if his ultimate object is still to get to the truth in any case. For, as Socrates himself allows, such deceit conceivably deserves the name of art. It is the competence, the "skilful deception" as one commentator puts it,⁴⁶ whereby one deceives without being deceived, the better to defend the truth in circumstances in which a less roundabout method might be less effective.

The bulk of the remainder of this chapter is preoccupied with advancing this argument. At the end, however, in the last section, we also return briefly to the notion of complex irony, this time with the question as to whether it too can be considered deceitful; whether, that is, it is simply a necessary and unavoidable articulation by Socrates of the discrepancy between two sorts of knowledge, or whether it is optional, just another concealment uttered once again for deliberately pedagogical reasons--for the sake of "painful elenctic surgery" as Vlastos puts it.⁴⁷

iii) Procedural standpoint

One thing to keep in mind before we proceed: The following presentation of the *Phaedrus* dwells primarily on the feature of a character contest between Socrates and Lysias in which Socrates' object, in his first speech, was to outplay Lysias so as to turn Phaedrus towards eros and philosophy. In this regard, the following presentation does not purport to account fully for the governing object of what is a quite complex dialogue. The *Phaedrus* contains more than

⁴⁶ p. 198. Crombie (1962); cf. "willful misrepresentation," p. 27, Vlastos (1991).

⁴⁷ p. 139; Vlastos (1991)

one distinct subject matter. As G. J. de Vries has pointed out,⁴⁸ the most obvious examples in this regard are the discussions about love from the beginning of the dialogue up to 257d, and the subsequent discussion about rhetoric from 257d up to the end of the dialogue. But with particular regard to Socrates' second speech about eros, the dialogue is also a treatise on the nature of the soul (245cff); in which regard there occur three additional subtopics, namely the soul as the ruling principal of life,⁴⁹ the soul as the source of the urge towards goodness,⁵⁰ and the soul as the original source of beauty or nobility of character.⁵¹ While it has been said that all the various topics probably are governed by a consistent general objective running throughout the

⁴⁸ See pp. 22-24; de Vries (1969)

⁴⁹ A complicated topic in and of itself, given the difficulty of either comprehending or believing in the argument at 245c-246d in which Socrates attempts to prove, not individuated and disembodied immortality but rather that each soul participates in a common principle of self-motion which is eternal and immortal, thus implying that perhaps the soul is immortal in one sense but not in another. William S. Cobb (1993) has explained the problem. See also, p. 396-397, Guthrie (1975). But in particular pp. 222-223, Martha Nussbaum (1987), who compares the disembodied soul of the *Phaedo* (e.g., 80c-e) and *Republic* (608e-613e) to that of the *Phaedrus* (and *Symposium*) in which the soul was more the self-moved locus of an inherent tendency or passion for philosophical knowledge. Part of the problem concerns the ambiguity of the opening statement at 245c, "all soul is immortal." See pp. 325-326, Crombie (1962), who takes this to mean just plain immortality since even if Socrates wanted to posit an "underivative source of activity," he fails, there being no sense in proposing, on a sort of prime-mover principle, *many* autonomous "self-activators." The problem stems partly from the fact that it is unclear whether "all soul is immortal" means the collective principal of all individual souls or each soul individually. See pp. 50-54, Burger (1980) who focuses squarely on the meaning of "all souls," and thinks Socrates is well-aware of the problem. Hence his attempt, partially successful at best given the impossibility of saying what such things really are like (246a), to describe the idea or visible form (τῆς ἰδέας αὐτῆς, 264a3-4) of an embodied "living being" (ζῶον, 246c5), conceived of as immortal in virtue of its innate tendency to be winged, to aspire to "the region where the gods dwell" (246d). (Concerning ἰδέα, εἶδος as visible form, see H. C. Baldry, 1937.) This issue is complex but also irrelevant here, beyond simply illustrating some of the complexities of the dialogue which are being deliberately overlooked for the moment. One other interesting point to note, however: the doctrine of an embodied, individual capability for self-motion is not necessarily mutually exclusive with that of individuated, disembodied immortality. As Nussbaum (1987) points out it could be just a matter of emphasis, of what Plato happened to value most about the concept of soul at the time of writing (p. 222). Also n. 4 p. 491, Guthrie (1975): "it is surely unimaginable that... 'soul in its totality' [if this is the meaning of ψυχῆ πᾶσα ἀθάνατος at 245c5] could remain if all individual souls were perishable." Could the same be said of soul as self-moving? I.e., how could this be a feature of soul as such without it also being a feature of every soul?

⁵⁰ I.e., in virtue of its 'winged' nature, 246dff.

⁵¹ *Phaedrus* 248ff, Socrates' description of the benefits of being erotically charged towards the good. The designation of the topic of soul, with these three related subtopics, is from p. 22, de Vries (1969).

dialogue, an objective which any interpreter needs to consider, if the object is to achieve a coherent view of the dialogue as a whole.⁵² it has never been an easy task to decide exactly how to identify or express this central aim (and, moreover, how to relate the concept of eros as presented in this dialogue with the same concept as it is presented in the *Symposium*).⁵³ The one point about which there is some consensus, however, is that however it should be spelled out the unity of the *Phaedrus* must depend on a fundamental relationship between the two main topics concerning eros and language. Hence, as de Vries has explained, the “main subthemes of the dialogue are intertwined” around the core message that the proper “foundation” for rhetoric (i.e., the “persuasive use of words”) is true knowledge, especially the knowledge of beauty.⁵⁴ A connection between eros and language thus occurs in that eros provokes in the soul an all-consuming desire to use language to acquire and defend the truth about beauty. In this regard, the *Phaedrus* could be considered first and foremost a treatise on a kind of rhetoric that is seated in the soul,⁵⁵ with the soul being the source of the desire to acquire the knowledge of beauty and goodness, and to defend that knowledge skillfully (in relation to which, one might add, the praise of eros in the *Symposium* then further demonstrates that the soul’s capacity to conjoin love with

⁵² Cf. p. 7, C. J. Rowe (1988): the “chief task of any interpreter of the *Phaedrus*” is to “identify the thread, or threads, which hold [the] various parts [of the *Phaedrus*] together; and in particular, to understand the relationship between the first half, which culminates in a long and powerful speech by Socrates on the nature of ideal love, and the second, the larger part of which is occupied by a rather more prosaic discussion of rhetorical theory and practice.”

⁵³ As Guthrie (1975) remarks of the *Phaedrus*, “As for its philosophy, Plato’s refusal to confine one dialogue to a single subject has upset his critics, who do not always see connexions where he did” (p. 396).

⁵⁴ See p. 23; de Vries (1969).

⁵⁵ Cf. *Phaedrus* 276a: the “discourse...of unquestioned legitimacy....[T]he sort that goes together with knowledge and is written in the soul of the learner, that can defend itself, and knows to whom it should speak and to whom it should say nothing....no dead discourse, but the living speech, the original of which the written discourse may fairly be called a kind of image (εἰδῶλον).”

language is decisive only in the *best* philosophical soul, the soul of Socrates). Ronna Burger essentially agrees, explaining that the *Phaedrus* offers the general argument that a philosophically defensible art of speaking and writing occurs in a soul that is galvanized by eros to practice rhetoric according to the guidelines of rational (Platonic) dialectics.⁵⁶ Clearly, the polemic between Socrates and Lysias (for Phaedrus), is not the sole issue in the *Phaedrus*. For that reason, it has to be noted that the following discussion by no means takes into account the full complexity of the dialogue.⁵⁷

At the same time, however, this is not to say that more complex issues necessarily negate the feature of rhetorical persuasion by which Socrates attempts to turn Phaedrus into an acolyte for philosophy. In fact, it might be argued that this example of rhetoric helps bring the two main topics of the dialogue together. Phaedrus is infected with eros, and subsequently shows an interest in rhetoric (257d-e) precisely because Socrates used rhetoric in a dubious way--telling a story about which he was initially ashamed (237a), and which he later acknowledged as false (243a, 244a)--to initiate the turn. In these circumstances, the topic of rhetoric constitutes a

⁵⁶ See pp. 1-7, 70-71; Ronna Burger (1980). Central to Burger's viewpoint is that the argument for immortality, as at 245c-e, is a metaphor suggesting the human capacity to be infected with philosophical love, and to engage in philosophical language, a capacity that persists so long as human life itself exists. It is, as Burger has observed, an argument that affords Socrates the means to say as a matter of general truth that eros is "the moving force of every soul" (p. 48). That makes it possible to hold that good rhetoric as described in the second part of the dialogue is innate and can and should be practiced by every living person to the best of his/her ability. Cf. pp. 150-151, Cobb (1993). The immortality argument thus constitutes a link between the first half of the dialogue which talks about eros, and the second half concerning language.

⁵⁷ See also n. 100 following, concerning the fact that Socrates' first and second speeches differ in that the term ἔρωξ denotes radically different dispositions. The discrepancy could be due to the fact that in his first speech Socrates deliberately used a sound argumentative method to fetch up in a false conclusion. If so, however, then perhaps all the more reason to think that the speech is primarily sophistical, a rhetoric of persuasion aimed at earning Phaedrus' undying admiration. On the other hand, however, there could be a genuine problem of definition here. The presumption here, though, is that regardless how the question of definition might be settled, any explanation would have to contend with the fact that Socrates did say the first story was false (243a, 244a). In other words, he did sow more confusion than he experienced himself.

natural enough follow-up to the topic of eros. In any event, the object in pointing out these issues is simply to note that there is more at stake in the dialogue than just the polemic between Socrates and Lysias. The following discussion, even at the risk of sounding hyperbolically negative about the Socrates' first speech,⁵⁸ has been restricted to this polemic in order to see if, on the basis of such a worst-case scenario, it may nonetheless be possible to offer a rationale for the problem of Socrates' occasional tendency to indulge in deceit.

II: Deceit in the *Phaedrus*

i) The three speeches about love

There are three speeches about love in the *Phaedrus*. The first is a written speech, the teaching of Lysias which has filled the young Phaedrus with admiration (227c, 234c, 235b), and the second and third are the two speeches that Socrates delivers orally, in reply to Lysias. All three speeches purport to explain the true nature of love, but they differ in that the first two disparage erotic love (ἔρως) while in the third Socrates praises it.

Lysias: Lysias claims that "lovers" (οἱ ἐρῶντες, 231a) are essentially irrational, and although they know this they are helpless to do anything about it:

...the man himself admits that he is not sound, but sick, that he is aware of his folly, but cannot control himself. (231d)

⁵⁸ Regarding the possibility of reading the speech either quite positively, as a "well-intentioned half-way stage on the way to Plato's own position as expressed in the Great Speech," or, more negatively, as "faulty in every vital respect,...repudiated by Plato *in toto*," see p. 405, including nn. 1, 2, Malcom Brown and James Coulter (1971). Also, p. 66, Mary Margaret MacKenzie (1982), noting another important issue, that blasphemous as it is Socrates' first speech defended "temperance and rationality (237-241d)" in customary fashion, while in marked contrast his second suddenly defended something quite different, "the irrational element of love." It's the starkness of the contrast that first gives rise to the impression that there's a lie going on somewhere. Cf. p. 57, Griswold (1986). We know where Socrates stands on that. He says the first speech was the lie (243a, 244a).

Far better, he thinks, that one eschew erotic love and adopt a sort of “passionless prurience,” as one commentator has aptly called it,⁵⁹ whereby one tries to be master of oneself rather than mastered by eros. Instead of ἔρωζ, therefore, Lysias endorses the concept of φίλια.⁶⁰ a disposition which, as he explains it, means that one does not consort with those who beg and appear in need of satisfaction, but rather prefers the company of those who are self-sufficient and who avoid unseemly displays of passion in order to be all the more successful stewards of their own interests (233d-234a). In effect, Lysias is endorsing a fraternity of peers, people who consort with one another because they find it beneficial to associate on the basis of compatible and complementary external interests.

