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# Socratic Encounters: Plato's Alcibiades

Andre Archie

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Socratic Encounters: Plato's Alcibiades

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty

of the Philosophy Department

McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

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Doctor of Philosophy

by

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## Chapter One: Introduction

The aim of this dissertation is to situate our reading of the Platonic dialogue *Alcibiades Major* among both ancient and modern readings of the dialogue. Since the nineteenth century the issue of authenticity has preoccupied most modern commentators of the dialogue, but from all reasonable evidence, commentators from the ancient world had no such qualms about attributing the authorship of *Alcibiades Major* to Plato. Our reading of *Alcibiades Major* is in line with modern commentators who take both the dialogue's dramatic features and educative value seriously, while not ignoring that in some quarters *Alcibiades Major*'s authorship is still in dispute.

Our treatment of *Alcibiades Major* differs from the attention given to it by past and present commentators, because it is our desire to see the ideas—expressed in the dialogue with such enthusiasm by Socrates and Alcibiades—entertained in a number of different contexts. For this reason we have titled the dissertation *Socratic Encounters: Plato's Alcibiades*, with each chapter designed to facilitate a kind of *cross-fertilization of ideas* from a variety of intellectual perspectives. Looking at the dialogue from various perspectives has allowed us to cast some new light on the dialogue from which other commentators may benefit.

The objective of the dissertation to highlight *Alcibiades Major*'s timeless insights and enduring relevance to contemporary issues, has led us on a course that revolves around *pedagogy*. The Platonic dialogues are gold-mines of insight, but knowing this to be the case does not answer the fundamental question: 'What did Plato intend to teach us by writing *Alcibiades Major*?' The dissertation goes to great lengths to provide answers to the question, and the answers it provides take unusual approaches. For example, Plato invites us to consider five issues in *Alcibiades Major*: appropriate listening, priorities, tradition, hypothetical questions, and women's role in male achievement. The dialogue is not limited to these five issues, but the dialogue cannot be seriously dealt with without

considering them. What does Plato intend to teach us about listening? We provide an answer to the question in chapter two, 'Listening in Plato's *Alcibiades Major* and Plutarch.' Whereas most commentators think that Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades was contrived to show that Alcibiades was corrupt prior to their meeting, we argue that Alcibiades' encounter with Socrates would have been beneficial if Alcibiades would have listened appropriately to what was being said to him. Thus, Plato intends for us to see that listening can be a source of moral uplift or a source of corruption.

The speech in the center of *Alcibiades Major*, the Spartan and Persian Speech, is crucial to the dialogue. Women figure prominently in the speech. In chapter six, 'Women, Moral Insight and Marriage,' we account for the prominence of women in the speech by arguing that women provide moral insight regarding male goals and achievement. Plato intends to teach us that Alcibiades' goals can be realized only by considering the opinions of him held by the mothers, daughters, and wives of his competitors. These are just two examples of the dissertation's approach to what Plato intends to teach us in *Alcibiades Major*.

## I. Historical Survey of what Prominent Commentators have said about *Alcibiades Major*

Up until the nineteenth century the dialogue *Alcibiades Major* was considered by ancient and medieval thinkers to be a primer for those interested in philosophy proper, and the Platonic corpus in particular (Denyer 2001, 14-15; cf. Alfarabi 1962, 53-54). The Middle Platonists (c. the first century B.C. through the second century A.D.) placed *Alcibiades Major* at the head of a number of reading programs. In particular, the Middle Platonist Albinus wrote a short preface to the Platonic dialogues titled *Prologue to Platonic Philosophy*<sup>1</sup> which gives three explanations for the prominence given to *Alcibiades Major*: (1) It teaches us to know ourselves as a rational soul. The soul is the true self (*auto*) that remains the same and remains the true subject of our actions. Thus,

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<sup>1</sup> See Julia Annas' Townsend Lectures on the Middle Platonist in *Platonic Ethics, Old and New* (1999).

we must see the body as the instrument of the soul;<sup>2</sup> (2) It is protreptic. The dialogue seductively exhorts Alcibiades and the reader to turn towards philosophy;<sup>3</sup> and (3) The dialogue is maieutic. Socrates helps Alcibiades give birth to some truth within himself by drawing out and clarifying his ideas.

However, the authenticity of *Alcibiades Major* was called into question by the German theologian Ernst Friedrich Schleiermacher (1836, 328-336) who deemed its literary quality unworthy of Plato. That Schleiermacher is aware of going against centuries of special praise accorded to *Alcibiades Major* is acknowledged in the opening pages of his commentary. He attributes the praise given to *Alcibiades Major* to learned authors, both ancient and modern, who themselves, ‘unable to invent anything original’ have preserved the ‘honor and dignity’ of learned men who have judged *Alcibiades Major* to be an authentic Platonic dialogue (328). These learned men, according to Schleiermacher, only proceed in deference to the tradition that esteems the dialogue. He goes on to say that he will gain little from being the ‘first to communicate doubts of this kind, and to explain the grounds of them,’ but it is imperative for him not to shrink from declaring his opinion on the merits of the dialogue (329). The grounds of Schleiermacher’s challenge to the historical prominence of the dialogue is on display in the following remarks:

This little work, which, with those who are accustomed to admire in the gross, has been ever a subject of most especial commendation, appears to us but very insignificant and poor, and that to such a degree, that we cannot ascribe it to Plato, even though any number of these who think they can swear to his spirit, profess most vividly to apprehend it in this dialogue. (329-330)

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<sup>2</sup> This also accounts for the subtitle Thrasylus has given the dialogue ‘On the Nature of Man’. True happiness is knowing one’s true self. On Thrasylus see Tarrant 2000, 118-123.

<sup>3</sup> Up until Hellenistic philosophy, all of Greek philosophy was protreptik—it proselytized. This idea is made delightfully clear by Vlastos 1991, 200-232.

The specific reasons for Schleiermacher's negative reception of the dialogue reads like a laundry list, but the list can be condensed in to one major complaint: want of uniformity in both literary structure and Socratic characterization.

Schleiermacher believed the dialogue contained genuine Platonic passages, which he does not cite throughout his commentary, but amid many other 'worthless' passages that read like little 'broken dialogues' (330). Even among the Platonic passages, he felt as if their literary effect was perfunctory ('shell-like', 331), designed to echo other genuine Platonic dialogues. When Schleiermacher turns to the want of uniformity in the characterization of Socrates in *Alcibiades Major* his criticism is more pointed, but not as much as one would hope considering the impression of his ideas on subsequent commentators of the dialogue. That Socrates is not the Platonic Socrates found in Plato's genuine dialogues is witnessed, Schleiermacher believed, in the opening remarks Socrates makes to Alcibiades (103a-104c) and the depiction of Socrates converting Alcibiades in the course of the dialogue from a hubris-filled youth to a submissive sycophant. In the opening pages of the dialogue we hear Socrates tell Alcibiades that he has been observing him for some time, and that it was a divine being that prevented him from speaking to Alcibiades sooner. Schleiermacher found it unagreeable that Socrates would introduce himself with such a long speech, and utterly unworthy of him to admit that he had been observing Alcibiades for a long period of time (334). As for Schleiermacher's complaint about the conversion experienced by Alcibiades in the course of the dialogue, he only mentions in passing that Socrates 'does not show that he alone has the power of teaching Alcibiades what he stands in need of... .' (331). We will see this particular criticism reappear in other commentaries that are skeptical of *Alcibiades Major*'s authenticity. Schleiermacher also found it un-Socratic that in discussing the virtues and the riches of the Persians and Lacedaemonians in the Spartan and Persian tale, Socrates does not make the irony in his laudatory description more apparent. Schleiermacher goes on to point out that the 'statistical notices' displayed in dwelling

upon the virtues of the Spartans, for example, is more in the manner of Xenophon than Plato. Additionally, he faults the characterization of Socrates as being eristic. Socrates constantly intrudes on the subject matter, ‘breaking off the subject shorter than is his custom’ simply to shame Alcibiades (333). Schleiermacher concludes his commentary by speculating about the origins of the *Alcibiades Major*. He believed that a pupil may have gotten hold of a rough draft of the dialogue Plato rejected, Plato having decided instead to distribute the ideas contained in it to other dialogues, and inserted ‘foreign additions,’ the effect of which is it lacks uniformity (336).

Schleiermacher’s judgment of the dialogue as inauthentic<sup>4</sup> was highly influential, and the dialogue soon fell out of favor. This is not to say that *Alcibiades Major* was declared inauthentic across the board at the time. A contemporary of Schleiermacher, the English utilitarian philosopher George Grote (1864, 331-363) addresses some of the concerns Schleiermacher had about the inauthenticity of the dialogue, but found the dialogue (including the lesser known *Alcibiades Minor*) to be ‘perfectly Socratic both in topics and manner’ (355). Grote concedes that *Alcibiades Minor* is ‘inferior in merit’ (350)<sup>5</sup> compared to Plato’s better known dialogues, but he accounts for its deficiency by speculating that it was probably an early production, having been written between 399-390 B.C. A concern of Schleiermacher’s that Grote echoes is the incompatible depiction of Alcibiades as inordinately insolent to Socrates’ entreaties and the inordinate submissiveness towards Socrates ascribed to Alcibiades as the dialogue unfolds. Grote’s response is that it is highly improbable to have such a conjunction in an interlocutor, but it attests to the larger point that ‘Plato attributes to the personality and conversation of Socrates an influence magical and almost superhuman’ (354).

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<sup>4</sup> See Pangle 1987, 1-19 and Denyer 2001, 14-26 on the debate of authenticity surrounding *Alcibiades Major*.