Socrates' first speech: In his first speech (237a-241d), Socrates essentially agrees with Lysias. Eros is the source of irrational desire. Distinguishing between two principles of human nature, “an innate desire for pleasure” and “an acquired opinion that aims at what is best (τοῦ ἀρίστου).” Socrates argues for the guidance of “temperance” (σωφροσύνη, 237e3), so that instead of being drawn “irrationally (ἄλόγως) towards pleasure,” desire thus becoming “wantonness (ὑβρις).” one must always aim for the best.⁶¹ The key to achieving temperance,

⁵⁹ p. 26: William Hepworth Thompson (1973). In this regard, a rather fundamental paradox, noticed by C. J. Rowe (1988) is that with his repetitive, sultry references to Phaedrus as παῖς καλός (“beautiful boy,” see e.g. 227c) Lysias “tries to persuade the boy to give in to him, despite the fact that he is not in love with him” (p. 143). Lysias’ difficulty is that as an orator his job is to seduce but that in this case his subject matter forbids seduction. At 233a he advises Phaedrus that it is better to yield to him than to a lover (ἐραστῆ) but in disallowing erotic passion and seduction he also forbids himself from trying to attract Phaedrus rhetorically. Also see Socrates’ reference to the paradox at 237b in the introduction to his first speech. As Charles Griswold (1986) explains, this reveals a motive for Socrates’ “deception:” by noting the “explicit contrast between the concealed lover’s ergon [deed] and his logos [word]” Socrates wants to show that “the whole speech is a lie” (p. 57). Griswold means Socrates is showing up Lysias (I think). By the same token, however, so is he exposing his own first speech, since it argues basically the same point as did Lysias.

⁶⁰ *Phaedrus* 233c: “...I am master of myself, rather than the victim of love (ἔρωτος)....for these are the tokens of lasting friendship (φιλίας).”

⁶¹ *Phaedrus* 237e

according to this speech? Ἔρως is irrational, so eschew it: "it is anything but a profitable investment to have as guardian or partner a man in love (ἀνὴρ ἔχων ἔρωτα)."⁶²

Socrates' second speech: In his second speech (244a-259e), Socrates announces his intention to sing a radically different tune.

...let us not be disturbed by an argument that seeks to scare us into preferring the friendship of the sane (τὸν σώφρονα φίλον) to that of the passionate.... What we have to prove is the opposite, namely that this sort of madness (ἡ τοιαύτη μανία) is a gift of the gods, fraught with the highest bliss (εὐτυχία τῆ μεγίστη).⁶³

Apparently, the two previous speeches were very wrong. Far from being a really bad thing, eros is the source of heaven-sent prosperity for anyone, lover and beloved alike. Instead of being an irrational, slavish devotion to desire, erotic madness is a mania that belongs to the best part of the soul, nourishing and strengthening an inborn tendency to be 'winged,' to want to soar upwards to the "plain of truth" (τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίον). Eros is a basis for Socrates to repeat his well-known conviction that whoever understands the truth is necessarily made good and can come to no harm.⁶⁴ To be thus winged is to be philosophically minded, someone truly inspired whom only the unphilosophical many mistakenly think is mad.⁶⁵ In comparing erotic madness (τῆς

⁶² *Phaedrus* 239c

⁶³ *Phaedrus* 245b-c: while Hackforth (Hamilton and Cairns) gives "bliss" for εὐτυχία, Fowler (Loeb) has "happiness," and Jowett (*The Works of Plato*), "blessings." Liddell and Scott give "good luck, success, prosperity"-the point being, therefore, that instead of being fatally irrational, the *mania* of eros is the source of all that which is good for humanity.

⁶⁴ I.e., at 248b-c, souls inspired by eros "behold the plain of Truth (τὸ ἀληθείας πεδίον)," in keeping with their "noblest part," and it is an "the ordinance of Necessity" that "[w]hatsoever soul has followed in the train of a god, and discerned something of truth (τι τῶν ἀληθῶν), shall be kept from sorrow...if she can do this always, she shall remain free from hurt (κἂν αἰεὶ τοῦτο δύνηται ποιεῖν, αἰεὶ ἀβλαβῆ εἶναι)."

⁶⁵ *Phaedrus* 249c-d: "Therefore it is meet and right that the soul of the philosopher alone should recover her wings.....he alone become truly perfect. Standing aside from the busy doings of mankind, and drawing nigh to the divine, he is rebuked by the multitude as being out of his wits, for they know not that he is possessed by a deity."

ἐρωτικῆς μανίας, 256d) to mortal prudence (σωφροσύνη θνητῆ, 256e), Socrates thus finds, contrary to what Lysias taught, that the real fools are those who cling to restraint, who are dispassionately absorbed by purely mundane, worldly affairs. They are ones destined to remain trivial and confused.

...they carry off no mean reward for their lovers' madness (τῆς ἐρωτικῆς μανίας), for it is ordained that all such as have taken the first steps on the celestial highway shall no more return to the dark pathways beneath the earth, but shall walk together in a life of shining bliss....[But] [h]e who is not a lover can offer a mere acquaintance flavored with worldly wisdom, dispensing a niggardly measure of worldly goods: in the soul to which he is attached he will engender an ignoble quality extolled by the multitude as virtue, and condemn it to float for nine thousand years hither and thither, around the earth and beneath it, bereft of understanding. (256d-257a)

In light of this passage, what should come to mind is a fundamental difference between Lysias' φίλια and Socrates' ἔρωσ. Only the philosophically inclined actually are intelligent. In this regard, Diotima's advice to Socrates at *Symposium* 203e-204b seems very much to the point:

...Love is never altogether in or out of need, and stands, moreover, midway between ignorance and wisdom. You must understand that none of the gods are wise--and why should the wise be seeking the wisdom that is already theirs? Nor, for that matter, do the ignorant (οἱ ἀμαθεῖς) seek the truth or crave to be made wise. And indeed, what makes their case so hopeless is that, having neither beauty, nor goodness, nor intelligence, they are satisfied with what they are, and do not long for the virtues they have never missed....wisdom is concerned with the loveliest of things, and Love is the love of what is lovely....Love is a lover of wisdom Ἐρωτα φιλόσοφον εἶναι).... Such, my dear Socrates, is the spirit of love (ἡ φύσις τοῦ δαίμονος). (203e-204b)

Only gods and fools are not erotic, the gods because they have no need of love of wisdom, fools because they do not understand the importance of it.⁶⁶ Only the erotic are philosophically

⁶⁶ "Fools" is from οἱ ἀμαθεῖς at 204a3 in the *Symposium* passage just cited. See p. 438, Strycker (1966), "the foolish." Jowett (*The Works of Plato*) alternates, giving "the ignorant," as do Tredennick (Hamilton and Cairns) and Lamb (Loeb), for οἱ ἀμαθεῖς at 204a3, but, contra Tredennick and Lamb, "the foolish" for οἱ ἀμαθεῖς shortly afterwards, at 204a9. For ἀμαθής Liddell and Scott (1995) give "untaught, unlearned, ignorant, stupid, boorish,"

inclined. They are intelligent because they understand the difference between wisdom and ignorance, and because they know, therefore, that they stand in need of wisdom. All the rest are “satisfied with what they have,” the gods because they have everything, fools because they mistake what they have to be enough. This is the fundamental difference between Lysian *φίλια* and Socratic *ἔρω*.⁶⁷

ii) The truth versus the lie, Socrates cheats again

The thesis of Socrates’ second speech is such a radical turnaround from that of his first, it seems obvious that both cannot be true. One has to be a lie; and the indications are that it is the first. As Socrates says, at the outset of his second speech:

False is the tale that when a lover is at hand favor ought to be accorded to the one who does not love, on the ground that the former is mad, and the latter is sound of mind (244a).

Not only this, but Socrates seems to have been aware all along that the first speech was false. As he told Phaedrus, prior to beginning:

and with particular reference to Plato, *ἀμαθῆς τὴν ἐκείνων ἀμαθίαν*, “stupid with their stupidity.” Cf. also the superlative *ἀμαθεστάτους* at *Protagoras* 349d7-8, Protagoras contending that there are people who are totally ignorant--and unjust, unholy, and intemperate as well--but who are, at the same time, completely courageous, of which Taylor (1991) remarks, “[s]ince the verb *mantanein* may mean either ‘learn’ or ‘understand’ (*Euthyd.* 277e-278a), the adjective *amathēs* may mean either ‘lacking learning’ or ‘lacking understanding’, and hence in different contexts have the force of ‘stupid’, ‘uneducated’, ‘ignorant’, or ‘inexpert’. No single English word covers that range of applications” (p. 150). The indications are that in Plato the two meanings of ignorance and stupidity/foolishness run together, in which case *ἀμαθῆς* is functionally synonymous with *ἀφροσύνη*, both denoting the disposition of a fool basically. See *ἀφροσύνην*, *Protagoras* 332a4, pp. 168ff preceding.

⁶⁷ Cf. pp. 438-439, Strycker (1966) relating this passage to *Apology* 29d-e, where Socrates refuses the option of recantation on the grounds that he cannot disobey the divine compunction to spend his life “philosophizing” (*οὐ μὴ παύσωμαι φιλοσοφῶν*, 29d4-5). To be thus erotic is fundamentally what it means to be Socrates. As David L. Roochnik (1987) remarks, “[t]o understand *ta erotika* is...to understand the primacy of the question, that mode of discourse emanating from the knowledge of ignorance” (p. 128).

I shall cover my head before I begin; then I can rush through my speech at top speed without looking at you and breaking down for shame. (237a)

If not for this remark, one might perhaps think that Socrates committed an inadvertent falsehood, as if he started out sincerely enough and only recognized the error of his ways relatively late in the game. That impression is belied, however, by the fact that he was conscious right from the beginning that he was doing something shameful.⁶⁸ Another indicator that he knowingly spoke wrongly occurs later, near at the end of the first speech. Socrates stops very abruptly, telling Phaedrus. “[n]ot a word more shall you have from me; let that be the end of my discourse” (241d). The perplexed Phaedrus protests: Socrates’ speech is but half finished; like Lysias he reviled ἔρωξ but unlike Lysias he did not go the extra step of praising φίλια.⁶⁹ But Socrates cannot continue. Evidently acutely aware that he had not spoken well, he decided to take his leave. At that precise moment, however, the *daimonion* comes forth to advise him that he has committed a grievous wrong, and leaving is not good enough. He must stay to recant:

At the moment when I was about to cross the river, dear friend, there came to me my familiar sign--which always checks me when on the point of doing something or other--and all at once I seemed to hear a voice, forbidding me to leave the spot until I had made atonement for some offense to heaven....for I felt disturbed some while ago as I was delivering that speech, and had a misgiving lest I might, in the words of Ibycus, ‘By sinning in the sight of God win renown from man.’ But now I realize my sin.⁷⁰

⁶⁸ Cf. pp. 56-57. Griswold (1986): “One of the most intriguing aspects of Socrates’ self-concealment concerns ‘shame,’ a phenomenon that is crucial in the *Phaedrus*.” Shame indicates one’s self-awareness that what one is doing has moral significance.

⁶⁹ Lysias speech is in two parts: from 231a-233d he devotes himself to the contention that ἔρωξ is irrational, appetitive, and emotional, and then, from 233d-234c, he adds that one should therefore prefer the more rational and moderate demeanour of φίλια. Hence, Phaedrus was expecting two parts from Socrates as well, not the half speech which Socrates refuses to continue.

⁷⁰ *Phaedrus* 242b-c; cf. p. 161. Rowe (1988): “Having outplayed Lysias, Socrates prepares to leave. But he is then held back, both by his ‘divine sign,’ and by his own realization that he has slandered Love. He proposes to recant.” Initially Socrates would simply have left, but the *daimonion* stayed him. It seems to be typical of Socrates to be

Prompted by the *daimonion*, Socrates realizes that he has 'sinned.' Forthwith, therefore, he stops, denounces both his first speech and that of Lysias,⁷¹ and resolves to absolve himself with a second speech, this time in praise of ἔρως. As Socrates explains at *Apology* 31d, 40a-c, the *daimonion* typically comes forth to protest when he has done something wrong. In the *Apology*, that was reason enough for him to conclude that he spoke well in his defense: the *daimonion* never once raised the alarm to indicate otherwise. But in the present case, the *daimonion* does raise the alarm, telling Socrates he has erred and must now stay to right the wrong he has just committed. The *daimonion* is never mistaken. In and of itself, it is a firm indicator that Socrates' first speech was not good. Add to that, however, Socrates' shame even at the outset, plus his announcement later on that the first speech was false, and what this all adds up to is that in his first speech Socrates 1) did wrong, 2) did wrong by speaking falsely, and 3) quite deliberately did wrong and spoke falsely. In this regard, the situation is not all that different from the exegetical episode in the *Protagoras*. Socrates cheated in such a manner as to deceive. That is to say, he gave the impression, while speaking, that he believed what he was saying to be true when in fact he really believed that what he said was false.⁷²

reluctant to indulge in farcical conversation: see *Protagoras* 335a-b.