<sup>5</sup> In commenting on the literary quality of *Alcibiades Major*, Grote says the following:  
...we find an excessive repetition of specializing illustrations, often needless and sometimes tiresome: a defect easily intelligible if we assume them to have been written when Plato was still a novice in the art of dialogic composition. (355)

Other prominent commentators have been tepid towards *Alcibiades Major* in light of Schleiermacher's comments, despite its prominence in the ancient world. For example, Paul Shorey (1933, 415-418) acknowledges that it was once considered to be the best introduction to Platonic philosophy, but concerning its authenticity 'it is inadvisable to dogmatize' (415). In spite of the disclaimer, Shorey's overall comments on *Alcibiades Major* indirectly weights in on the side of Schleiermacher due to his portrayal of it as an exceptional case or a scholastic gloss on ideas convincingly expressed in Plato's other dialogues. Shorey comments:

But if we attribute it to Plato we have to assume the improbability that he thought it worth while to elaborate a tedious, if scholastically convenient, summary of a long series of ideas and points that are better and more interestingly expressed in other dialogues, and that he repeats or quotes himself more often than in any other genuine work, and we must be prepared to overlook a few expressions which jar on the ear of any reader who knows intimately Platonic Greek. (415)

Shorey does cite as significant two ideas in *Alcibiades Major* that he finds expressed more clearly there than in any other Platonic dialogues. The first is that the body is the instrument of the soul, which is the true self; the second is that as the eye can see itself only through reflection, so the mind best knows itself through the reflection of its thoughts in another mind<sup>6</sup> (415).

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<sup>6</sup> Cf. Aristotle's treatment of this idea in *Magna Moralia* (1231a13-26), where the value of friends is considered:

Since then it is both a most difficult thing, as some of the sages have said, to attain a knowledge Of oneself, and also a most pleasant (for to know oneself is pleasant)—now we are not able to see what we are from ourselves (and that we cannot do so is plain from the way in which we blame others without being aware that we do the same things ourselves; and this is the effect of favor or passion, and there are many of us who are blinded by these things so that we judge not aright); as then when we wish to see our own face, we do so by looking in to the mirror, in the same way when we wish to know ourselves we can obtain that knowledge by looking at our friend. For the friend is, as we assert, a second self. If, then, it is pleasant to know oneself, and it is not possible to know this without having some one else for a friend, the self-sufficing man will require friendship in order to know himself.

The now conventional reading of *Alcibiades Major* as a spurious Platonic dialogue, or at best, an incomplete work written by an immature Plato, held sway from the early nineteenth century (1836) up to the late twentieth century (1964). The commentator who seriously challenged the conventional reading of the dialogue with as much positive enthusiasm for the philosophical and literary merits of *Alcibiades Major* and Plato's authorship of the dialogue as Schleiermacher expressed disdain and doubt, was the classical scholar and philosopher Paul Friedlander (1964, 231-243). The uniqueness of Friedlander's commentary is that what was considered by previous commentators to be *Alcibiades Major*'s literary weaknesses and odd characterization of Socrates becomes a complex type of writing characterized by dramatic irony.<sup>7</sup> Friedlander's dramatic reading of the dialogue has yielded valuable insights, and, as we will see in part two, has influenced subsequent commentators of the dialogue who are not concerned as much with its authenticity as they are with its educative value. In order to maintain continuity in the progression witnessed in the readings of *Alcibiades Major* we will structure our appraisal of Friedlander's commentary as a response to the criticism we have heard from the previous three commentators, and then discuss two ideas brought out by Friedlander that have set him apart from these same commentators.

Friedlander begins his commentary by acknowledging that in antiquity 'there was no doubt about Plato's authorship' of *Alcibiades Major* (231), but that Schleiermacher was the first to regard it with strong antipathy as un-Platonic. As if to juxtapose the special honors given to the dialogue by the ancients, and Schleiermacher's comment that the praise attributed to it is due to unoriginal authors who wish to preserve the dignity and honor of learned men who judge the dialogue to be an authentic Platonic dialogue (*see* page 3), Friedlander lists distinguished ancient authors who either used the dialogue as a basis for explaining Alcibiades' subsequent career, such as Plutarch (Clough 1992 vol.2,

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If this passage is modeled on *Alcibiades Major*, and the *Magna Moralia* is an authentic work of Aristotle, then this would be good evidence of the authenticity of *Alcibiades Major*.

<sup>7</sup> See Vlastos 1991, 21-44; cf. Longinus 1991, 42-48; Klein 1989, 1-31 and Strauss 1988, 30-37.

258-290), Aristotle echoing the striking image discussed in *Alcibiades Major* (132e-133d) about the eye looking into another eye (*see* no. 6, page 7) or scenes from Xenophon's *Memorabilia* (e.g., Socrates' encounter with Glaucon III. vi-vii. 9) having been modeled after the dialogue. In juxtaposing the reception of the dialogue in this way, it is clear that Friedlander is placing the burden of proof squarely in the lap of those commentators who follow Schleiermacher's lead. One of the more substantial criticisms Schleiermacher levels against reading *Alcibiades Major* as an authentic Platonic dialogue is that several of its opening episodes show a Socrates that is unagreeable and unworthy of Plato's Socrates. In the first episode we see Socrates confronting Alcibiades with a long speech, which, in other Platonic dialogues Socrates 'hates' (334), according to Schleiermacher; in the second episode Schleiermacher finds it unworthy and strange that Socrates admits he has been watching Alcibiades for some time but was prevented from talking to him by a divine being.

Friedlander's reading of the opening remarks Socrates makes to Alcibiades is not framed, like Schleiermacher's, in relation to other *standard* Platonic dialogues and their portrayal of the Platonic Socrates, but instead is framed by an internal critique of *Alcibiades Major*. What we mean by an internal critique is that Friedlander reads the dialogue in such a way that it is allowed to provide its own answers to interpretative difficulties.<sup>8</sup> For example, Friedlander sees the initial encounter between Socrates and Alcibiades as 'filled with a tension unequalled in Plato' (232) due to the collision of two very proud persons. The long speech and Socrates' admission is indicative of a pent-up erotic attachment that was born in the past, that is now able to unfold in the present, and the reader is in the unique position to witness it. But this tensioned-filled beginning can not be appreciated fully, Friedlander believes, without connecting it to how the dialogue

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<sup>8</sup> This is not to say that other Platonic dialogues may not assist with interpretative difficulties. We are sympathetic to the position that the dialogues are self-contained. For the opposite position see Szlezak 1993, 66-75. He argues that all the Platonic dialogues have 'gaps' which can only be filled by Plato's unwritten doctrines. Cf. Kahn's *Plato and the Socratic Dialogue: The Philosophical Use of a Literary Form* (1996). He advocates a proleptic reading of the dialogues.

ends. Friedlander cites Socrates' last words that the state may win out over him and over Alcibiades (135e) as complementing the tense beginning in the opening of the dialogue between the past and the present. These last words foreshadow the political career of Alcibiades and the death of Socrates. 'Thus, the dialogue...ends with tension between present and the future' (233).

Here we see Friedlander employing parts of *Alcibiades Major* to assist in interpretative difficulties raised in other parts of the dialogue. What he ends up with is a broader perspective to bring to bare when countering the type of criticism Schleiermacher raises. A constitutive part of this broader perspective is Friedlander's discernment of how the dramatic irony that informs the philosophical discussions in Platonic dialogues function. A good example of how a proper understanding of dramatic irony can explain an apparent lack of uniformity in a dialogue is exhibited by the different interpretations given by Schleiermacher and Friedlander of the Spartan and Persian Speech.<sup>9</sup> Schleiermacher found the speech Xenophonic, not Socratic, because it dwelled superfluously on the riches of the Lacedaemonians and Persians without making it apparent to Alcibiades the irony in his laudatory description. Friedlander, on the other hand, considers the Spartan and Persian Speech to be the core of the dialogue. Its 'iridescent images' (236) are designed to keep Alcibiades from falling below himself, considering he is all too willing to measure himself against local, Athenian politicians who are of no account. According to Friedlander, the speech also functions to accomplish two other ends: (1) It facilitates and sharpens the discussion focused on the concept of 'caring for oneself' as the highest form of self-knowledge (124c-135e) which directly follows the speech; and (2) It serves as a Socratic critique of Athenian educational practices where the care of the young is left to the most useless slaves (122b-d), and in

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<sup>9</sup> Cf. *Protagoras* 342ff. on the secret teachings of the Spartans, *Charmides* 156cff. on the special art of healing that King Zalmoxis taught the Thracians and *Hipparchus* 228b-229e.

the guise of the four royal Persian tutors teaching the Socratic virtues to the heir of the Persian throne, we see the outlines of a state dedicated to education.

A general criticism of *Alcibiades Major* that runs throughout each of our previous three commentators, which Friedlander addresses, is the sentiment that the dialogue is deficient in quality. Schleiermacher found it unworthy of Plato; Grote considered it an authentic Platonic dialogue but an early production from an immature Plato; and Shorey all but says it is not authentic by commenting that it is improbable that Plato thought it worthwhile to elaborate such a tedious and scholastic summary of ideas found expressed more lucidly in other dialogues. The specific point of convergence for at least two of our commentators, Schleiermacher and Grote, and hovers in the background of the third, Shorey (i.e., the scholastic comment) is the complaint that the depiction of Socrates' transformation of Alcibiades in the course of the dialogue from overly confident youth to overly submissive youth is incompatible with the Platonic Socrates. Friedlander addresses this complaint by again showing Plato's use of dramatic irony in accounting for Alcibiades' transformation. He explains that there is no discrepancy between the conceitedness displayed by Alcibiades in the opening pages of the dialogue when he disdainfully concedes to answer Socrates' questions on the condition that Socrates can help him realize his ambition (103a-104e) and the submissiveness displayed for the remainder of the dialogue once Alcibiades has heard the Spartan and Persian Speech (124b-135e). The portrayal of the transformation of Alcibiades, according to Friedlander, is not the weakening of authorial creative power, it is a moving and dramatic showing of a pupil's pride broken once he has been brought to 'see his own emptiness before the superior strength of his master' (236). As a result, the 'prerequisite of listening and replying, quietly and objectively' (236) has been fulfilled and self-knowledge can proceed. Thus, the inner movement of the dialogue revolves around humiliation and submission, from the strong resistance of Alcibiades in the beginning to surrender at the end.

Having appraised Friedlander's commentary on *Alcibiades Major* as a response to the criticism of it by the prominent commentators Schleiermacher, Grote, and Shorey, we turn now to two ideas pointed out in Friedlander's commentary that are ignored by these other three commentators. The first idea accounts for the lack of dramatic externals<sup>10</sup> (e.g., no setting, no secondary figures) by arguing that in the person of Alcibiades the historical figure himself in both his 'character and fate' comes to life in such a powerful way that his mere presence obviates any need for what Friedlander refers to as a 'setting full of charm and symbolic meaning' (232). It is as if Alcibiades' infamous exploits become the backdrop of the dialogue. Friedlander's insight is significant because the sheer economy with which the dialogue focuses on Socrates and Alcibiades heightens the tension around which the dialogue revolves, as we mentioned earlier, and suggests where the dialogue's continuity lies. The second idea is an extension of Friedlander's comments on the Spartan and Persian speech. We know that Friedlander thought the speech was the core of *Alcibiades Major* and its function is to keep Alcibiades from falling beneath himself, because it poses a stark choice for him between careful training and wisdom or being the best only among the local, Athenian politicians. But the speech's additional significance is its use of myth<sup>11</sup> as a motivator for Alcibiades to get serious about a genuine education. Friedlander believed that the Spartan and Persian speech goes beyond all the other mythical speeches (*see* no. 9, p.10) in other Platonic dialogues due to its maturity in tying Alcibiades' ambition to the concept of caring for oneself, unlike the myth told in Hipparchus (228bff.), for example, which had very little effect on the unnamed interlocutor.

Overall, Friedlander's remarks on *Alcibiades Major* are a substantive endorsement of the dialogue's authenticity. As if to mock Schleiermacher's attack on the

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<sup>10</sup> Johnson 1999, 1-19 argues that the lack of dramatic externals in *Alcibiades Major* is in keeping with the teaching of the dialogue which is that the self is ultimately impersonal, rational, and universal.

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Szlezak's 1993, 96-99 discussion of Plato's use of myth and logos and Sorel 1967, 26-56 on the importance of myth in motivating the masses in modern, industrialized democracies.

historical prominence of the dialogue, and other doubters who followed and continue to follow his lead, Friedlander concludes his commentary with a challenge:

Among the minor dialogues of Plato, there is none in which such a moment—deeply saturated with what precedes and with what follows—is depicted with such irresistible power. Should we infer from this that someone else surpassed Plato? Or is it not rather Plato himself who is here surpassing his own previous achievements?

II. Historical Survey Continued: Modern Commentators who take both the dramatic features and Educative Value of *Alcibiades Major* seriously.

For commentators who take *Alcibiades Major*'s dramatic features and educative value seriously, Friedlander's reading of the dialogue is a lesson on how the drama in a Platonic dialogue is inseparable from the philosophical issues the dialogue entertains. There are several commentators,<sup>12</sup> while not doing so self-consciously, who follow Friedlander's approach to the dialogue. Steven Forde's commentary on *Alcibiades Major* views the role of women in the Spartan and Persian speech as central to understanding the dialogue as a whole, which echoes Friedlander's interpretation of the speech as the 'core' of the dialogue. To his credit, Forde's interpretation of the speech takes us beyond Friedlander's, due to his attempt to locate the precise role women play in Alcibiades' quest for a genuine education. Mark Lutz's commentary on *Alcibiades Major* construes the philosophical ideas entertained in the dialogue as having broad applications due to its role within Socratic education as a whole. In addition to viewing Socrates' commitment to getting Alcibiades to appreciate the role virtue can play in his private and public life as analogous to the broader issue of whether or not virtue should play a role in liberal democracy's moral, political and religious discourse, Lutz views *Alcibiades Major*'s

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<sup>12</sup> Bruell's 1999, 19-38 commentary on *Alcibiades Major* will not be discussed, but his treatment of the dialogue should be grouped among the commentators we will be discussing.

teachings as contributing to what he calls the ‘classical counter-culture’s’ corrective to ideological mass movements such as multiculturalism.

Forde’s (1987, 222-239) commentary on *Alcibiades Major* begins by first acknowledging that the dialogue was held in the ‘greatest esteem in the Platonic school of antiquity’ (222), and secondly, refers the reader in the first foot-note, interestingly enough, to Friedlander’s commentary on the dialogue for a discussion of the tradition in the Greek school. Following the introduction there are no original insights in Forde’s commentary leading up to the Spartan and Persian Speech<sup>13</sup> that are worthy of discussion, but his interpretation of the speech, which does call for discussion, is insightful and will have significant implications for how he views the remainder of the dialogue. Forde takes the position that the speech is the first part of a two-pronged strategy designed to persuade Alcibiades to pursue a genuine education. The first strategy employs paradoxical argumentation and combative refutation (103a-120b), but it has only managed to ‘force Alcibiades into silence. The second strategy employs the Spartan and Persian speech which promises success on the condition that he perfect himself. This latter strategy proves to be successful. For the sake of clarification, it will be in order here to briefly summarize the speech. Only by doing so can we appreciate Forde’s unique interpretation of the speech and contribution to the reading of *Alcibiades Major* as a whole.

In the Spartan and Persian speech (120b-124c) Socrates tells Alcibiades that his true rivals are the Spartan and Persian Kings not men like Midias,<sup>14</sup> the petty demagogue (120b). In the guise of Midias Socrates offers Alcibiades the possibility of neglecting himself, considering that even the women find Midias slave-like, before illustrating the length to which he has to cultivate himself in order to compete against his true rivals.

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<sup>13</sup> For reason unsubstantiated, Forde tells us that he prefers to refer to what we have been calling the Spartan and Persian speech as ‘The Royal tale’ due to his presumption that Socrates’ speech is a description of realities (228).

<sup>14</sup> See Denyer’s 2001, 168-169 interesting explanation of Socrates’ reference to Midias’ slave-boy hair styles.

Alcibiades chooses to view the Spartan and Persian Kings as his rivals and Socrates commences the speech by explaining to Alcibiades: that the kings' ancestors go all the way back to Zeus; the Spartan wives are guarded at public expense by ephors to ensure that their future kings are 'descended from the family of Heraclidae alone' (121b-c); the Persian king is so formidable that the Persian wife is only guarded by her own fear since no one would even suspect the king's heir of being fathered by anyone except him; when the eldest son of the Persian king and heir to the throne is born all the king's subjects have a feast day, and from that day all of Asia celebrates the king's birthday; the young king is brought up by highly respected eunuchs in the royal household, and at the age of fourteen is entrusted to the 'royal tutors' (122a); Persian wealth is splendid and luxurious; and there is more gold and silver in Sparta alone than in the rest of Greece put together' (122e).

Socrates' illustration of the king's prominence, of course, serves as a touchstone when compared to the opposite condition Alcibiades find himself in. By any scale Alcibiades' goods pale along side the goods of the Spartan and Persian kings. So what accounts for Alcibiades choosing to view the kings as his true rivals? Socrates takes this question up at the conclusion of the speech by having the women in the lives of the kings wonder what Alcibiades could possibly have in mind for even thinking he can successfully compete with their men. Amestris, the Persian king's mother and widow of Xerxes, typifies the response the other women have regarding Alcibiades' audacity. She simply says, 'I don't see what this fellow could be relying on, except diligence and wisdom—the Greeks don't have anything else worth mentioning' (123d).

Forde argues that Alcibiades' self-perfection, which is called for by the speech, is dependent upon women's judgment, who, if they were in control of Athens, 'alone might know how to despise Midias' (229). Women as motivators and judges of male achievement is the normative assumption Socrates makes, according to Forde, which accounts for the prominence of women in the Spartan and Persian speech. This line of

reasoning is seen in Forde's interpretation of Socrates' account of the wealthy furnishings a trustworthy traveler witnessed who had been through the Persian king's court (123b-c). The traveler reported that he passed through many regions and tracts of lands, 'which the locals called the "the Queen's girdle" and another "the Queen's veil." We are told that each of these tracts is named after the queen's wardrobe, and that each one is set aside to pay for the queen's finery. Forde finds it significant that the word designating each of the tracts pertaining to the queen's wardrobe is *kosmos* (order), and based upon Socrates' use of this word he draws the following conclusion:

Indeed, what we learn from the trustworthy traveler whom Socrates cites is precisely that the Persian domain is cast onto a very well-defined order; that order revolves somehow around the person of the queen. (230)

Although Forde is not explicit here, the 'somehow' is most likely the normative assumption he thinks Socrates makes in the speech regarding the role of women in male achievement. The Persian queen judges whether or not the domain and her king are in the proper order. Towards the end of his interpretation of the speech Forde does move a little closer to telling us what exactly accounts for his belief that Socrates casts women as judges, and, specifically, why Alcibiades' quest for a genuine education revolves around the person of the queen, too. Similar to the women knowing how to despise Midias, the Persian queen recognizes true superiority, which is the principle of her devotion and obedience and if Alcibiades proves himself superior to the king she will give herself voluntarily to him. Forde concludes his comments on the speech as follows:

In the very act of showing Alcibiades the most pleasing possible political prospect, Socrates cements his subjection to a new authority, the Persian Queen who as judge imposes conditions for his success. (232)

Although Forde's emphasis on the dramatic role women play in Alcibiades' quest for a genuine education is an interesting reading of the speech and deserves praise for its novelty, he does not adequately analyze how the women in the speech perform as judges;

or why Socrates even cast women in such a role. We will revisit this issue in chapter six of the dissertation by further analyzing the role of women in the speech.

Lutz's commentary (1998, 1-46 and 111-149) on *Alcibiades Major* is a part of a larger project motivated by the question of whether or not there is room in liberal democracy for virtue. This fascinating question is approached by Lutz with the assumption, made explicit by Friedlander, that the dialogue's educative value is inseparable from the dramatic presentation of the two participants, Socrates and Alcibiades. In other words, Lutz takes it for granted that the dialogue's form and content are not mutually exclusive.