⁷¹ *Phaedrus* 242d4-5: "That was a terrible theory, Phaedrus, a terrible theory (δεινὸν λόγον) that you introduced and compelled me to expound." The Greek reads, Δεινόν, ὦ Φαῖδρε, δεινὸν λόγον αὐτός τε ἐκόμισας ἐμέ τε ἠνάγκασας εἰπεῖν, the complete passage most likely indicating that Socrates is referring to two speeches, both the one Phaedrus brought (αὐτός τε ἐκόμισας) and the one Socrates spoke to Phaedrus (ἐμέ τε ἠνάγκασας εἰπεῖν). The singular δεινὸν λόγον probably refers, therefore, to the fact that both speeches espoused the same theory. Cf. Fowler (Loeb), Jowett (*The Works of Plato*).

⁷² There is this view in the literature that the speech is not quite so negative as all this because it 1) was not totally untruthful in that it did revile a wrong-headed sort of irrationality, 2) was dialectical in that it prepares the way for the third speech, 3) was divinely inspired, either genuinely or ironically, so as to indicate that Socrates was not all to blame, 4) does effectively reveal the defects of Lysias' discourse, and 5) was interrupted in a timely way by the *daimonion* just as soon as it had fulfilled its corrective function. Cf., e.g., pp. 32-35, Burger (1980); pp. 65-69, Griswold (1986); pp. 26-27, de Vries (1969); and Jane V. Curran (1986). However, none of this necessarily militates against the view that it was also a deception. Even given #1, that it perhaps bespoke some truth, it still

There is, of course, one significant difference between the situation here and that which we saw in the *Protagoras*: we now have it directly from Socrates himself that he cheated. Not only that but here it is quite clear what the cheating consisted of and why it is a problem to cheat: Socrates spoke falsely and it was wrong to do that. What we had to learn by means of some laborious speculation about Socrates' underlying disposition in the case of the *Protagoras*, is more directly evident here in the *Phaedrus*. Can this be turned into the excuse that Socrates did not cheat after all, just because he was more forthright this time around? Probably not. It is still the case here, just as it was in the *Protagoras*, that so far as his audience was concerned Socrates was quite sincerely responding in a conventional way to an opportunity to get involved in a rhetorical contest. Phaedrus compelled the speech (235d, 237a).⁷³ and was so eager to hear if Socrates could outdo Lysias he never picked up on the initial hint that Socrates was ashamed even to begin.⁷⁴ Rather, as de Vries has pointed out, he misconstrues the shame, taking it to be "Socrates' reaction, if his performance might prove to be inferior to the one given by Lysias."

By comparison, Socrates "thinks of the unworthy conception of Eros which is to be the starting-

does not necessarily mean it was fundamentally false. A half-truth presented as the truth is a deception no less than a lie presented as the truth.

⁷³ That the occasion was a competition at which Socrates was actually compelled take a turn, is a matter of some consensus. See, e.g., pp. 32, 34, Burger (1980); pp. 55, 69, Griswold (1986); but esp. p. 37, Hackforth (1972) who goes so far as to say "the speech was extorted from Socrates." Hackforth's impression comes from the fact that at 244a, Socrates dissociates himself from the speech, saying "the preceding discourse was by Phaedrus." To the same point, Hackforth could have added 257b where Socrates pawns the speech off on Lysias; or 262d where Socrates calls it "an oratorical joke (προσπαίζων ἐν λόγοις, 262d2) and, in reminiscence both of his opening invocation to the muses (237a) and to the "divine presence" that caused the tendency towards dithyrambic verse (238c-d), pawns it off on "the local deities, or perhaps those mouthpieces of the Muses that are chirping over our heads [cicadas]."

⁷⁴ *Phaedrus* 237a: Phaedrus ignores the shame and simply says, "You can do anything else you like, provided you make your speech." He seems blithely unaware of Socrates' difficulties. Like the audience in the *Protagoras*, Hippias in particular, he has no clue about the real nature of Socrates. If he had, there would be no need for the first speech. Perhaps the shame was a test, to see if the sin really was necessary. Evidently it was.

point of his speech.”⁷⁵ Griswold makes a similar observation: Phaedrus probably does not understand “the complex significance of the shamefulness of the two speeches [i.e., Lysias’ and Socrates’ first],” because he “finds nothing wrong morally in what Socrates is saying.”⁷⁶ Socrates’ shame issues from a point of view that is radically different from that of Phaedrus. He is ashamed to say things which Phaedrus has not found shameful at all. Phaedrus admires what Lysias wrote (227c, 235b) and only wants to hear if Socrates can articulate the same point any better (236a-b). Socrates’ revelation that he cheats is a clear hint only to those who do not already need the cheating in order to be persuaded that he might be a better orator in a more fundamental way than mere skill with words: that is to say, who do not need such devious convincing to be willing to admit of the possibility that maybe Socrates is not only a better speaker, he may also have a better thesis than that of the orator he challenges. But that is only to say shame does not mean cheating when cheating isn’t necessary and isn’t likely to happen anyway.⁷⁷ All of which is to say, Socrates’ shame does indicate that he is still under the auspices of rules like that of *Gorgias* 495a-b and 500b-c, and still bound by the divine compulsion

⁷⁵ p. 82, de Vries (1969)

⁷⁶ p. 57; Griswold (1986); similarly see p. 35, Hackforth (1970): “[t]o Phaedrus Socrates’s words here doubtless express apprehension that he will disgrace himself by an inferior performance....the shame that Socrates really feels is, as transpires later (243b), due to his having been forced to adopt an unworthy conception of Eros” (p. 35).

⁷⁷ Another consideration: What if the shame is itself ironic? Burger (1980) hints at this, with the suggestion that Socrates only “pretends” to have become aware of having erred at the end of the speech. It’s ambiguous what exactly she means, however. The remark is in the context of a sentence reading, the “awareness of the error or sinfulness of the speech...is in fact present at its inception” (p. 35). In any event, it would not be good thing if the shame were ironic, either early or late. If the shame at the end of the speech (242c-d) is a pretense, so too must be the shame at the beginning (237a). Otherwise the speech is both shameful and not shameful. Moreover, the status of the second speech, the good and true one, would be in doubt as well, prompted as it is by a *daimonion* that only signifies the pretense of shame. Nothing would make any sense.

identified in the *Apology* (23b, 28d-e, 29d, 30e), that he should confine himself to a more sincere manner of discourse.⁷⁸

Having ruled out the possibility of excusing Socrates by doubting *whether* he cheats, perhaps it will be more promising to attempt to answer the question as *why* he does so. Consider the following exchange between Socrates and Phaedrus during the little interlude (238c-d) that Socrates initiates in the middle of his first speech.

Socrates: Well, Phaedrus my friend, do you think, as I do, that I am divinely inspired?

Phaedrus: Undoubtedly. Socrates, you have been vouchsafed a quite unusual eloquence.

Socrates: Then listen to me in silence. For truly there seems to be a divine presence in this spot, so that you must not be surprised if, as my speech proceeds, I become as one possessed: already my style is not far from dithyrambic. (238c-d)

In the *Gorgias*, Socrates claimed that dithyrambic poetry was one of the hallmarks of a bad orator, the sophist who practices a pseudo-rhetoric that aims at “flattery” (κολακεία), pleasantries which have nothing to do with the knowledge of good and evil but which the speaker knows the listener is likely to find agreeable nonetheless.⁷⁹ Speaking in dithyrambs is something that Socrates condemns. And yet, here in the *Phaedrus* he admits that he is speaking in just this way. Moreover, he admits to it again at 241e, after the speech is concluded:

My good friend, haven't you noticed that I've got beyond dithyramb, and am breaking out into epic verse, despite my faultfinding? Don't you see that I shall

⁷⁸ See p. 183 preceding.

⁷⁹ See chapter one (pp. 22ff preceding) where in light of *Gorgias* 464b-466a, 501e-503a, and 517d-519b we witnessed Socrates including dithyrambic poetry under the heading of the pseudo-skill of flattery. It is the pseudo-skill of the practitioner of “shameful mob appeal” (503a), the rhetoric that aims “toward pleasure and the gratification of the spectators” (502c).

clearly be possessed by those nymphs into whose clutches you deliberately threw me? (241e)

If Socrates has deliberately chosen to speak in dithyrambs--a mode of discourse, one should note, which he finds fault-worthy here as well--the purpose of his speech is flattery, persuasion without regard for the truth. Once again he is playing the role of the sophist, this time to persuade Phaedrus to listen to him rather than to Lysias.⁸⁰ And, just as was the case in the *Protagoras*, here too the ploy appears to have been quite successful. Consider Socrates' question to Phaedrus immediately prior to beginning his second speech, the one in which he resolved, finally, to tell the truth:

Where is that boy I was talking to? He must listen to me once more, and not rush off to yield to his nonlover before he hears what I have to say.

Phaedrus replies,

Here he is, quite close beside you, whenever you want him. (243e)

This is the be-all and end-all of the intention to cheat. In the *Protagoras*, Socrates wanted the great sophist close beside him, ready and willing to listen and participate according to his, Socrates', way of conversing. Likewise here in the *Phaedrus*. Initially, at the beginning of the dialogue, Phaedrus presents himself as a protégé of Lysias, doubting that Socrates (or anyone else for that matter) could possibly make a better speech about love (234e, 235d-e). But Phaedrus is now ready-to-hand beside a new mentor. The indications are that Socrates has been

⁸⁰ As Kenneth Dorter (1971) has pointed out, if Socrates burst into dithyrambs, he was "under the influence of the erotic Dionysius" (dithyramb being "the Dionysian lyric") while in the process he was supposed to be defending an entirely rational temperance. Dorter's take on this is that "while ostensibly disparaging...the passionate," Socrates in fact mean to praise it (pp. 282-283). But that's simple irony, the irony of deceit, since the real object was concealed, far from self-evident to the listener. That's the point of saying dithyrambic speech is flattery, insincere in the case of Socrates since he takes flattery to be a no-no--a "menace" to be "averted" as Hackforth (1972) says (p. 47).

courting Phaedrus much as a lover might court the beloved. Hence the repeated references to a παῖς μάλα καλός, a “youth of great beauty,” a formula that first appears in Socrates’ speech in the beginning, at 237b2, and is repeated in one form or another several times thereafter (e.g., 237b7, 238d8, 241c7, 243e8).

One should probably not conclude from this that Socrates was trying to foster a homoerotic relationship between himself and Phaedrus. That might be his purpose if his sole intention was nothing but flattery. But consider the following passage, with which Socrates closes his second speech:

...if anything that Phaedrus and I said earlier sounded discordant to thy ear, set it down to Lysias, the only begetter of that discourse, and staying him from discourses after this fashion turn him towards the love of wisdom....Then will his loving disciple here present no longer halt between two opinions, as now he does, but live for Love (πρὸς Ἔρωτα)⁸¹ in singleness of purpose with the aid of philosophical discourses (μετὰ φιλοσόφων λόγων). (257b)

Socrates’ object is similar what it was in the *Protagoras*: he wanted to induce an interlocutor to accept a more philosophical style of discourse. That was the object behind his attempt at seduction. As de Vries has pointed out, παῖς καλός was a “fiction” introduced by Socrates as a matter of rhetorical convenience.⁸² Since Phaedrus was initially under the influence of a rhetoric of flattery, Socrates evidently thought it best to try winning him back by means of flattery. But the object of his flattery was not to gain a lover for himself; rather it was to ensure that he would

⁸¹ *Phaedrus* 257b: regarding “Love” capitalized, for Ἔρωτα, Socrates is directing this entreaty to eros personified as the god, the son of Aphrodite. Cf. 265b4-5, Socrates ascribing that “which we declared to be the highest, the madness of the lover, to Aphrodite and Eros (Ἰ Αφροδίτης καὶ Ἔρωτος ἐρωτικὴν μανίαν ἐφήσαμέν τε ἀρίστην εἶναι).”

⁸² See p. 113, de Vries (1969); alternatively, p. 168, Rowe (1988) who notes that Socrates has obviated the possibility by pretending that he already has his “beloved, ‘supposedly,’ in Isocrates (279b2)” while “Phaedrus has his own (so Socrates pretends), in the shape of Lysias (236b5, 257b4-5, 279b2-3).”

be successful in his bid to emancipate Phaedrus from the clutches of the unloving lover, Lysias, and introduce him instead into the charge of ἔρωϛ, the means by which Phaedrus might then become capable of engaging in philosophical dialogue, as indeed he is as evidenced by his participation in the elenctic discussion about rhetoric that takes place following Socrates' second speech.⁴³

iii) Verbal irony

This makes Socrates' first speech of the *Phaedrus* a sustained verbal irony.⁴⁴ In the first instance, it is ironic in that Socrates' stated intention is to speak to Lysias' credit, while in reality he intended to use his skill with words to make Lysias look bad. How do we know this? At 237a, at the outset of his first speech, Socrates calls upon the muses to

... 'assist the tale I tell' under compulsion by my good friend, to the end that he may think yet more highly of one dear to him, whom he already accounts a man of wisdom.