Lutz's project is fascinating precisely because it envisions broad applications for the type of Socratic education found in *Alcibiades Major* that may concern modern times. Before we turn to his specific treatment of the dialogue and the educational issues found therein, it will be helpful to list possible uses a Socratic education may have for contemporaries according to Lutz<sup>15</sup> (11):

- 1) It may counter the inclination of democratic thinkers to dwell on the useful at the expense of contemplating the noble;
- 2) It may counter the democratic tendency to focus on mass movements and the sweep of history at the expense of exceptional and influential actors;
- 3) It may moderate democracy's fascination with the titillating and sensational rather than the charming;

and

- 4) It may foster an appreciation for authentic human types as opposed to democracy's embrace of exaggerated, artificial and abstract characters.

Lutz conceives the acceptance of the Socratic sentiments expressed in the list to be the first steps towards promoting a 'classical counter-culture' (11) that would challenge, for

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<sup>15</sup> Lutz is endorsing, which he acknowledges, Tocqueville's thoughts on the importance of the ancients. See Tocqueville 1969, 472-474, 487, 488-489, 525.

example, ideological mass movements such as multiculturalism. The Socratic challenge would not be in the form of invective, seeking to discredit all things modern. It would promote discourse, according to Lutz, about the role virtue should play in society:

By reading “multicultural” authors with an eye to what they imply about justice and the rest of virtue, the Socratics would try to articulate their political claims. In the course of elucidating these claims, they would hope to provoke the writers of this literature... In the best case, this would induce writers to compete with one another to guide the reading public. (13)

Here we see the unique and practical perspective of Lutz’s project, which is brought to bear on his reading of several passages in *Alcibiades Major*. That *Alcibiades Major* plays a significant role in Socratic education as a whole, and contains educational correctives that are applicable to modernity, is affirmed by ‘Socrates’ knowledge of erotic matters’ (9) portrayed in the dialogue. For example, upon hearing how deficient he is compared to the Spartan and Persian Kings, Alcibiades, Lutz argues, under Socrates’ prodding finally feels erotic (119). Prior to the Spartan and Persian Speech Alcibiades was complacent with himself, having thought that his nature was sufficiently noble and good. Once his confidence is shaken there arises within him a ‘passionate desire to learn how to be noble and good’ (119). Thus, Lutz draws two important effects from the speech on Alcibiades’ quest for a genuine education:

Firstly, it finally confirms... that erotic love depends on the *belief* that we lack something we need to be noble and good. Alcibiades loves what he believes he needs but lacks. Secondly, this speech marks the beginning of Alcibiades’ education to virtue. By awakening him to his ignorance and need, he begins to desire to learn what is truly noble and good. (119)

The applicability of Alcibiades’ awakening for contemporaries lies in awakening the love of the noble in modern man through a serious study of Socratic teachings contained in the

dialogues. Or, if this sounds too removed, Lutz suggests that the awakening may be kindled by exploring the classical heritage of modern modes of thought (13).<sup>16</sup>

There is one other idea expressed in the concluding remarks of Lutz's commentary that seeks to make the teachings found in *Alcibiades Major* applicable to modernity. The idea is an extension of the previous discussion dealing with Alcibiades' awakening. The closing thoughts of *Alcibiades Major* contain the arresting view that the eye can see itself only through reflection, so the mind best knows itself through the reflection of its thoughts in another mind. Similarly, the soul is unable to see itself by itself, but must look into the soul of another and especially into the place in the soul that knows (133aff.). Socrates shares this image with Alcibiades, of course, with the intention of exerting great influence over him because Alcibiades' political goals are said to be unattainable without cultivating the most noble part of himself, which Socrates reflects. Thus, Alcibiades must attach himself to Socrates if he wants a genuine education. The lesson that Lutz draws from this concluding imagery for modernity is that the most compelling works produced by the best minds of any tradition is worth serious study. Traditions such as Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, and Judaism all contain lessons and thoughts capable of appealing to the best part of ourselves if approached sympathetically and honestly (13). This would also apply to great writing, too. Great writing, according to Lutz, whether it is Western or non-Western, necessarily raises the most fundamental political and social questions, which eventually lead around to issues having to do with virtue and, at least in the West, its place within liberal democracy.

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<sup>16</sup> The operating assumption Lutz seems to make in advocating a Socratic education, at least in this part of his interpretation of the Spartan and Persian speech, is that modern man would go about fulfilling his lack in the appropriate fashion once he is shown it exists. This assumption is not obvious at all.

### III. Plan of the dissertation: Other Dramatic Features and Educative Issues Gleaned from a Close Reading of *Alcibiades Major*

We have surveyed what prominent commentators have said about *Alcibiades Major* since its debut in antiquity (c. 350 BCE ) up to the present. Each commentator had something to say about the dialogue's educative value, but it was not until Friedlander's approach to *Alcibiades Major* were we made aware of how the dramatic features (e.g., irony) of the dialogue are part and parcel of its educative value. We can not have one without the other. Lutz's reading of *Alcibiades Major* takes what Friedlander has taught us about the significance of dramatic features in the dialogue for the purpose of having Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades embody lessons about virtue for liberal democracy. Lutz sees broad applications for the educative issues entertained in *Alcibiades Major*. In *Socratic Encounters: Plato's Alcibiades* we continue the tradition of reading *Alcibiades Major* as a serious work that raises serious questions that are relevant today.

Although we are confident the dissertation will contribute to the literature on *Alcibiades Major*, we are not claiming that the chapters that comprise the dissertation are definitive readings of the topics considered. We are claiming the weaker proposition that each chapter is highly instructive because they were framed by the question concerning Plato's intentions in writing the dialogue. The chapters of the dissertation are outlined as follows:

Chapter Two, 'Listening in Plato's *Alcibiades Major* and Plutarch,' proposes that in the Graeco-Roman world rhetoric and public speaking was highly valued in higher education; listening as an art became a worthy academic pursuit. As a result, a tradition of 'how to listen' literature arose that sought to instruct about moral issues youths who were entering manhood. In particular, such writers as Pliny, Seneca and Plutarch crafted short treatises on the proper ways to listen. The animating idea of the various treatises is that faulty listening skills account for the main source of corruption in the young.

In the chapter we engage the ‘how to listen’ tradition by employing conceptual categories taken from Plutarch’s short treatise *On Listening* and applying them to *Alcibiades Major*. With a little detective work, we discovered that there are dispositional reasons why Alcibiades failed to listen appropriately to the moderating forces of the Socratic conversation. Alcibiades’ failure to listen sets the stage for his notorious public enterprises. The dispositions that seriously hampered Alcibiades’ ability to listen and benefit from the Socratic conversation are envy, excessive admiration, and the inability to listen *actively* when engaged in conversation. We explore each of these dispositions from Socrates’ initial encounter with the ambitious youth to Alcibiades’ reaction to the Spartan and Persian speech to the conclusion of the dialogue in which we see a broken, submissive Alcibiades eager to listen and eager for a genuine education.

Chapter Three, ‘*Alcibiades Major* and the *Apology*,’ continues the broad orientation the dissertation takes in interpreting *Alcibiades Major* by arguing that because the principal idea found in *Alcibiades Major* is also found in the *Apology*, each dialogue is a natural complement to the other. The leading theme in both dialogues is the importance of establishing priorities in one’s life. Our argument revolves around the concept of eudaemonism, and how by first reading the *Apology* as a synoptic view of Socrates’ orientation, and then reading *Alcibiades Major* as a specific illustration of Socrates’ cross-examination, we began to see that Socrates is arguing for a radical perspective regarding one’s priorities: our lives should be directed at some ultimate end with other ends subordinate to it. Coupling the two dialogues in such away has not been attempted by others who have commented on *Alcibiades Major*. We claim in the chapter that one can appreciate better Socrates’ intellectual and dramatic depth in *Alcibiades Major* after having witnessed his approach to the Athenians *en masse* in the *Apology*. In addition to the discussion of priorities, towards the end of the chapter we suggest other leading ideas found in the *Apology* and *Alcibiades Major* that might be worthy of attention.

Chapter Four, ‘Socratic Traditionalism’, also takes as its theme priorities and their proper ordering, but from the perspective of the craftsman putting his skills to good use. The focus of our discussion is Plato’s *Alcibiades Minor*<sup>17</sup> and a type of traditionalism found in the characterization of knowledge as knowledge of utility in the dialogue. By characterizing knowledge in such a way, we argue that Socrates is endorsing a form of traditionalism that is referred to by the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott in his essay ‘Political Education’ as traditions of behavior. Here again we found it useful to employ conceptual categories taken from another intellectual tradition. In particular, Oakeshott’s general critique of rationalism in politics is a part of contemporary conservative thought that seeks to ground proper human doing not in ‘timeless, ephemeral principles,’ but in particular activities that are recognized as such due to their traditional modes of conduct. These traditions of behavior, we point out, make up a craft and determine whether a craft person puts his skills to good use, the precise subject Socrates is concerned with in *Alcibiades Minor*. In addition to Oakeshott, we analyze three of Pindar’s odes as illustrations of traditions of behavior that constitute an athlete’s craft. Often the athlete’s excellence is due to his command of a type of knowledge based in utility.

Chapter Five, ‘Instances of Decision Theory in Plato’s *Alcibiades Major* and *Minor*, and Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*’, discusses Socrates’ use of hypothetical choices as early versions of what was to become in the in the twentieth century the discipline of decision theory founded by F.P. Ramsey. Socrates’ use of hypothetical choices and thought experiments in the dialogues is a way of reassuring himself of an interlocutor’s philosophical potential. We found that there are three distinctive categories under which

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<sup>17</sup> We do not find it necessary to justify our inclusion of *Alcibiades Minor* within the dissertation or rehearse what commentators have said about it. The majority of our concern in the dissertation is with *Alcibiades Major* for the simple reason that more has been written on it, but where there is overlap in themes between the two dialogues, as it is in the case of chapter five, we discuss it. Chapter four is solely devoted to *Alcibiades Minor*. For a vigorous defense of *Alcibiades Minor*’s authenticity see Grote 1864, 331-363; no.4 on Pangle and no.12 on Bruell.

these choices and experiments are offered: (1) The Call of Ambition; (2) The Limits of Ambition; and (3) The Transparency of desire. Under the category The Call of Ambition the hypothetical choices offered to the interlocutor is concerned with establishing as fact from prior observation that an interlocutor is worthy of being befriended by Socrates due to the interlocutor's ambition. The choices offered under the category The Limits of Ambition are designed to assesses the length to which an interlocutor is willing to go to fulfill his desire(s) so Socrates can establish limits around which the subject-content of the conversation revolves. To assess just how far Alcibiades is willing to go to attain his goal of being a great Athenian leader, we employ F.P. Ramsey's concept, "Mathematical Expectation," which is taken from his essay 'Truth and Possibility.' "Mathematical Expectation" operates on the assumption that it is not enough to measure probability, we must also measure our belief to 'apportion our belief to the probability.' That is, it determines how strongly or to what degree a person holds a particular belief. So if a person's belief in X lacks enough doubts to cancel the belief out, the probability of his acting on this belief is higher than if his belief in X was plagued by a greater number of doubts.

In Chapter Six, 'Women, Moral Insight and Marriage,' we take up several different themes raised in *Alcibiades Major* with the intent of showing that Plato's comprehensive perspective may prove useful in shedding light on a number of contemporary issues. For example, we argue for the assumption we find Plato making in placing women in such a prominent role in *Alcibiades Major*'s Spartan and Persian speech: women provide moral insight regarding male goals and achievement. Our argument (1) lays out what precisely the women of the speech say about Alcibiades' challenge to their men; (2) surveys and critiques what prominent commentators, in particular Steven Forde, have said about the prominent role women play in the speech; and (3) advances a reading of the speech that unifies the sentiments expressed by each of the women. Number three goes beyond the dialogue proper, but only to show the

relevance of Plato's assumption for contemporary relations between men and women. Specifically, we discuss the prominent role played by women in the Spartan and Persian Speech in relation to the role women should play in contemporary society as envisioned by the feminist scholar Carol Gilligan. What we find is that for Plato and Gilligan women play a profound role when it comes to male achievement, but it is in the causal factor that accounts for the role played by women where Plato and Gilligan part company. The chapter argues for the causal factor Plato endorses in the dialogue.

Chapter Seven, 'After thoughts,' concludes the dissertation. In this chapter we discuss briefly some of the implications of the ideas expressed in *Alcibiades Major*.

Only by reading *Alcibiades Major* with this type of broad orientation can we hope the dissertation contributes something extra to ancient philosophy while, at the same time, showing the enduring relevance of the Platonic dialogues.

## Chapter two: Listening in Plato's *Alcibiades Major* and Plutarch

His [Socrates'] words overcame him so much, as to draw tears from his eyes, and to disturb his very soul. Yet sometimes he would abandon himself to flatterers, when they proposed to him varieties of pleasure, and would desert Socrates; who, then, would pursue him, as if he had been a fugitive slave.... Cleanthes the philosopher, speaking of one to whom he was attached, says his only hold on him was by his ears....

(*Plutarch's Lives* Volume I, p. 262)

### Introduction

Plutarch's characterization of the young Alcibiades makes explicit a theme that is found throughout the writings that form the Alcibiades tradition.<sup>18</sup> It was Alcibiades' inability to listen (*acuín*) appropriately to the moderating forces of the Socratic conversation that led to his notorious public enterprises.<sup>19</sup> That is, Alcibiades did not listen to Socrates in the sense of obeying him or following his advice or being guided by his conversation. Listening as an important pedagogical stance necessary for human flourishing has not, however, received the scholarly attention it deserves.

Although contemporary discussions of listening are not so common, the Graeco-Roman world (c. first century B.C. through the second century A.D.) discussed it quite earnestly in the form of short treatises. Some writers dealing with this theme include: Pliny, Epictetus, Seneca, and Plutarch. Plutarch's short treatise *On Listening* (*Peri Tou Acuín*) is particularly compelling because its main argument is that there are dispositional reasons why young listeners may not benefit from what they hear.<sup>20</sup> This chapter focuses

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<sup>18</sup> Gribble 1999, 214-215 points out that there are two genres in the Alcibiades tradition. The *first* tradition, typified in the writings of Thucydides and Demosthenes, focuses primarily on Alcibiades' bios or 'way of life' and how it influenced his civic attitude. The *second* tradition, the Socratics, focuses primarily on Alcibiades as a moral agent shaped by his own choices as a young man. Plato, the most notable figure of the Socratics, not only provides us with a defense for the charge against Socrates of corrupting the youth, he explores the relationship between philosophy and political life.

<sup>19</sup> On Alcibiades' behavior during the Peloponnesian War see Thucydides' *Peloponnesian War* 6.27-29 and *Plutarch's Lives on Alcibiades* Volume I.

<sup>20</sup> See *NE* I.3 1095ff. on the young listener's inability to listen properly to lectures on political science because he is inexperienced in the opinions political action is based upon; and because the young listener's tendency is to follow his passions as opposed to reasoned discourse. When I refer to dispositions I am

on Plutarch's treatise and Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades Major* because Plutarch explains well the practical significance of listening as a powerful force for moral edification, and he also provides us with the insight that *how* one listens can be decisive in *what* is heard, which may explain why the Socratic conversation did not have a lasting effect on Alcibiades, as his public career attests.

Plutarch's treatise is addressed to the teenager Nicander whose entry into manhood is officially marked by the wearing of the *toga virilis* or adult dress. Plutarch's concern is that the boy not forget that manhood is as much concerned with self-imposed discipline as childhood was concerned with listening to parents. Plutarch's treatise is divided into two parts. The first part discusses briefly the significance of listening in relation to the sense of hearing, and surveys three dispositions he considers to be the main impediments to benefiting from what is heard. The dispositions are envy, excessive admiration, and non-active listening. It is the awareness, or non-awareness, of these dispositions on the part of the listener that proves to be as vital to moral education as listening is to speaking. The second half of the treatise discusses how these three dispositions lead to listening improperly. It is the second half of Plutarch's treatise, the half on which I concentrate, that gives an impressive account of Alcibiades' failure to listen. In accord with Plutarch's account, I will argue that Socrates' approach to Alcibiades in Plato's dialogue suggests that the young Alcibiades' disposition is characterized by envy, excessive admiration, and the inability to listen actively when engaged in conversation. Consequently, the resourceful Socrates is forced to work with recognition of the limitations of his interlocutor.

Plutarch begins his treatise by telling Nicander that it was Theophrastus who thought hearing was the most emotional of the senses because, unlike the degree of distraction visible, tasteable, or touchable objects cause, loud noises, like bad advice, resound in the mind at the expense of wholesome sounds (Cf. *Crito* 54d-e). The importance

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referring to *hexis prohairetike*. See *NE* ii 1103a15-1103b on the forming of dispositions through choice and actions.

of hearing, be it the most emotional of the senses or not, Plutarch tells us, is that hearing is less emotional than it is rational. Vice can affect the mind by entering the body in a number of ways, but virtue can only affect the mind through the ears, particularly the ears of the young (38a), if there has not been corruption due to flattery or negative remarks. Plutarch also mentions Xenocrates' suggestion that it is less crucial for boxers to wear ear protectors to protect against punches, than for children to wear ear protectors to protect their characters against the corruption of words. Plutarch's position is somewhat novel perhaps because we might suppose sight the most impressionable of the senses when it comes to moral benefit and harm. Leontius' struggle not to look at the corpses in the *Republic* iv might typify this view. Perhaps Plutarch's position is not novel after all, however, if we take into consideration that Hellenistic and Roman education was primarily oral (Marrou 1956, 197-286).

Plutarch is attempting to arouse in Nicander, by mentioning Theophrastus and Xenocrates, an awareness of the significance of listening that may compel him to respond attentively to his education. The philosophical flourishing of Nicander is not only a reflection of his moral capacity to listen appropriately, but a reflection on the moral disposition of Nicander's parents. We know that Plutarch intends for Nicander's parents to be implicated in his moral development because we are told that Nicander's formative years were spent in a home that took philosophy seriously. Although the treatise does not tell us anything specific about the nature of Nicander's philosophical home, a home which formed a particular moral disposition in him, Plutarch still finds it necessary to warn Nicander that hearing is a powerful source for corruption because of its manipulation of the emotions. Likewise, hearing is a powerful source of moral education due to its reception of rational arguments which regulate and discipline pleasure.

Plutarch makes it clear that moral dispositions affect the receptivity to what is heard because hearing is necessarily both a passive and an active power. The listener is cable of listening appropriately only to the extent that he has been habituated to be

actively affected in a certain way. Aristotle's discussion of potentiality in Book 9 of the *Metaphysics* and potentialities in relation to being affected in chapter 8 of the *Categories* complements Plutarch's argument. From Aristotle we learn that there are certain characteristics that are passive potentialities residing within an entity's nature that are essential to the entity's being. For example, a certain passive power belongs to oil to be burnable, in addition to having the passive potential to be acted upon in a certain way (1046a19 ff.). Aristotle's use of oil to illustrate an entity's active and passive power is instructive, but his discussion in the *Categories* of potentialities in relation to an entity being affected leaves room for the active and passive power of an entity to be influenced by habituation. Aristotle informs us that perceptual capacities (e.g., hearing) and the faculties of reason have the potential to be affected in certain ways. Depending on the way perceptual faculties have been habituated, they can either be open to certain affections or closed; they can either have or shun certain emotions (Kosman 1980, 106-107). When Plutarch discusses with Nicander the effect envy, excessive admiration, and non-active listening has, as dispositions, on what the listener hears, he is referring to the whole person: the emotional and intellectual effect, and their discriminating ability to be either receptive or resistant to what is heard.<sup>21</sup> Plutarch first discusses the role of envy as it relates to hearing.

### **Envy (*phthonus*)<sup>22</sup>**

“Now the presence of envy, attended by malice and hostility, is not a good thing for any undertaking, but it stands in the way of all that is honorable...:”  
*(phthonus toenynt metha bascanias cai dysmenias oydeni mhen ergo paron agathon, alla pasin empodius toes caloes, 39d)*. The envious person, Plutarch tells us, becomes annoyed with the equipment or non-moral goods of others. That is, he becomes annoyed

<sup>21</sup> See Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 1103a26-b25 and Aristotle's theory of passive powers in Book 9 of the *Metaphysics*.