In and of itself, the sense of this statement is a bit ambiguous, there being no clear indication as to exactly who is "the man of wisdom," Socrates or Lysias. In context, however, it seems clear that the expression "one dear to him whom he already accounts a man of wisdom" must refer to Lysias. At 236b, Socrates speaks to Phaedrus of "your darling Lysias" whose discourse, according to Phaedrus, was "outstanding" in that

⁴³ Regarding the view that Phaedrus was being emancipated into the charge of ἔρωϛ, cf. pp. 211-212, 219, Martha Nussbaum (1987). Burger (1980) points out that the success of the defense of eros depends on this (p. 69).

⁴⁴ On verbal irony, see pp. 118ff preceding.

...it has not overlooked any important aspect of the subject, so making it impossible for anyone else to outdo what he has said with a fuller or more satisfactory oration. (235b)

Phaedrus has, of course, challenged Socrates try his hand at making just such a “fuller speech of superior merit” (236b). Moreover, he promises Socrates that if he can meet the challenge, then “up with your name in wrought gold beside the offering of the Cypselids at Olympia” (236b). At the present juncture of the dialogue, however, this is only a challenge. Lysias is still the wise person, the beloved of Phaedrus; all of which is to say, the “man of wisdom” in question is Lysias not Socrates. In his opening statement, Socrates is saying he will speak to Lysias’ credit.

But this does not square with Socrates’ judgement later on that Lysias’ speech, no less than his own, was “terrible” (242d); nor with the subsequent analysis at 262e-264e (discussed shortly) which apparently justifies this judgement. If Socrates spoke what he knew to be a terrible speech, to further the point of what he took to be another terrible speech, then clearly his intention was not to make the first terrible speech look good. Rather, it was to make it look bad, to amplify the fact, as he eventually reveals, that in reality he thinks it was far from wise to revile ἔρωξ as an irrational mania. In this regard, Socrates’ first speech was a simple verbal irony:⁵⁵ he said he would make Lysias look good but in reality his intention was make him look bad.

But if this is true, then Socrates’ first speech was a simple verbal irony in yet another, even more fundamental sense. Socrates says that ἔρωξ is bad while in reality what he really thinks and wants to say is that it is good. Socrates indicates as much quite explicitly: the tale of madness reviled as ἔρωξ was a terrible (δεινόν, 242d4), false (οὐκ ἔτυμος, 243a8, 244a3), shameful (αἰσχύνης, 237a5), errant (ἀμάρτημα, 242d2), foolish and blasphemous (εὐήθη καὶ

⁵⁵ Again, just as a reminder of simple irony, see n. 6 preceding.

ἀσεβῆ, 242d7) story. The speech was a quite simple irony, an outright lie deceptively concealed as such under the guise of sincerity.⁸⁶

Perhaps, one might be tempted to argue, there is no real deception because in fact Socrates did not actually revile ἔρωζ as it was conceived of in the second speech. Rather, he reviled an intemperate mania which causes the lover to “run away from his obligations as one compelled to default” (241b) and, therefore, quite truthfully criticized a left-hand “sinister love,” as he later calls it (266a). Hackforth makes this point,⁸⁷ which turns on the possibility that the central term of reference, ἔρωζ, may be ambiguous, with two different meanings, both true because different, on the one hand meaning something bad on the other something good. In light of this, Burger notes that not everything Socrates said in the first speech was false: “his sin [i]s a lack of complete vision,” not that he was totally wrong-headed.⁸⁸ That is the same as to say that Socrates did err, his sin being that he spoke half truths while pretending to have spoken the whole truth. Note, however, that Socrates did say the first speech was false. Even if he did correctly revile the left-hand “sinister love,” it was still false to grace this indisposition with the term ἔρωζ. Therein lies the deception, the subtle sophistry which Phaedrus could not possibly understand as the reason for Socrates’ shame.

⁸⁶ Cf. pp. 72-73, V. Tejera (1975): the “speech is not philosophical but sophistical,” a deceit in that Socrates’ real thoughts were concealed the better to succeed at persuasion. Against the possibility of thinking that Tejera overstates the case, because in Socrates’ own judgement the speech did correctly identify and revile a “left-hand” kind of love (266a), consider the possibility that this may also have been a way for Socrates to be more convincing in putting forth the lie. As noted shortly, it is precisely because one is more capable of deception whenever one has knowledge to conceal that the ability to deceive is accorded the name of art.

⁸⁷ p. 48; Hackforth (1972)

⁸⁸ See pp. 34-35, Burger (1980): further to the issue of some serious truth in the speech, see n. 100 following.

Just as was the case in the *Protagoras*, therefore, here too Socrates is deceptive when he speaks insincerely because he takes advantage of an interlocutor's delusion to maintain a false impression of sincerity. So far as his listener in the dialogue is concerned, what Socrates said literally is true: ἔρωξ is bad. Only Socrates knows otherwise. By indulging in such irony, Socrates managed to convince Phaedrus to abandon the Lysian viewpoint in favour of his own. To Phaedrus, Socrates was just trying to outdo Lysias. Likewise for Socrates, except that unbeknownst to Phaedrus this was not just a speech contest. There was also the hidden agenda of seduction, the concealed intention to attempt to gain a competitive advantage over Lysias, not solely to win an argument but rather so that Phaedrus would admire Socrates enough to be willing to listen to the recantation (243e) and, afterwards, to participate in a rather scathing critique of Lysias (262e-264e). It was as if Socrates realized that to be successful in soliciting Phaedrus as an audience for a truer account of love, he would at first have to avoid departing too far from the subject-matter of the orator whom he wanted to refute but whom Phaedrus admired.⁹⁹

It is important to realize that in the case of Socrates' false intention both to do Lysias credit and to revile ἔρωξ, we are encountering not complex but simple verbal ironies.⁹⁰ That is to say, Socrates is not presently speaking with a studied ambiguity, as he does in the case of the

⁹⁹ As an ironic speech, and a transitional ploy, whose object was to outplay Lysias and thereby set Phaedrus up to listen to a more sincere speech, cf. p. 26, Thompson (1973); pp. 31-32, Burger (1980); pp. 36-37, Hackforth (1972); and pp. 57-59, Griswold (1986). Also, with particular emphasis on the idea that the three speeches in the *Phaedrus* form a dialectical progression from less to more satisfactory hypotheses about love (in a manner reminiscent of the way in which one speech supercedes another in the *Symposium*), Jane V. Curran (1986). Regardless whether one takes the move to be one of falsehood to truth, or as half-truth to whole-truth, however, the speech still does express the wrong side of the coin preparatory to getting at the right side. To belabour a point, the speech was false.

⁹⁰ See the definition of simple versus complex verbal irony, pp. 118ff preceding.

complex irony by which he says he both knows and does not know virtue. Rather, he is indulging in the more simple irony of stating the exact opposite of what he really intends to do--i.e., speak to Lysias' credit--and what he really thinks is the truth--i.e., that ἔρωϑ is good not bad.

This is why it is difficult to find an excuse for Socrates. If he is simply not being candid about what his real intentions are, then he appears to be in violation of his conviction that he should say what he thinks is the truth when he is talking about the right way to live. The discussions about love certainly do concern the right way to live. The whole point is to talk about what is and what is not the right kind of love to live by. But in his first speech Socrates said that ἔρωϑ is *not* the way, and that was contrary to what he really thought. That is why he was ashamed, and why he ran afoul of his *daimonion* in the present dialogue.⁹¹ The shame and the *daimonion* are indications that Socrates is still bound by the requirement to say what he thinks when he is talking about how to live. To indulge in simple verbal irony is to violate this rule. To call such irony a 'pedagogical device' does not in and of itself change that. In this dialogue, no less than in the earlier dialogues, simple verbal irony is an indication that one has not spoken well.

The object, in the following section, is to situate this problem in the context of the discussion, following Socrates' second speech, in which he distinguishes between two sorts of bad rhetoricians, only one of whom is truly "without art" (ἄτεχνον).⁹²

⁹¹ Another possibility, in addition to the 'sin' of insincerity, is that the *daimonion* reacted because it was impious, loathsome and evil for Socrates to speak falsely about the god of love. Cf. p. 200, Shorey (1933): "they have wronged [the majesty of love] by two speeches more to be expected from brutal sailors than from men of gentle and noble disposition. His [Socrates'] wonted monitor, the divine voice, checks him and will not let him depart until he has made amends and washed the bitter brine of impiety from his ears with the potable stream of a truer speech."

⁹² *Phaedrus* 262c3; also 262c6, ἀτεχνων τε καὶ ἐντέχνων

iv) **Irony and the art of deceit**

Socrates offers to Phaedrus the following definition of rhetoric:

Must not the art of rhetoric, taken as a whole, be a kind of influencing the mind by means of words, not only in courts of law and other public gatherings, but in private places also? And must it not be the same art that is concerned with great issues and small, its right employment commanding no more respect when dealing with important matters than with unimportant? Is that what you have been told about it? (261a-b)

Initially, Phaedrus resists the definition because Socrates has not restricted it to persuasion in important matters but has applied it to any manifestation of the ability to persuade.⁹³ But

Socrates redirects him to the main question that concerns him, the attempt to say

...what is it that the contending parties in law courts do? Do they not in fact contend with words.....About what is just and unjust? (261c)

Phaedrus agrees that this is exactly what happens. From 261c-262c, Socrates then elicits

Phaedrus' agreement to the following proposals:

- ...he who possesses the art (τέχνη) of doing this can make the same thing appear to the same people now just (δίκαιον), now unjust (ἄδικον) at will? (261c-d)
- ...anyone who intends to mislead another, without being misled himself, must discern precisely the degree of resemblance and dissimilarity between this and that. (262a)
- ...when people hold beliefs contrary to fact, and are misled, it is plain that the error has crept into their minds through the suggestion of some similarity or other.
- But can anyone possibly master the art of using similarities for the purpose of bringing people around, and leading them away from the truth about this or that to the opposite of the truth, or again can anyone possibly avoid this happening to himself, unless he has knowledge of what the thing in question is? (Phaedrus: No, never.)

⁹³ *Phaedrus* 261b (Phaedrus speaking): "No, indeed, not exactly that. It is principally, I should say, to lawsuits that an art of speaking and writing is applied--and of course to public harangues also. I know of no wider application."

- It would seem to follow, my friend, that the art of speech (λόγων τέχνην) displayed by one who has gone chasing after beliefs, instead of knowing the truth, will be a comical sort of art (γελοῖαν τινά), in fact no art at all (ἄτεχνον). (262c)

Socrates has led Phaedrus to admit that an art of rhetoric may consist of the ability to persuade without regard for what one thinks is the truth. With this settled, Socrates then invites a comparison between the three speeches:

Would you like to observe some instances of what I call the presence or absence of art (ἀτέχνων τε καὶ ἐντέχνων) in that speech of Lysias (ἐν τῷ Λυσίου λόγῳ) which you are carrying, and in those which I have delivered (καὶ ἐν οἷς ἡμεῖς εἶπομεν)?⁹⁴

With regard to Lysias, Socrates argues (262d-264e⁹⁵) that Lysias' speech was artless. He simply said in a rhetorically embellished way⁹⁶ that ἔρωξ is irrational, and that one should

⁹⁴ *Phaedrus* 262c: the expression ἐν οἷς ἡμεῖς εἶπομεν, literally "in the ones we spoke," has been considered ambiguous. See, e.g., pp. 159-160, Cobb (1993): "Some readers see [οἷς ἡμεῖς εἶπομεν] as a reference to Lysias' speech and to both of Socrates' as a unit, while others see it as referring only to Socrates' two speeches." In that regard see p. 99, Thompson (1973): because "[u]p til now, Socrates' two speeches have been consistently and emphatically separated (whichever translation we adopt of *en hois eipomen*)" it makes no sense to suppose that they are now being lumped together. Alternatively, p. 262, de Vries (1969), who takes it that Socrates is referring to his and Lysias' speeches as a unit. The ambiguity appears worsened by the fact that when Socrates considers his own speeches, on the one hand he treats them as one in that they both proceeded correctly enough on the understanding that appetitive desire can be distinguished as either rational or irrational, while on the other hand he treats them as different in that they argued for opposite conclusions one true the other false. There are reasons for both points of view. At the same time, however, if we note what actually happens, Socrates first discusses Lysias' speech separately (see n. 95 following) and then, only after dismissing Lysias, discusses his two. In this respect, the basis for the comparisons is the standard of art discussed from 261c-262d--rhetoric is an art and capable of deceit on the standard of knowledge. Knowledge is the point of comparison. Lysias' fails that standard, Socrates' two speeches don't not even his first.