<sup>22</sup> See Aristotle's *Rhetoric* ii, 10.

by those he considers his equals because of their beauty, status within the community, wealth, and good fortune. This envious disposition carried over into a context in which it must listen, “scatters the mind” which impedes the listener from assimilating the content of what is being said. Here Plutarch engages in what we can refer to as psychological detective work. If we could peer into the mind of the envious listener, Plutarch postulates, we would see that he is preoccupied with the following three things: himself, mistakes made by the speaker, and third person or audience receptiveness.

The mind of the envious listener is simultaneously comparing its state with the speaker’s mind, trying determine which is better. To understand Plutarch’s point we need only imagine the envious listener listening to a mathematician or philosopher demonstrating a complex proof. Such a proof would call for such qualities as knowledge, a lucid memory, sensitivity in making subtle distinctions and patience. The envious listener is not interested so much in the demonstration of the proof and the beneficial effects from having heard it as he is in whether or not his mind is capable of displaying the same qualities. Next we see the envious listener focusing excessively on the mistakes made by the speaker. Remaining with our example of the mathematician or philosopher demonstrating a proof, the envious listener delights in the forgetfulness, hasty generalizations and impatience of the speaker. When the speaker misses the mark, makes a mistake in his proof, Plutarch adds, the envious listener does not put himself in the position of remedying the deficiency by contributing positively to the topic in some novel way, he tallies the mistakes, as if keeping score, in order to detract further from what is heard. The envious listener is concerned with third person reactions or audience receptiveness insofar as it may become aware of the speaker’s shortcomings. He voices disagreements by dwelling on the comments made by the speaker’s detractors, and if this is effective in belittling the speaker, the envious listener insists that the proof at hand has been demonstrated better and more capably by other mathematicians or philosophers.

At bottom, Plutarch explains, the envious listener is motivated by an overriding desire for standing and recognition.

**Admiration** (*thaumazin*)

“Admiration is the opposite to contempt, and it is, of course, a sign of more reasonable and equable nature; all the same, it too needs quite a lot of caution, and perhaps even more” (40f).

Admiration as a moral disposition and its effect on how one listens and what is heard is the opposite of envy. Envy disregards content for superficialities, whereas admiration lacks a critical sense due to its eagerness and openness to assimilate what is said. Admiration signifies a character that poorly distinguishes between that which is precious and that which is pernicious in speech. Plutarch suggests that an admiring listener needs to be vigilant about philosophical argumentation and what it is conveying. Plutarch is describing the prudence that should inform all intelligent listening. Simply to be excited about what a speaker is saying is not enough. It is possible to curb the corrupting influence of an uncritical admiration. Plutarch’s practical suggestion is that upon the completion of hearing a speech or at the conclusion of a conversation we must ask ourselves whether we have been rewarded by the speech or conversation: “Am I now more confused after having talked with him?” “Did the speech provide me with moral insight?” Plutarch’s practical suggestion is eudaemonistic because it asks the admiring listener to place what he has heard within the larger context of what constitutes a happy life, and, in turn, to assess whether or not what was heard enhances or subtracts from a virtuous life (*see* Vlastos, 1991, 200-232 on eudaemonism).

**Non-Active** (*cataeurythmus*) **Listening and Active** (*erythmus*) **Listening**

Plutarch’s characterization of non-active and active listening pertains mainly to listening to speeches or lectures. Nonetheless, Plutarch’s outline of the responsibility of

the listener vis-à-vis the speaker is instructive for the intimacy of conversation between two or more interlocutors.

Plutarch warns that people who non-actively listen take it for granted that the listener has no role to play while listening, whereas the speaker is presumed to have his subject-matter in order and so nothing further is needed on the part of the listener except to listen. This way of construing the situation could not be further from what actually takes place between the speaker and the listener. Plutarch argues that both the listener and the speaker have responsibilities that make for a productive conversation. Specifically, a concern for moral responsibility towards self-improvement should characterize the relationship between the one speaking and the one hearing. The responsible listener and the speaker must see themselves as composing a “harmonious rhythm” (45e-f). What Plutarch has in mind is the appropriate verbal and non-verbal communication that transpires when two or more people interact, and how what transpires incites each person, the speaker and the listener, to speak and listen as if they were taking part effortlessly in a very delicate balancing act. One of the more practical examples of harmonious rhythm Plutarch discusses is for the listener to have good manners and not to praise the speaker immoderately.

Plutarch also tells us that the speaker must be prepared to present his information in an orderly, engaged manner. But more importantly, it is the active listener who complements the speaker’s preparedness by further reflecting on what has been said. Not to mimic, parrot style, what has been said as if one were a recorder intending to play back verbatim what the speaker said at some future time, but actively add to what has been said for the purpose of aiding “original thinking”<sup>23</sup> and for the benefit of one’s own moral

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<sup>23</sup> Hume 1987, 253 aptly describes, many centuries later, what Plutarch seems to have in mind: “The great part of mankind may be divided into two classes; that of *shallow* thinkers, who fall short of the truth; and that of *abstruse* thinkers who go beyond it. The latter class are by far the most rare: and I may add, by far the most useful and valuable. They suggest hints, at least, and start difficulties, which they want, perhaps, skill to pursue; but which may produce fine discoveries, when handled by men who have a more just way of thinking.”

excellence. Listening must awaken the native abilities of the listener, to do otherwise, Plutarch tells us, is to be “sophistic and curious”<sup>24</sup> (48dff.).

Another aspect of active listening is to view criticism as a necessary step towards self-improvement. It is only through criticism, Plutarch believes, that youthful complacency can be minimized. We must pity the youthful listeners who “treat a rebuke by a philosopher with nonchalance or indifference, and laugh at reproof and praise their reprovers” (46c-d) because it is indicative of bad education and breeding. The opposite tendency of resistance towards criticism is the tendency towards sensitivity when criticized. Sensitivity may suggest a receptive nature on the part of the youthful listener, but often times it is this very sensitivity that accounts for the “lack of discipline and manliness” (46e-f) which turns the listener towards “flatterers” and “professional speakers.” The underlying idea behind the issue of indifference and sensitivity towards criticism is that listening, like philosophy, causes pain. And just as we would look forward to bandaging after having surgery, Plutarch reminds us, after youthful pretensions have been deflated by listening to the stings of reason, one should not run away before one has tried the treatment prescribed by reason. Plutarch concludes his treatise *On Listening* by reminding us that proper listening is the means by which reason habituates the listener towards self-improvement and proper living.

### **Plato’s *Alcibiades Major***

As we have discussed, particular dispositions can determine *what* and *how* we hear, and it is in the dialogue *Alcibiades Major* that this is well illustrated. That is, the dialogue *Alcibiades Major* can be read in such a way as to show how envy, excessive admiration and non-active listening account for the failure of Alcibiades to listen to the Socratic conversation appropriately.

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<sup>24</sup> One might see a connection of active listening to “recollection” in Plato’s *Meno*. Meno is a poor interlocutor since he is not really active in the conversation. He does not much think but dodges. In contrast the slave is active and takes to heart what Socrates says.

Like Nicander in Plutarch's treatise, Alcibiades is coming of age, and his enormous ambition and potential is seen by Socrates as calling for concern. What compels Socrates to engage Alcibiades in conversation is that Socrates recognizes the outstanding nature (*phusis*) that Alcibiades has is conducive to philosophy,<sup>25</sup> but that Alcibiades is profoundly ignorant about the means by which he can fulfill his desire to be a great political leader. Ambitious figures such as Alcibiades are in need of self-analysis, because their overwhelming talent and insatiable desires can either be utilized constructively or destructively. Socrates' task in the *Alcibiades Major* is essentially protreptic. It is through the Socratic conversation that Alcibiades' desire to rule Europe and Asia will be re-directed towards desiring to rule himself first by cultivating that part of his soul where reason rules and is most divine.

### **Envy and Alcibiades**

In the opening pages of the dialogue, Socrates comes across in a strange manner (*see* 103a-105a). He explains to Alcibiades that he, in fact, is Alcibiades' first and true lover. Socrates explains that ever since Alcibiades was a little boy he has observed him because he was unable to talk to him, until now, due to his daimonic voice. Socrates has observed many things over the years regarding Alcibiades, including the education he has received. In addition to taking notice of Alcibiades' education, Socrates has correctly surmised that Alcibiades' ambition is motivated by envy. Socrates' insight is shown initially in a rather abrupt fashion when Socrates claims that Alcibiades feels entitled to be honored more than Pericles and anyone else, past or present. As the dialogue unfolds and Alcibiades is made aware of the work required of him, we see that it becomes ambition in the service of envy that characterizes Alcibiades' desire to be a great political ruler. To understand better Alcibiades' envy we need only think of an individual with

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<sup>25</sup> It is Diotima's praise of eros in the *Symposium* (209b-e4) that illustrates best Socrates' attraction to Alcibiades.

such large desires for personal and public distinction that it becomes almost painful to witness other's accomplishments without that individual feeling a personal sense of loss. Alcibiades is such an individual. Alcibiades' beauty, wealth and family connections can not satiate his large political desires, or the envy he suffers from, but is not yet fully aware of. In no uncertain terms, but quite subtly, Socrates piques Alcibiades' wonder at the scope of his envy by imputing to Alcibiades a profound state of discontent. Socrates' diagnostic ability is clearly on display in the following remarks spoken to the young Alcibiades:

Suppose one of the gods asked you, 'Alcibiades, would you rather live with what you now have, or would you rather die on the spot if you weren't permitted to acquire anything greater'? I think you'd choose to die. What then is your real ambition in life? I'll tell you. You think that as soon as you present yourself before the Athenian people—as indeed you expect to in a very few days—by presenting yourself you'll show them that you deserve to be honored more than Pericles or anyone else who ever was. Having shown that, you'll be the most influential man in the city, and if you're the greatest here, you'll be the greatest in the rest of Greece, and not only in Greece, but also among the foreigners who live on the same continent as we do. (105a-b)

Alcibiades does not deny Socrates' imputation, his desires are now transparent, so the dialogue proceeds as if Alcibiades freely confessed his discontent. How do we know Alcibiades is envious? Aristotle's account of envy in *Rhetoric* ii explains that to be envious is to be discontent because one has been aroused by another's better fortune. Alcibiades is not yet fully conscious of another's better fortune, this will be thematized for him in the Spartan and Persian tale, but he is aware of his uneasiness and enormous ambition. We want to claim that Alcibiades is partially conscious of another's better fortune because it takes us quite a distance in making sense of Socrates' claim, and

Alcibiades' implied agreement, that Alcibiades thinks he deserves to be honored more than Pericles and anyone who ever was.