⁹⁵ At *Phaedrus* 262e, Socrates asks Phaedrus to read from "Lysias' speech" (τοῦ Λυσίου λόγου), and they talk about no other speech until after they have concluded, at 264e, that Lysias was artless.

⁹⁶ *Phaedrus* 235 (Socrates speaking): "...it seemed to me that he said the same things several times over. Maybe he's not very clever at expiating at length on a single theme, or possibly he has no interest in such topics. In fact, it struck me as an extravagant performance, to demonstrate his ability to say the same thing twice, in different words but with equal success." See pp. 399-400, Guthrie (1975): "Its repetitiousness suggested either carelessness or a need to pad out inadequate material or perhaps a childish desire to show virtuosity by saying the same thing in different ways." Similarly, p. 31, Hackforth (1972). Socrates' criticism at 263a-d, that Lysias lacked knowledge, explains what the problem was--Lysias lacked the knowledge he would have needed to speak more coherently and substantively. Cf. Socrates' judgement about Meletus' carelessness in the *Apology*, discussed at n. 50 chapter five preceding.

therefore avoid the advances of the lover (262e, 263e-264a). But unlike ordinary terms such as “iron” or “silver,” the meaning of which everyone can agree on quite easily, love is a difficult concept the meaning of which cannot simply be assumed (263a-d). To be able to be genuinely persuasive about it, one has to premise one’s argument on a clear definition; otherwise the argument is likely to be disorderly and incoherent.⁹⁷ Socrates concludes, therefore, that Lysias’ discourse was little different from the platitudes inscribed on the tomb of Midas the Phrygian, of which, he says to Phaedrus:

I expect you notice that it makes no difference what order the lines come in.⁹⁸

Socrates then turns to his own speeches which, even though they argued for opposite conclusions (265e), were both better than that of Lysias. Socrates explains why. Both of his speeches seized hold of a “single general form which they postulated was irrationality (τὸ ἄφρον τῆς διανοίας ἔν τι κοινῇ εἶδος, 265e3-4).” In that regard, his first speech was right to criticize “a part on the left” (σκαίον τινα ἔρωτα.), while his second correctly “conducted us to the forms of madness which lay on the right-hand side” (τὰ ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μανίας).⁹⁹ A further similarity is that both speeches called that about which they spoke ἔρωσ. But Socrates’ first

⁹⁷ Cf. p. 408: Guthrie (1975).

⁹⁸ *Phaedrus* 264e: to see this as a typically Socratic position, with a basis in the craft-analogy, cf. *Gorgias* 503c-d: “...the good man who speaks for the best surely will not say what he says at random but with some purpose in view, just as all other craftsmen do not each choose and apply materials to their work at random, but with the view that each of their productions should have a certain form (εἶδος τι). Look, for example, if you will, at painters, builders, shipwrights, and all other craftsmen--any of them you choose--and see how each one disposes each element he contributes in a fixed order, and compels one to fit and harmonize with the other until he has combined the whole into something well ordered and regulated.” Lysias fails according to a very basic standard of technical expertise.

⁹⁹ *Phaedrus* 266a6: Guthrie’s (1975) notes the similarity in virtue of the method of divisions and combinations pointed out by Socrates. That’s true of course, but the even more fundamental, and eminently Socratic, standard of excellence is still knowledge (277b), the ability to give “a rational account” as *Gorgias* 501a says.

speech reviled ἔρωσ while the second “extolled it as the source of the greatest goods that can befall us (ὡς μεγίστων αἰτίων ἡμῖν ἀγαθῶν, 266b1).” In this regard, Socrates admits readily enough that his first speech was “really...just a festive entertainment (τῷ ὄντι παιδιᾶ πεπαίσθαι, 265c8-9),” an “illustration of the way in which one who knows the truth can mislead his audience by playing an oratorical joke (προσπαίζων ἐν λόγοις, 262d2) on them.” However, because it was nevertheless correct to premise its conclusion on a clear definition, an inherent tendency towards irrationality that should be controlled, it was an artful piece of rhetoric, a deception made successful by the fact that it relied on knowledge.¹⁰⁰

This is clearly not an ideal conception of rhetoric. That much is clear by the fact that Socrates was ashamed (αἰσχύνης, 237a5), said the speech was false (οὐκ ἔτυμος, 243a, 244a), called it terrible (δεινόν, 242d4), errant (ἁμάρτημα, 242d2), foolish and blasphemous (εὐήθη

¹⁰⁰ And by the fact that it argued well, establishing its conclusion, not on the basis of nostrums about how one should or shouldn't love, but with sound logic, it necessarily following, if there is an irrationality that should be avoided, and that this irrationality is named ἔρωσ, that ἔρωσ should be shunned. In this regard, cf. p. 423, Brown and Coulter (1971): “it is no accident that a man who *thinks* the way the left-handed lover does should also conceive of love the way he does. There is a kind of logical necessity which operates to bring this about.” It was not necessarily the argument about irrationality that was bad, only that to this sort of irrationality Socrates attached the term ἔρωσ which, as it turns out in his second speech, he really prefers as the term of reference for the right-hand mania of the philosopher. In this regard, as noted already (see pp. 208ff preceding), the *Phaedrus* does present more than one meaning for the term ἔρωσ, an important ambiguity which is not fully accounted for by the present, rather simplistic, reduction of the dialogue to a rhetorical contest, a “mere rhetorical polemic” as Brown and Coulter call it, between Lysias and Socrates for *Phaedrus*. Cf. p. 243, Brown and Coulter: “Among the reasons against such reduction is the violence it would do to important, and in the *Phaedrus* importantly new, matters of logic such as the nature of paradox, ambiguity and definition.” At the same time, however, a more detailed and sophisticated consideration of that problem should probably not overlook the fact that at the beginning of his second speech, Socrates does say that the story of the first was false (243a, 244a), nor that later on he calls it “an oratorical joke” (262d), a “festive entertainment” (265c). The ambiguity in question must be at least partially due to the fact that Socrates' first speech was a deliberate, albeit more skillful and therefore more artful, indulgence in a rhetoric of persuasion. (In comparison to the current presentation, Brown and Coulter's assessment of the middle speech of the *Phaedrus* concerns Socrates and Isocrates, not Socrates and Lysias, in which regard Socrates is repudiating, in the name of a “left-hand” love, an “entire complex of rhetorical-sophistical culture” (p. 422). However, given how they actually describe the object of Socrates' revulsion--i.e., “destructively possessive, lacking in trust, jealous of any independence or maturity on the part of the beloved....decisions concerning human attachments...calculated on the basis only of pleasure and utility” (p. 422)--it does seem reminiscent of Lysias' preference for a calculating, disinterested reason that prefers fraternal compatibility.)

καὶ ἀσεβῆ, 242d7). and was prompted by the *daimonion* to recant (242b-d). But this does not stop Socrates from thinking that he still spoke better than did Lysias. Insofar as he at least knew enough about love to premise his conclusion that ἐρωσ is bad on a definition that distinguished between irrational and rational appetite, he knew enough to mount a more skilled argument than Lysias.¹⁰¹ Shameful, false, terrible, and sinful as the speech was, therefore, it still conformed to the notion of art in that it deceived from the standpoint of knowledge of the subject-matter.¹⁰² But if this is true, then Socrates' first speech was better than Lysias' because he spoke ironically, because he perpetuated a simple irony of deceit, leading Phaedrus around by the nose without at the same time ever being deceived himself.

Lysias' speech could not be ironic because it demonstrated little by way of knowledge, and no sense of a possible underlying meaning apart from the literal meaning of what was said.¹⁰³ But Socrates did have knowledge--at least to the extent that he had another opinion about love which all along he considered more fundamental than the opinion he defended initially. That,

¹⁰¹ Part of the argument, but not highlighted here, is Socrates' claim that his speech was better than that of Lysias because it manifested the skill of rational dialectics, the Platonic method of "divisions and collections" (διαίρεσεων καὶ συναγωγῶν) discussed in detail at 266bff. As indicated in the Introduction, however, that is beside the point here. An even more fundamental criterion than that of skill at analyzing is that one has to have knowledge (see *Phaedrus* 277a, cited at n. 18 in the Introduction). This much at least is genuinely Socratic; see *Gorgias* 501a-b. The other thing is that here it matters more *that* Socrates argued skillfully more than it does exactly *why* he was able to do so. The situation in the *Phaedrus* is analogous to that of *Protagoras* 342a-347a in that Socrates used his skill with rhetoric to unseat a rival. That he may not always follow exactly the same argumentative methodology in doing this is not in and of itself a strong enough reason to think that there is no analogy.

¹⁰² Another point of similarity in this regard between the *Phaedrus* and the *Protagoras* is Socrates' reliance on his well-known doctrine that evil is involuntary to score rhetorical points. See *Phaedrus* 237d, "we know that men desire that which is fair without being lovers" used as a premise to recommend the avoidance of ἐρωσ. Compare this with *Protagoras* 357c-d, but especially 345e where Socrates espouses the same doctrine apparently to gain the upper hand in the debate over Simonides' poem (see n. 30 p. 77 preceding; also, regarding details on the sophistry at *Protagoras* 345d-e, pp. 178ff preceding).

¹⁰³ See p. 31, Hackforth (1972): the speech is so "tedious," so lacking in the evidence of conviction, it belies the impression of any "real belief in [the] thesis." Rather, it bespeaks an "attitude...of utter oblivion of the existence of true affection" (p. 31).

combined with his superior argumentative skill, is precisely why, unlike Lysias, he was able to deceive without himself being deceived.¹⁰⁴

With this in mind, perhaps the best way to grasp the distinction that Socrates makes between two kinds of bad rhetoricians, only one of whom is artless, is to realize that the artful bad rhetorician is a master of irony while the artless one is not. That is to say, the artful bad rhetorician differs from the artless one in that only the former has enough by way of knowledge and conviction of purpose to be capable of indulging in the simple irony of deceit; the kind of irony that Socrates practiced in deceitfully pretending that he meant to do Lysias credit, and in not meaning what he said when he argued that ἔρωξ is bad.

In the *Phaedrus*, this is supposed to be a worthwhile skill, good enough that Socrates is willing to attach to it the name of art.¹⁰⁵ It may be right to think that of two orators, one who is capable of irony and one who is not, the ironist is the one who is more skilled. However, skill alone does not seem to be a good enough reason to explain Socrates' willingness to indulge in deceit. That is as much as to say that if he acts in a way that he thinks is immoral, he still acts well so long as he is better than anyone else at being immoral. Why, then, would he lead us to think it right to attach the name of art to such a skill, and thereby render the term art highly ambiguous?

¹⁰⁴ Similarly, see p. 198, Crombie (1962): "...an orator like Lysias (I think this is the point) who is not interested in the real nature of things, will not understand, and so not be able to play on this difference [i.e., the subtle distinction between "two kinds of madness....two very different things called 'love'"] as Socrates has; he will be as likely to be deceived as his audience. Whether for truth, then, or for skilful deception, the orator must be able to discriminate."

¹⁰⁵ Reflecting on *Phaedrus* 261c-262b Shorey (1933) writes that this is taking "art" in the widest possible sense "to cover all influence upon men's minds by speech, including even the false dialectic that plays with the ambiguity of abstract words....Men are more easily misled by words whose meanings differ slightly and so may be used to lead by insensible transitions to a desired conclusion. And only he who knows the real meanings can do this effectively....The speech of Socrates did this. The speech of Lysias did not" (p. 204).

Here is one possible answer: sometimes Socrates is faced with intractable interlocutors who would never appreciate the significance of what he wants to say were he not willing, at least initially, to address them in terms that they can understand. Such occasions may excuse deceit. This may well have been the case in this dialogue. In the beginning, Phaedrus presents as an acolyte of Lysias, full of excitement and admiration for what Lysias wrote, eager to hear what Socrates has to say, but disinclined to believe that anyone can make a better, more complete analysis of the subject (227c, 234c-d, 235b). Hence, when Socrates offered to try his hand at a speech of his own, Phaedrus actually went so far as place on him a condition--that he start out with the same view as Lysias, that "the lover (τὸν ἐρώτα) is less sane than the non-lover (τοῦ ἐρώτορος)."¹⁰⁶ One could surmise that if Socrates had not obeyed this restriction, Lysias might have protested and refused to listen. That makes it look as if Socrates had little choice but to start out by speaking falsely, if his objective was to enlighten his interlocutor. This is similar to the situation that faced Socrates in the *Protagoras*. In the beginning he could get nowhere because the master sophist was far less interested in being challenged than he was in demonstrating his ability to defend himself with long speeches. The farcical exegesis of Simonides' poem seems to have helped to cure that problem in a similar manner to the way in which Socrates' first speech in the *Phaedrus* helped cure Phaedrus of his initial attachment to Lysias.