Who is in a better position than Alcibiades to judge whether or not Pericles should be honored less. Pericles, the influential politician and general of the years between the Persian and Peloponnesian Wars, assumed guardianship of Alcibiades and his brother Clinias after their father died in the battle of Coronea (see Jaeger 1998, 406-411 and Plutarch 1992, vol.1, 201-234 on the life of *Pericles*). Alcibiades at this young age is so sure of himself he believes he will obscure the other generals and statesmen once he concerns himself with public affairs, and will eventually outdo Pericles' reputation and authority. But Alcibiades has not said these things *himself*; he has not said he is Pericles' equal. These various statements have only been implied because Alcibiades has not yet been disabused of the notion, a notion Socrates will forthrightly do away with (at 118c-119c), that Pericles was unable to teach him what the just and admirable and the good and advantageous are. Subsequently, Alcibiades is partially aware of Pericles' better fortune, but in due course his uneasiness and ambition will be shown to be based on envy. Pericles and his reputation will be the first obstacle to overcome in order for Alcibiades to achieve greatness.

Having disclosed Alcibiades' ambitions, Socrates asserts that they are impossible to achieve without his help (105d). The god would not permit Socrates to speak with Alcibiades until all the young man's great hopes were developed so that he would be willing to listen to Socrates since in no other way can he get the power he seeks. Socrates' aim is to get the type of power over Alcibiades that Alcibiades desires to get over the Athenians (105e). Thus the young man who supposed himself in need of no one is told that he desperately needs Socrates in order to achieve any of his ambitions. This shocks and intrigues Alcibiades. Unlike his other suitors that offered him small advantages, Socrates offers him the world. What Socrates has done is to set himself up as the object of Alcibiades' envy, but only to facilitate his more comprehensive aim, which

is to harness Alcibiades' envy, and attach it to a life that is worthy or the best type of life. That is, by providing Alcibiades with an ultimate end, Alcibiades' life will be identified and ruled by that end. The notion of eudaemonism underlies Socrates' continuous references to the gods (105e5; 124c-d). Someone as ambitious as Alcibiades has no need for anything above himself. In an intellectual and pragmatic sense the divine must become the ultimate object of envy for Alcibiades. Only in this way will Alcibiades, in striving to be god-like, continuously find the motivation to cultivate himself, especially while out of earshot of Socrates. Before this can happen, Socrates must further inflame Alcibiades' envy through the telling of the Spartan and Persian Tale.<sup>26</sup>

### **Admiration, Alcibiades and the Persian and Spartan Tale**

Alcibiades is brought to the point of acknowledging that he needs to care for himself, and that his thinking regarding local, Athenian politicians prevents him from doing so, because he thinks his natural abilities will be adequate. As we have argued, the disposition Socrates finds Alcibiades to have is envy. More accurately, ambition in the service of envy. It is Socrates' task to provide Alcibiades with an end to strive towards; to provide direction and content to his overwhelming ambition. As the dialogue unfolds, we see that self-knowledge is what Socrates is prescribing to Alcibiades. What started off as an Alcibiades filled with envy and ambition gradually gives way to an uncritical admiration for the picture Socrates draws of the Spartan and Persian Kings.

The tale of the Spartan and Persian Kings illustrates the relationship between political success and self-perfection. Socrates begins the tale by explaining to Alcibiades that his political ambitions can no longer be satisfied by simply outdoing the local

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<sup>26</sup> Commenting on the favorable attention the prisoners of Pylos gave to Nicias after the peace and restitution of the captives Plutarch says the following: "It was commonly said in Greece, that the war was begun by Pericles, and that Nicias made an end of it, and the peace was generally called the peace of Nicias. Alcibiades was extremely annoyed at this, and being full of envy, set himself to break the league." *Plutarch's Lives: Alcibiades*, 263, volume I. Plutarch's comments are consistent with our argument that Socrates exploits Alcibiades' envy in order to steer him toward philosophy.

Athenian politicians. In fact, if he really wants to attain what he has set out to do, which is to rule all of Greece and Europe, he must first become aware of, and then suitably assess, his true competitors with whom he must struggle ( $\alpha\gamma\omega\nu\alpha$ , 120a6). Socrates informs Alcibiades that his main competitors are the Spartan and Persian Kings. What makes these kings worthy of Alcibiades' attention is how they handle their women, their wealth, and their education. The Spartan Kings, Socrates says, are held in such high esteem that their wives "are guarded at public expense by the ephors, so that every precaution is taken to ensure that their kings are descended from the family of Heraclide alone" (121c). The Persian King is so supreme his queen does not need to be protected; fear (*phobu*, 121c3) prevents her from being unfaithful. When the Persian son and heir to the throne is born all of Asia celebrates; and the boy is brought up by royal tutors. Alcibiades' tutor was old and useless, Socrates reminds him, and hardly anyone noticed when he was born. Socrates concludes the tale by stressing the amount of wealth the Spartan and Persian Kings have. Spartan wealth greatly exceeds Athens', he tells Alcibiades, and their land in Messene is larger than all the estates in Athens. Persian wealth, on the other hand, is even larger than Sparta's. According to Socrates, a reliable source informed him that the Persian court is so large that each tract of land is "named for a part of the queen's wardrobe" (123, b-c).

Alcibiades' reaction to the tale is quite predictable; it is excessive. Alcibiades has been awed by Socrates' portrait of the kings. Alcibiades' excessive admiration of the tale is illustrated in the section directly preceding (124b1-126e1) the royal tale. The question at issue is what constitutes a healthy (*hygieias*) city. The intention of the royal tale, we must not forget, is to get Alcibiades to see who his real competition is in order to deflate his pretensions of knowledge so he can care for himself. Instead, Alcibiades admires the grandiose vision of the Spartan and Persian Kings so much that he answers Socrates' question by equating like-mindedness (*homonoia*) of the citizens of the city to "the friendship (*philian*) and agreement (*homonoean*) you find when a mother and father agree

with a son they love, and when a brother agrees with his brother, and a women agrees with her husband” (126e1-4). Socrates suggests that *homonoia* must be analogous to common knowledge found among practitioners of a particular craft or art, such as arithmetic.

The type of agreement Alcibiades prefers is subjective and unaccountable. Personal failings on the part of the brother, or a wife in relation to her husband, would not sever the agreement unless extreme circumstances prevailed. These types of relationships do not call for Alcibiades to master himself. The assumptions that Alcibiades seems to be making is that all will recognize his greatness without his having to lift a finger. Alcibiades is displaying a sense of entitlement, and Socrates recognizes this continuous subtle drift to which Alcibiades is prone. The type of agreement Socrates is looking for is the type of agreement that is intellectually based. The type of like-mindedness knowers of a particular art, such as mathematics, would have. Alcibiades’ conception of agreement precludes self-cultivation; he is claiming that emotional, familial-like agreements can be had despite a lack of an objective criterion by which we can separate the knowers from the non-knowers. This lack of intellectual agreement cannot have the necessary protreptic effect that Alcibiades needs because there is no common criterion Alcibiades feels compelled to aspire to. The practical implication of Alcibiades’ way of thinking is that he can neglect his soul. That is, the part of his soul that is wise and God-like.<sup>27</sup>

### **Non-Active Listening and Alcibiades**

Non-Active listening is the last disposition we must explore to determine how it played a part in the failure of Alcibiades to listen appropriately to the Socratic conversation. The main aspect of active listening that concerns our reading of the

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<sup>27</sup> This correlates well with the leading philosophical thought that all beings are to be understood in terms of the principle of being, i.e., that which has being fully and independently (see, e.g., Aristotle’s *Metaphysics* iv 1-2 and *NE* 1168b31-33: “just as the city or any other systematic whole is most properly identified with the most authoritative element in it, so is man”.)

*Alcibiades Major* is what Plutarch describes as both the listener and speaker sharing the responsibility of forming a “harmonious rhythm.” That is, aside from the speaker or questioner being prepared to impart and promote knowledge through speech—moral knowledge in the case of Alcibiades’ conversation with Socrates—the listener must respond to what is being said by showing what was said by the speaker has been understood intellectually and dispositionally. For a listener to understand intellectually and dispositionally the listener must be able to give an account of what is heard through effectively explaining it to others and by exhibiting it to others through his behavior. There needs to be a harmonizing of word (*logos*) and deed (*ergon*). It is only in this way that we know the listener has been affected, the dye has been cast. Does Alcibiades actively listen? Although in the course of the dialogue Alcibiades submits to Socratic questioning, and allegedly turns from his overwhelming desire for political rule to the care of his soul (128d-e), Alcibiades’ closing remarks illustrate that the Socratic conversation did not make a deep enough impression on him. Alcibiades did not actively listen, and so the dialogue ends on a rather unharmonious note with Socrates suggesting that the power of the city may prove to be his and Alcibiades’ downfall (135e). Why would Socrates make such a statement?

Socrates makes such a statement because Alcibiades fails to locate the proper starting point for the arduous task of self-cultivation. The following exchange reveals Alcibiades’ persistent confusion, despite having come this far in the Socratic conversation, and Socrates’ unwillingness to name that confusion for what it is, slavishness (*duleuin*):

S: Then do you know how to escape (*apopheuxa*) from your present state?

Let’s not call a handsome young man by that name.

A: I do.

S: How?

A: It’s up to you, Socrates.

S: That's not well said, Alcibiades.

A: Well, what should I say?

S: That it's up to God (*oti ean theus ethela*).

A: Then that's what I say. And furthermore I say this as well: we're probably going to change roles, Socrates. I'll be playing yours and you'll be playing mine, for from this day forward I will always attend on you, and you will have me as your constant companion.