¹⁰⁶ *Phaedrus* 236b: as is generally well noted, Socrates was essentially forced into the competition, "extorted" as Hackforth (1972) puts it (p. 37). That limited him in what he could say if he wanted to be the clear winner. See p. 69. Griswold (1986): "Since Socrates accepted the challenge to state Lysias' position better than Lysias could, Socrates delivered a superior but shameful speech." He had to speak shamefully, if he was to meet Phaedrus' condition. Cf. also p. 34; Burger (1980).

In both respects, the important factor appears to be the ability to effect a cure. This seems born out by what Socrates says in the *Republic* about what kind of falsehood is tolerable and what kind is not. On the one hand, there is an “essential falsehood” (τὸ τῷ ὄντι ψευδός, 382c3) which is “hated not only by gods but by men,” while on the other there is a kind of “falsehood in words (τὸ ἐν τοῖς λόγοις [ψευδός], 382c6)” which “is serviceable so as not to merit abhorrence” (382c). In the former case, Socrates explains, falsehood means “deception in the soul about realities,” the state of being deceived as in “blindly ignorant,” with an ignorance rooted “in the soul of the man deceived” (382b). This should immediately bring to mind those words from the *Apology* in which Socrates said he should be considered wise and good, the one person innocent of that “ignorance most culpable” “which thinks that it knows what it does not” (29a-b). The idea, then, seems to be that so long as an orator is innocent of the fault of self-deceit, any other genuine falsehood is excusable.

This tolerance for “falsehood in words” is manifest just as much in the *Republic* as it is in the *Phaedrus* and in the *Protagoras*. In the *Republic*, the quintessential example is the famous “noble lie” (γενναῖόν ψευδομένου, 414b9-c1), introduced in Book III to ensure the universal each-to-his/her-own mentality required for the well-being of the state. People are born best suited to different roles. Some are meant to be craftsmen, some guardians, and only a few will prove to have the potential to be rulers. A unified and coherent state requires that each citizen accept this principle, and adopt the function to which they are best suited. Socrates *knows* all this, or at least feels certain of it, and he wants to make his knowledge look plausible in a general theory of a state. But he also understands that in practice incommensurability is a serious problem, difficult to avoid but potentially disastrous for the state. Thus he asks:

How, then...might we contrive one of those opportune falsehoods (τῶν ψευδῶν τῶν ἐν δέοντι γιγνομένων) of which we were just now speaking, so as by one noble lie (γενναῖόν τι ἐν ψευδομένουσ) to persuade if possible the rulers themselves, but failing that the rest of the city? (414b-c)

Socrates' answer, in part, is the myth of the metals (415a-d), a "falsehood" in the sense that it is a myth or pseudo-truth told on the understanding that what is said is not actually what is meant.

The message, literally, is that the gods place gold, signifying the qualities of leadership, in some but not others at birth. The non-literal message, however, is quite different. It is just a pleasant story, a kind of flattery as it were, to persuade everyone to believe that their stations in life are preordained by the gods, and to be prepared to accept for the good the state as a whole, therefore, the principle that class is not a birthright but should be determined according the native abilities that emerge as a person matures.¹⁰⁷

In the *Republic*, the justification for such falsehood is that it is a "necessary" or "opportune" (ἐν δέοντι, 414b9) device (μηχανή, 414b8), a means to ensure political and moral stability.¹⁰⁸ It is a form of speech that entails concealment and deception, an agenda hidden as an ulterior motive,¹⁰⁹ but it is excusable on the grounds that it is "useful as a remedy or form of

¹⁰⁷ See, e.g., *Republic* 423c-d: "...if a degenerate offspring was born to the guardians he must be sent away to the other classes, and likewise if a superior to the others he must be enrolled among the guardians, and the purport of all this was that the other citizens too must be sent to the task for which their natures were fitted, one man to one work, in order that each of them fulfilling his own function may be not many men, but one, and so the entire city may come to be not a multiplicity but a unity." (See 462-466; Guthrie 1975.)

¹⁰⁸ On the noble lie as a worthwhile albeit ironic and false myth, for the sake of political fraternity and the unity of common interests, see D. E. Hahm (1969).

¹⁰⁹ In this regard, the noble lie has always been controversial, and has spawned quite disparate views amongst scholars. On the one side there are some very disparaging conclusions about Socrates' and Plato's political elitism and opportunism. More common in recent years, however, is the more sympathetic view that the noble lie highlights, as a fact of life, that the truth is not always understood or appreciated, in which case speech would be fruitless without a little noble mythologizing. Dombrowski (1981) characterizes the former as "wolves" amongst whom he includes Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies I: The Spell of Plato* (London, 1962, orig. ed. 1941), R. H. S. Crossman, *Plato Today* (Oxford, 1939), Warner Fite, *The Platonic Legend* (New York, 1934), John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1971, esp. p. 454 including n. 1); Arnold Toynbee, *A Study*

medicine (φαρμάκου)."¹¹⁰ Like Socrates' description, in the *Phaedrus*, of good-bad rhetoricians who deliberately conceal what they know, such falsehood presupposes that the people who practice deceit do not necessarily believe what they say but speak solely for the sake of persuasion, and are not themselves being taken in by what they say. The moral seems to be, if you have a worthy end (to wit, remedy) in view, any means to get there is justified.

Of course, all of this goes against Socrates' fundamental conviction that one should speak more truthfully. In the *Protagoras* this is evident by fact that there we are still in the context of early dialogues in which it is reasonable to suppose that Socrates is always under the truth-telling obligation identified at *Gorgias* 495a-b (also 500b-c, and *Crito* 49d). But so too with the *Phaedrus*, where the same obligation can be presumed to be still in effect because of Socrates' shame, and the advice of the *daimonion* that he erred in telling a falsehood with his first speech. Likewise in the *Republic*. Socrates waffles and quails at the thought of what he must do.¹¹¹ He hardly knows "how to find the audacity or the words to speak" the noble lie (414d). His problem is that even though he has advocated the art of falsehood as a useful remedy, he still thinks, as he has always thought, that "we must surely prize truth (ἀλήθειάν) most highly" (389b). Here, no less than in the *Phaedrus* and in the early dialogues, he still seems to be under the auspices of *Gorgias* 495a-b, where he admitted that he does not speak well if he does not speak his mind

of History I (London, 1934), and Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Plato: New Readings" (*Representative Men*, New York, p. 74); and the latter as "eagles," generally too numerous to mention they being the majority nowadays, but including F. M. Cornford, *The Republic of Plato* (Oxford, 1975, orig. ed. 1941), Ronald B. Levinson, *In Defense of Plato* (New York, 1970, orig. ed. 1953), and R. I. Nettleship, *Lectures on the Republic of Plato* (London, 1906, esp. pp. 132-134).

¹¹⁰ *Republic* 389b; see also 459c-d

¹¹¹ *Republic* 414d: Glaucon is the witness, noticing Socrates' waffling initially (414c-d) and then interrupting the telling of the lie (414e) to remark that Socrates indeed had good reason to be concerned.

clearly and unambiguously. The criterion of an ideal art of language is still that one not only knows the truth (*Phaedrus* 277b, *Gorgias* 501a), one must also speak it (*Gorgias* 495a-b, 500b-c, *Crito* 49d).

But Socrates is not so blinded to the human condition as to cling to his ideals no matter what. While the gods must be presumed never to have any need of resorting to falsehoods (389b), the same cannot be said of humanity. Humanity has a regrettable propensity to err, and sometimes falsehood or pseudo-truth is the best way to attempt to remedy the situation. As one commentator has explained, this is a purely practical alternative, warranted by the peculiarity of the human condition, where the truth might not come out any other way:

Plato *needs* to persuade by means of myth, with its pseudo-truth, because most people cannot apprehend truth any other way. A ψεῦδος is useless to the gods, but very useful to men as a remedy or medicine (*Republic* 389b, 459c)....To deny the level of pseudo-truth appropriate to a certain level of intelligence would prevent one from knowing at all (see *Laws* 663d-554a).¹¹²

This is not to say, however, that the “medicine” (φάρμακον, 389b4) in question is anything to dispense lightly. In a manner that seems reminiscent of his belief in the *Gorgias* that the art of knowing good from evil is restricted to the kind of expertise that is analogous to medicine and gymnastics,¹¹³ Socrates is careful to point out that “such a thing must be assigned to physicians, and laymen should have nothing to do with it” (*Republic* 389b). In this regard, it would appear that the only legitimate candidate in the dialogues is Socrates himself. As Socrates says in the *Gorgias*, he is the only one presently engaged in the “political art” of speaking, “not

¹¹² p. 5; Daniel A. Dombrowski (1981). In a similar vein, p. 120, Laszlo Versényi (1963): “all genuine teaching must be ironical to a certain extent.” No argument here. It’s just a question of how, especially when it’s deliberate and requires justification.

¹¹³ See pp. 24ff, chapter one preceding.

with a view to winning favour” but to “aim at what is best” (521d). His prediction about his forthcoming trial is that it “will be like that of a doctor prosecuted by a cook before a jury of children” (521e). That only serves to reinforce the impression that he alone, the only true wise man in Athens (*Apology* 23a-b), actually has the ability, the necessary lack of self-conceit, and the appropriate moral attitude generally to be accorded the license to practice the dubious medicine of deceit.

From this, it would appear that Socrates deserves the right to practice deceit not only because he is able to deceive without himself being deceived, but also because he knows when an occasion is both tenuous enough and important enough to warrant deploying his skill. But that means that he is justified in deceiving just because he deploys the skill on occasions where his concern about the right way to live is paramount; in just those sorts of circumstances, that is, in which he is normally supposed to be bound by the rule to be sincere!

This seems very paradoxical. Consider, however, the fact that underlying all Socrates’ initiatives, there is that single-minded objective to get his interlocutors to care about the welfare of their souls (*Apology* 37e-38a). In an old article, a commentator once noted, in light of Socrates’ first speech in the *Phaedrus*, “if a discourse is founded on truth it will be good.”¹⁴ In other words, you cannot go wrong if you have knowledge, because knowledge is sufficient for being good. That is the message of Socrates’ doctrine that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue. You *are* good to the extent that you know the good. The doctrine is supposed to apply in the case of someone who has true knowledge. Only then is there no paradox. But Socrates does not have true knowledge. He just has a set of convictions which, for him, denote

¹⁴ p. 157; R. L. Howland (1937)

the best intention in the world, the desire to promulgate the view that an unphilosophical life, a life devoid of examination and self-examination, replete instead with “essential falsehood” (*Republic* 382a), the self-deceit of “ignorance most culpable,” simply is not a life worth living (*Apology* 29b, 38a).

While this may not amount to knowledge, for Socrates, it is something that he believes to be true. If he deceives for the sake of this truth, then he is acting on the basis of what he perceives to be the good. He is pursuing a worthy cause. In each case of deceit encountered here, Socrates appeared to be acting in accordance with what he knows, always for the sake of enlightening someone else. That was his object in the *Protagoras* where he sought to get the master sophist to submit to the elenchus. So too in the *Phaedrus*, where his intent was to introduce Phaedrus to a more edifying conception of love. Likewise in the *Republic*, where the aim of the noble lie was political solidarity. Even while indulging in deceit, Socrates acts in accordance with knowledge so far as he has it. The result is a way of speaking which, although not good in and of itself, is nevertheless good insofar as it is directed at circumstances in which, paradoxically, it would be the more ideal practice of sincerity that would fail to represent the truth.

In the last chapter, in respect of complex irony, we said that the truly ironic thing about Socrates is that it is the very paradox that he is both good and not good which makes him good. His tendency to indulge in the simple irony of deceit may just be another manifestation of this paradox. While this sort of medicine is not a clear good, and for that reason always an occasion for shame or regret, if it accomplishes Socrates’ purpose to introduce others to a more philosophical disposition nonetheless, then perhaps it is good to dispense it after all.

v) **Does complex irony deceive?**

One final question comes to mind, namely 'What might be Socrates' motive in speaking complex ironies?' Why, that is, instead of expressing the truth that he is both knowledgeable and not-knowledgeable in the form of a complex irony, would he not just say unambiguously that he has knowledge in one sense of the word but not in another? The answer cannot be that Socrates does so purely out of choice. The issue seems to be too fundamental, the occasions on which the irony occurs too ubiquitous, for that to be any kind of satisfactory explanation. This is *the* characteristic Socratic irony, the irony of Socrates' ignorance about which, in reply to Thrasymachus' accusation of habitual deception in the *Republic* (337a), Socrates protests innocence (337e), thus indicating, in effect, that it is not his usual practice to indulge in pretense. Nor had there better be any pretense; for not only would Socrates be lying at the outcome of every elenctic argument that ends in aporia, he would also be lying when he reports, in the *Apology*, that the oracle makes him a paradigm of wisdom just because he alone admits his ignorance. On the one hand, Socrates would always be pretending to be ignorant, while on the other he would be saying as a matter of general truth that he really is ignorant. His universal calling card would be the liar's paradox.

The question occurs with particular force because of a strange inconsistency in Vlastos' view about complex irony. On the one hand, Vlastos has it that complex irony is a necessary admission of the discrepancy between knowledge and ignorance, while on the other hand he views it as still very much a deliberate pedagogical device, a deception practiced by Socrates to avoid saying too much so as to get his interlocutors to think for themselves. This inconsistency comes out at the end of Vlastos' (1991) chapter "Socratic Irony," and at the end of the later

chapter in the same book. "Does Socrates Cheat?" In the former instance, Vlastos wants to say that when complex irony occurs, "Socrates could have deceived without intending to deceive."¹¹⁵

This is as much as to say that for whatever reason Socrates employed complex ironies, he had no underlying intention to withhold information, to trick an interlocutor into thinking independently.

However, on the same page Vlastos also says that

If you are young Alcibiades courted by Socrates you are left to your own devices to decide what to make of his riddling ironies. If you go wrong and he sees you have gone wrong, he may not lift a finger to dispel your error, far less feel the obligation to knock it out of your head.¹¹⁶

Similarly, at the end of the chapter, "Does Socrates Cheat?" Vlastos says that Socrates'

"characteristic irony" is that he "plays along" with his opponents' "deluded state of mind," his

object being "to induce them to submit to painful elenctic surgery."¹¹⁷ On the one hand, then,

complex irony is unintentional and in no way characteristic of deliberate deceit, while on the

other hand it is very much an intentional coverup of the whole truth. Holding forth the idea that

¹¹⁵ p. 44; Vlastos (1991)

¹¹⁶ As observed earlier (see n. 23 p. 55 preceding), this is part of Vlastos' explanation as to why Socrates did not articulate the case of his ignorance more clearly and literally. The other is that an ironist like Socrates simply was not able to be more clear. But it's these two claims which then appear contradictory.

¹¹⁷ pp. 138-139; Vlastos (1991): there is a sudden, confusing shift on p. 138 from the claim that "extra-elenctic Socratic capers are scattered all through Plato's earlier dialogues," to the claim that this is Socrates' "characteristic irony," the latter of which, for Vlastos, has all along meant complex irony. It is this "characteristic irony" that he thinks is pedagogical: it plays on interlocutors' delusions to get them to submit to "elenctic surgery." But it is also supposed to be an irony that Socrates utters without any intention to deceive. That's the reason, both here and in Vlastos, for arguing that Socrates *doesn't* habitually indulge in the simple irony of deceit, and why he rejects the accusations of Thrasymachus and Callicles to that effect. The result of Vlastos' confusion is that at some point extra-elenctic capering and complex irony seem to mean the same thing, on the criterion that they both entail intentional deceit. At the same time, however, Vlastos wants to maintain that complex irony deceives *unintentionally*. Which is it, intentional or unintentional? If it's pedagogical, then the former because if it's the latter it can't be pedagogical (not unless there's such a thing as a pedagogy that you don't know anything about). Earlier on, this inconsistency was explored with regard to the ramifications for the notion of extra-elenctic capering (see n. 39 preceding plus associated text). Now it's the other side of the coin of that inconsistency: complex irony is and isn't intentionally pedagogical.

deception might have pedagogical value makes little difference in this regard. As soon as complex irony becomes *deliberately* pedagogical, then Socrates has started pretending to be more ignorant than he really is. But that would entail a kind of deceit so ubiquitous that, in effect, Socrates 1) would be running so totally roughshod over the rule that one has to say what one thinks in discussions about morality that the rule would become a lie, and 2) once again, therefore, would be entangled in the liar's paradox. It does not matter that deceit might have an ostensibly noble end, such as that of getting interlocutors to think their way through the ambiguity of irony for themselves. Such a ploy in certain extreme cases characterized by simple irony is one thing, but it would be quite another matter to attempt to justify the practice as a general habit pertaining the more pervasive instances of complex irony.

The confusion that Vlastos displays is understandable in a certain sense. Socrates' complex irony does have a therapeutic function. It enlightens those who are anywhere close to understanding it. Such, in fact, is the case with Socrates himself. That is precisely why Socrates professed himself to be a wise man, wiser than any other, and why he set about trying to alert his fellow citizens to the importance of devoting oneself to the search for virtue (*Apology* 23a-b, 37e-38a). Secondly, the irony is not literally explained anywhere by Socrates himself.¹¹⁸ In this vacuum, an obvious explanation could be that complex irony is a deliberate deceit, an irony of pretense to the extent that its real meaning remains hidden.¹¹⁹ Unfortunately, however, that

¹¹⁸ As Vlastos admits elsewhere, the disavowal of knowledge "is one of Socrates' most notorious traits;" Socrates is "exclusively a moral philosopher" (p. 47), and "Plato never puts Socrates in the position of explaining what he means by that disavowal" (p. 83, Vlastos 1991).

¹¹⁹ Which perhaps explains why Vlastos persists in clinging to the notion of pedagogical irony, even in respect of complex irony; and why he is in good company in this regard, it being quite common to think Socrates can be at once quite sincere about his ignorance and yet intentionally ironical for pedagogical reasons. See nn. 14, 23, chapter two preceding.

makes it both deceptive and not-deceptive, and nowhere has Vlastos explicitly acknowledged this paradox or attempted to explain it.¹²⁰

An alternate possibility, however, is that perhaps the problem lies with irony itself. That is to say, Socrates' complex irony indicates a mindset inclined to recognize such discrepancies as that of knowledge and not-knowledge, or goodness and not-goodness, and to articulate them ironically while at the same time displaying no overt awareness that he has appropriated a new form of irony. This might explain why he could speak both ironically and quite sincerely. He could speak ironically but couldn't fully articulate what the irony that he utters means.

There is some precedence for this idea. On more than one occasion, Vlastos himself has asked the question as to why Socrates speaks ironically. In his 1991 work, the question and accompanying answer are posed in regard to *Apology* 20d-e and 23a, where Socrates explains to the court that his bad reputation as someone who "inquires into things below the earth and in the sky," and as a sophist who "makes the weaker argument the stronger" (19b), came about because he professed to be smarter than anyone else in that he acknowledges his capacity for a mere "human wisdom" (20d-e) which falls far short of the divine wisdom that is "the property of god" (23a). Commenting on these passages, Vlastos remarks, "[o]nly the most sluggish intellect could have failed to draw the obvious inference: Socrates is avowing that '*human* wisdom,' which, he believes, may be claimed by a man determined to stay inside the limits of the 'mortal thoughts' ($\theta\nu\eta\tau\acute{\alpha}\ \phi\rho\nu\epsilon\iota\nu$) which befit the human condition." Hence, Vlastos reasons, "when, so soon after saying this, he turns around and says that he has '*no* wisdom, great or small,' he can only be

¹²⁰ Although, as we shall note shortly, he does appear to be aware of the problem in a sort of implicit way, in that he does raise the question as to what Socrates' motive is for complex irony. It is just that he has not raised the problem as a matter for discussion in quite the same way as here.

referring to that 'more than human' wisdom he has avowed as god's exclusive prerogative."

This, for Vlastos, is a firm indication that Socrates uses "'wisdom' in two sharply contrasting senses, avowing... 'human' wisdom, while disavowing... a kind of wisdom he deems to be above man's reach."¹²¹ But in a footnote to this last sentence, Vlastos then asks "Why then doesn't he *say* so?" Vlastos' answer in this context? Socrates felt "no obligation to turn didactic" and explain himself more clearly. Vlastos offers two reasons for this:

First....this is not *Socrates'* way of doing philosophy; he wants his hearers to find their way through the paradox for themselves (just as he wants Alcibiades to find out for himself the meaning of Socrates' love for him). Secondly....he could not have done so without turning epistemologist, shifting out of the role of pure moralist to which he sticks with single-minded fidelity in Plato's representation of him.¹²²

In this note, Vlastos still appears to hold with the idea that complex irony is a deliberate pedagogical device. But there is another insight as well, the suggestion that Socrates was no epistemologist. Further to this latter idea, Vlastos refers us to his earlier, 1985, paper in which he first advanced the notion of complex irony. There, in response to the same question as to why Socrates is ironical, Vlastos has a more specific answer:

When he [Socrates] peers at the abyss that yawns between knowledge_c and knowledge_e he measures the distance not in analytic but in religious terms....The question [as to why Socrates' chooses to express his ignorance ironically] concerns linguistic conventions.¹²³

What exactly does this mean? For Vlastos, two things which, unfortunately, seem to contradict one another. On the one hand, it is instrumental for Socrates to resist the temptation to be less

¹²¹ p. 239; Vlastos (1991): in the latter sentence, Vlastos is referring to *Apology* 23a.

¹²² n. 4 p. 239-240; Vlastos (1991). Emphasis is Vlastos'.

¹²³ pp. 28, 29; Vlastos (1985)

ambiguous because the purpose of his irony is "to tease, mock, perplex [an interlocutor] into seeking the truth." Socrates thus tells others about his ignorance while at the same time he "doesn't want to" since he "taunts them to ponder what he is hinting at by using words that do and don't say what he means."¹²⁴ Thus far, this is still to say that complex irony is a pedagogical device, just the kind of deceit that Socrates should normally abjure.

On the other hand, however, Vlastos has argued that Socrates broke new ground with complex irony,¹²⁵ and it is the nature of irony that it is often used *prior to the possibility of its full meaning being explicated in the speaker's own language*.¹²⁶ In view of this, one might say that what Vlastos could have done is more clearly link the idea that Socrates was ironical, and did not present a more analytic account of the discrepancy between human and divine wisdom, to the contention that he was a moralist and not an epistemologist. Then Socrates' motive in being ironical could be explained without the damaging addendum that the motive for complex irony is that he persists in being pedagogical in a way that runs counter to the requirement to be totally forthright. Irony is what it is because it is. At some point, there is not much more that can be said: for as soon as it is explained by the speaker it is no longer irony. It is the nature of the beast that the real meaning remains hidden.

¹²⁴ pp. 30-31; Vlastos (1991)

¹²⁵ See n. 2 p. 118 preceding.

¹²⁶ See n. 21 p. 27. Vlastos (1991): "the occurrence of ironical speech acts is independent of the availability of them as such in the speaker's language. The use of irony, as distinct from reflection on it, is as old as the hills." Vlastos admits this as a commonplace, scarcely worth such a reminder. Similarly, pp. 15-17, D. C. Meucke (1982): the concept of irony was "responded to before it was named and consequently before there could have been a concept of it." As an illustration, although the word irony was not current in the English language prior to 1502, it has been well recognized and studied in English literature from well before that time.

This is certainly a more favourable way of looking at Socrates' complex irony. He protests ignorance because he has to if he is to be honest about the limited extent to which he can be considered wise (notwithstanding that he's wiser than anyone else). But to be totally honest, he cannot mean just that. He also has to assert his knowledge, thereby specifying the limitations of his ignorance.¹²⁷ On one side of the coin, then, knowledge is limited by a serious profession of ignorance: while on the other side, the scope of this ignorance is limited by a modicum of knowledge. It is all quite enigmatic, all quite deeply ironical. Obviously everything would be clearer and less ambiguous, if Socrates had simply said what was the case clearly and literally, rather than by means of an ironical profession of ignorance. But if Socrates does assert his knowledge/ignorance ironically, it does not necessarily follow that this was a matter of deliberate choice, as if he knew how to be more explicit. It may simply be the case that his use of such complex irony was more sophisticated than any extant ability to explain it. That is tantamount to claiming that irony was as close as Socrates was able to come to being totally honest.

¹²⁷ As observed earlier (pp. 64ff including n. 48 preceding), complex irony seems to be a way for Socrates to avoid the liar's paradox. Of course, the same would be true if the meaning of that irony had been more clearly explicated: i.e. if it had not been irony at all. In the absence of such a clear explanation, however--i.e., given that it is irony which we are encountering--complex irony remains a saving grace for Socrates.

CONCLUSION

In chapter one, the problem was posed that Socrates is supposed to be a good man, but that he consistently disclaims the knowledge of goodness which he thinks one has to have in order to be good. At the end of the chapter, this problem was labeled the problem of Socrates' goodness (SG).

In chapter two, the possibility was raised but ruled out that perhaps Socrates' doctrine that moral knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue is not sufficiently meaningful to be a good premise from which to deduce that Socrates is not good. Subsequently, in the same chapter, the problem of SG was made to turn on the question of the meaning Socrates' irony. Since it is all but universally assumed that Socrates' professions of ignorance are not in fact literally true, and that in some sense he is saying he does have moral knowledge, perhaps Socrates does not deny the knowledge of virtue after all.

The immediate problem with this, however, is that Socrates cannot employ this kind of simple verbal irony--i.e., saying one thing and meaning another--without running afoul of his conviction that one has to say what one really thinks when involved in discussions about virtue or the knowledge of virtue. If Socrates were to indulge in such a simple irony, not merely in respect of his ignorance, but more generally in regard to any issue of import in a conversation about virtue, he would be guilty of what Vlastos' calls "cheating;" using his irony quite deliberately to obfuscate the possibility that he knows a lot more than he is actually saying. It was admitted that this kind of insincerity does occasionally seem to happen, most notably in the

famed exegesis of Simonides' poem in the *Protagoras*. This problem was put aside, however, to be discussed at greater length in chapter six.

In the meantime, two important occasions were examined in which Socrates is accused by an interlocutor of intentional deceit--Thrasymachus' accusation at *Republic* 337a that Socrates habitually dissembles when he says he lacks moral knowledge, and Callicles' accusation in the context of *Gorgias* 489d-e that Socrates mocks, thus belying that he is serious when he offers to switch roles with his interlocutor in the hope that his ignorance might be overcome if he takes on the role of the pupil. In both cases, however, we witnessed Socrates rejecting the accusations; and therefore, at the very least, giving no grounds to suppose that his irony *cannot* be a solution to SG.

In chapter four, we then turned to Vlastos' notion of complex irony, according to which Socrates disclaims knowledge in one sense of the word but at the same time reclaims it in another sense. If this is the sort of irony that Socrates utters when he disclaims moral knowledge, then there appear to be two different standards of knowledge that one should consider when trying to determine the sense in which he might be good. On the one hand, he clings to a set of moral intuitions that he considers true because they have survived the test of the *elenchus*, while on the other hand he disclaims the thorough-going, godlike knowledge which would ultimately be the only sure standard of goodness (so far as he is concerned).

In Chapter five, this notion of complex irony became the clue to suggest that there is a sense in which Socrates might be good after all, though only to the limited extent that goodness is possible for a mere mortal who is incapable of godlike knowledge. For although Socrates still lacks the kind of knowledge that denotes a thorough acquaintance with virtue, his moral

intuitions are the governing feature of his life. That makes Socrates good in one sense but not in another. That is to say, he is not good in the sense that his appropriation of virtue is self-admittedly deficient, but he is good in the sense that 1) his life is overwhelmingly governed by his concern for the good: 2) he strives to be totally consistent with his own intuitions about virtue; and 3) he accepts and lives by the presumption that he has a divinely appointed mission to get his fellow citizens to adopt the same sort of moral dispositions in their own right. In the first part of the chapter, this claim is made in the form of a very general argument, similar to the way in which some other commentators have recently argued for the claim that Socrates is good even though his life is still deficient by his own standards. The second part of the chapter, however, goes the additional step of trying to demonstrate how this basic notion of being good in one sense but not in another might be replicated in the case of each of the cardinal virtues, justice, temperance piety, courage, and (with qualification) wisdom. The conclusion: Not only is Socrates intimately associated with a complex irony characteristic of two senses of knowledge, such that he both does and does not know virtue, he is likewise ironic in that he is both good and not good according to two different standards of goodness.

Chapter six then revisited the problem of deceit and suggested, in light of Socrates' distinction in the *Phaedrus* between two sorts of bad rhetoricians, only one of whom is truly artless, that the deceit such as he practices in the exegesis of Simonides' poem in the *Protagoras*, and in his first speech about love in the *Phaedrus*, is excusable to the extent that the practice is limited to cases in which Socrates is faced with an intractable audience that he would have no hope of enlightening were he to use more straightforward speech. The result was a curious sense of paradox: sometimes Socrates has to tell a lie in order to tell the truth. Ultimately, however,

this paradox resolved itself on the understanding that the occasions for this simple irony of deceit are additional manifestations of the more fundamental, complex irony that Socrates is both good and not good.

Chapter six concludes by entertaining the question as to whether complex irony deceives. This issue turned, ultimately, on the question as what might be Socrates' motive in asserting himself in terms of complex irony: why, that is, he would not simply articulate clearly the fact that he has in mind two different standards of knowledge, instead of obfuscating the point in the non-literal language of irony. The possibilities considered in this regard were that 1) Socrates employs complex irony knowingly and deliberately for pedagogical reasons, in which case complex irony would be intentionally deceptive, or 2) he employs the irony unintentionally, in which case, if there is any possibility of deception, the cause is Socrates' inability to express himself more clearly not a deliberate refusal to do so. The latter alternative was preferred on the grounds that it avoids the necessary but damning conclusion, in light of the fact that this irony is ubiquitous throughout the early dialogues, that Socrates runs totally roughshod over the rule to speak sincerely. For it is not at all implausible to suppose that this kind of irony can be uttered in the absence of a full understanding as to all that it actually means. After a certain point no amount of analysis will make such irony any less ironical or paradoxical. At some point Socrates' irony has to be left untouched and simply accepted or rejected, a riddle as much it is an answer to the question as to whether it makes sense for him to think 1) that knowledge is necessary and sufficient for virtue, 2) that he lacks this knowledge, but 3) that he is nonetheless a good man.

But perhaps that is the best conclusion of all. What emerges is a quintessentially philosophical Socrates, someone who is good just because he is unflinchingly ironical, wise not in the sense that he possesses godly wisdom but rather because he loves and devotes his life to the attempt to discover and understand the very property of the gods that he knows he cannot ever have. In the *Symposium* (203e-204b), Diotima tells Socrates that neither a god nor a fool philosophizes. A god has no need and a fool lacks the perspicacity to love wisdom. A god has no need to yearn for knowledge, while a fool is as yet unaware that for humanity wisdom is an object of desire more than of knowledge. A god is not a philosopher, a lover of wisdom, because a god already has knowledge. In comparison, the fool is not a philosopher because he/she tends to be guilty of that "ignorance most culpable" which Socrates speaks of in the *Apology* (29b1-2) while disparaging the evil of supposing oneself to be wise when in fact one is not wise at all. A god is not a philosopher because a god is good; but a fool is not a philosopher because a fool is bad. Socrates falls in between the extremes of godliness and a most culpable foolishness, offering thereby the image of a kind of wisdom that is riddled with irony, a way to be wise in virtue of one's self-acknowledged lack of wisdom. On the one hand, this means that Socrates does not in fact measure up to his belief that one has to have a fully integrated practical and theoretical knowledge of the good in order to be good. On the other hand, however, because Socrates' ignorance is ironic, it is true *both* that he lacks godly wisdom *and* that he is not lacking in anything that is possible by way of human wisdom. This is what distinguishes him from both the gods and fools, and what makes him such a challenge. Socrates is good notwithstanding his inability to appropriate goodness as such. Wisdom, such as he does display it, signals the possibility of the governance of wisdom in all human affairs. *Socrates' Wisdom* (as it was called

at the end of chapter five to distinguish this middle wisdom from useless human wisdom and impossible godly wisdom) satisfies an important necessary condition of virtue, the knowledge as to how to be good in the absence of the knowledge as to what exactly the good is. Far from denying that he meets this condition, Socrates' ironic ignorance, his complex irony, attests to it.

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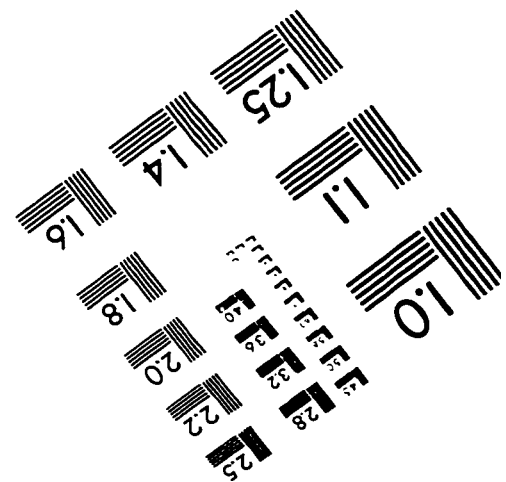
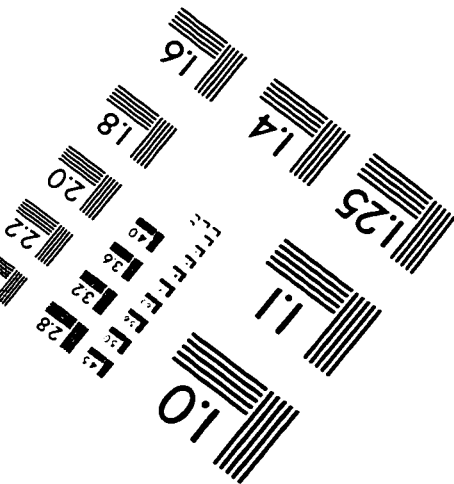
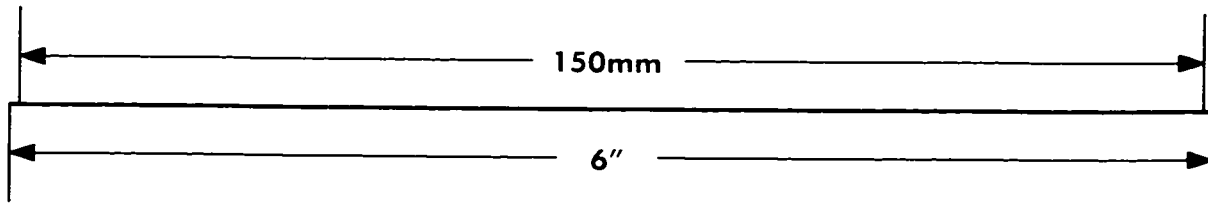
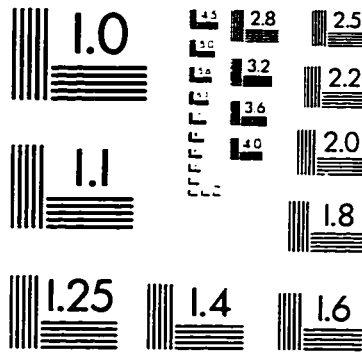
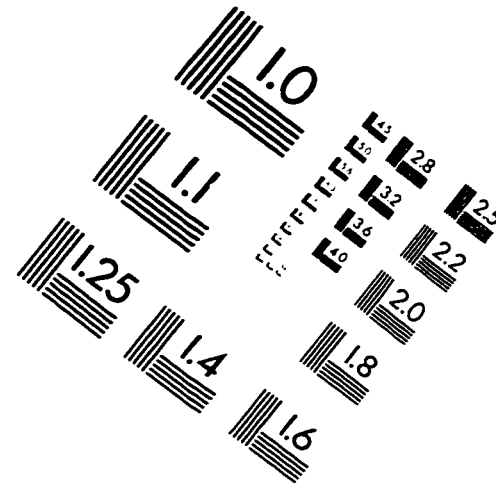
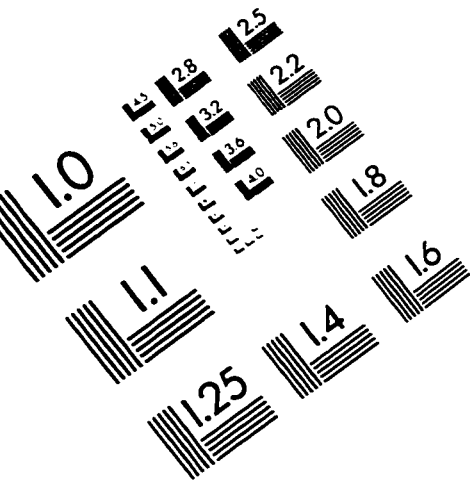
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