S: Then my love for you, my excellent friend, will be just like a stork: after hatching a winged love for you, it will be cared for by it in return.

A: Yes, that's right. I'll start to cultivate (*epimelesthai*) justice in myself right now. (135c13-e4)

Alcibiades answering in such a way reveals his lack of understanding of the discussion he and Socrates have had in the dialogue. This lack of understanding on the part of Alcibiades is revealed by Socrates comparing his love for the youth to a stork. The commentator Nicholas Denyer points out in his commentary on *Alcibiades* that popular ornithology held that once storks taught their young how to fly their roles reversed, and the offspring cared for their parents. Likewise, Socrates has not only expressed his love for Alcibiades, he has produced in Alcibiades a counterlove for Socrates. In the *Phaedrus* 255c-e we get the following description of how the exchange of love between the lover and the beloved should unfold:

Think how a breeze or an echo bounces back from a smooth solid object to its source; that is how the stream of beauty goes back to the beautiful boy and sets him aflutter. ... So when the lover is near, the boy's pain is relieved just as the lover's is, and when they are apart he yearns as much as he is yearned for, because he has a mirror image of love in him—'backlove' [counterlove]—though he neither speaks nor thinks of it as love, but as friendship.

To Alcibiades' credit he knows his initial role as beloved has been reversed, but he fails to understand that the reversal supervened as a result of his conversation with Socrates about justice. The earnestness with which Alcibiades concludes his conversation with Socrates by claiming he will start to cultivate justice in himself right away belies non-active listening because for Alcibiades to have located the proper starting point for the arduous task of cultivating justice within himself he would have recognized it began in the beginning of his conversation with Socrates.

### **Conclusion**

Plutarch's short treatise *On Listening* is both practical and profound. Its practical suggestion is that a listener's dispositions can affect the receptivity toward what is heard. Among the young, Plutarch claims, the overriding dispositions that impede the moral benefit that is to be gained through conversation are envy, excessive admiration, and non-active listening— just the sorts of dispositions we have found Alcibiades to have in Plato's *Alcibiades Major*. *On Listening*'s more profound suggestion is that to care for ourselves there needs to be a perspective outside of ourselves to engage us in conversation— just the sort of approach Socrates takes towards Alcibiades. At least there must be this external challenge to our self so long as that self is not adequately developed. In fact, on a dramatic level, Socrates set out to redirect the provincial political ambition that Alcibiades harbors towards a concern for a genuine rule over his soul, but by the end of the dialogue Alcibiades' inability to listen actively blinds him to the realization that throughout the Socratic conversation he had been cultivating justice in his soul.

### Chapter Three: *Alcibiades Major* and the *Apology*

The ancients regarded *Alcibiades Major* as the best introduction to Platonic philosophy because it contains in germ all the leading ideas found in the other dialogues that constitute Plato's corpus.<sup>28</sup> One of the more fascinating aspects of *Alcibiades Major* is that we see over the course of the dialogue Alcibiades transform from an arrogant, self-sufficient youth who wants to be a great Athenian ruler to a humble youth who is willing to submit himself to Socrates for the sake of cultivating his soul, the 'true self'. The transformation of Alcibiades merits further analysis because in addition to the protreptic effect the Socratic conversation has on him, it illustrates in impressive detail<sup>29</sup> how Socrates operates and what means he employs to induce the protreptic effect. To speak of *Alcibiades Major* as providing important information about Socrates' philosophical approach may initially seem awkward since Plato's *Apology* might be the primary source of information pertaining to the historical Socrates. We will argue that because the principal idea found in *Alcibiades Major* is also found in the *Apology*, each dialogue is a natural complement to the other. By first reading the *Apology* as a synoptic view of Socrates' orientation, and then reading *Alcibiades Major* as a specific view of Socrates' cross-examination, we begin to see how these dialogues are complementary. The leading theme in both dialogues is establishing priorities in one's life. There are also other themes found in both dialogues that are worthy of attention.

Establishing priorities in life is central to understanding Socrates' conduct before the jury in the *Apology* and Socrates' approach to Alcibiades in *Alcibiades Major*.

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<sup>28</sup> See the commentaries of Olympiodorus (*Commentary on the first Alcibiades of Plato* 10.18-II.6), and Proclus (*Sur le premier Alcibiade de Platon* II.I-21) cited in Denyer. The Islamic philosopher Alfarabi comments, too, that all the Platonic questions are raised in *Alcibiades Major* (Alfarabi 1962, 53-54).

<sup>29</sup> Shorey 1933, 415 does not look favorably upon the details. Commenting on *Alcibiades Major* Shorey says the following:

...we have to assume...that he [Plato] thought it worthwhile to elaborate a tedious, if scholastically convenient, summary of a long series of ideas and points that are better and more interestingly expressed in other dialogues....

Socrates, in *Alcibiades Major*, confronts an interlocutor<sup>30</sup> that cares more about what he has (e.g., wealth, power, honors, etc.) than about what he is. Alcibiades is a soul in need of cultivation and his soul merits attention before all competing alternatives. The task of reorganizing the interlocutor's priorities is facilitated by Socratic testing, exhortation, and examination. Socrates' criticism of Alcibiades' priorities in *Alcibiades Major*, and the Athenians' priorities in the *Apology*, is informed by moral reflection that is *eudaemonistic*. Eudaemonism is the idea that our lives should be directed at some ultimate end (i.e., happiness) with other ends subordinate to it. Once what happiness is is determined what should be sought is what contributes to happiness. In these two dialogues Socrates does not advocate a facile criterion for the proper ordering of priorities, but instead advocates by word and deed the best way to live.

In the *Apology* there are two instances where Socrates addresses directly the issue of priorities. The first instance occurs after Socrates rejects his counterfactual reflection that entertains the possibility of acquittal on the condition he cease his investigations and stop practicing philosophy (29c6-29e4). The second instance occurs after the jury finds Socrates guilty (36b4-d). In both instances Socrates addresses broadly the issue of Athenian priorities, mainly by focusing on the priorities held by the citizenry as a whole. The discussion of priorities in *Alcibiades Major* will complement the broad discussion of priorities in the *Apology* because Alcibiades is specifically approached by Socrates with the intent of trying to reorder Alcibiades' priorities in order to assist him in the realization of his ambition.

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<sup>30</sup> Although Socrates defends his life, he does not wish merely to get off from the charges any way that he can. Were this his objective he should bring his children into court, cry, beg forgiveness, promise never to do such things again. Rather than conduct his defense this way, he tries to make his defense as much like the usual conversation as he can so that the Athenians will be confronted with Socrates as he is, and they will have to decide whether they find him as he is guilty or not guilty. The best way to defend his life, Socrates thinks, is to display that life in the courtroom. Hence this dialogue really is a dialogue. For a denial that the *Apology* is a dialogue see Myles Burnyeat's 'The Impiety of Socrates,' *Ancient Philosophy* 17 (1997), 1-12.

## Priorities

In the presence of the Athenian jury, Socrates underscores the ordering of priorities that inform his philosophical investigations and his general concern for the soul by presenting a counterfactual reflection. He entertains the possibility that the jury offers him an acquittal on the condition that he cease his investigations and stop practicing philosophy or die. If he were acquitted on those terms, Socrates imagines himself to say:

Gentlemen of the jury, I am grateful and I am your friend, but I will obey the god rather than you, as long as I draw breath and am able, I shall not cease to practice philosophy (*philosophon*), to exhort you and in my usual way to point out to any one of you whom I happen to meet: Good sir, you are an Athenian, a citizen of the greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power; are you not ashamed of your eagerness to possess as much wealth, reputation and honors as possible, while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom (*phroneseos*) or truth, or the best possible state of your soul? (29d-e4)

Socrates admonishes the Athenians to be ever vigilant in ordering all that they care about and to have the appropriate priorities in mind. What might this ordering of priorities look like? Consideration of a related passage at 29e-30b reveals Socrates' standpoint in challenging the citizens of Athens for neglecting the right order through placing greater value on their personal possessions than their souls and thus attaching little importance to the most important things (e.g., wisdom, truth and the soul), while cherishing inferior things (e.g., wealth, reputation and honors). Socrates endorses the following claim:

Wealth does not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively.

(*hoyk ek chrematon arete gignetae, allex arete chremata kae ta alla agatha toes anthropoes kae idia kae demosia*, 30a9-10)

We can interpret this passage in several ways. Either virtue makes wealth and other things good for humans collectively or privately; or virtue does not come from wealth but

that from virtue comes wealth and all other goods for man collectively and privately. The ambiguity may be intentional to allow for both interpretations, but each interpretation is anchored in an order that prioritizes three types of goods: goods of the soul; goods of the body; and external goods. Goods of the soul revolve around the mutually entailing ideas of knowledge and virtue; goods of the body include non-moral qualities such as health; and external goods include, among other non-moral goods, wealth and honors. Socrates believes in the greater value of the soul than of the body and its possessions. What Socrates suggests is that only the goods of the soul allow one to use the other goods well (We will say more about the soul's value when overseen by wisdom when the second instance of priorities is discussed). Even if external goods are most necessary, they are not the highest since the soul is what uses the others. For example, when we consider that it may be true that the virtuous person is rich, presumably it is because such a person knows how to make do or do the best with what he has due to the moderating influences of the soul. We are now in a better position to appreciate why Socrates admonishes the Athenians so single-mindedly as his counterfactual reflection attests. The very things that give Athens the reputation for 'both wisdom and power' blind it and make it 'sluggish' (30e4) with respect to the most important things (30d4). Athens is blinded by its bodily goods and its possessions. Thus, the right ordering of Athenian priorities becomes the concern of Socrates' examination and exhortation of his fellow citizens.

Following the jury's verdict of guilty, Socrates again addresses the issue of Athenian priorities, and what role he played as a private citizen in trying to convince others to concern themselves with the state of their soul as opposed to the body and its possessions. Socrates explains that his counter-assessment must be commensurate with a life that has not been lived quietly or concerned with what occupies the majority of Athenians: wealth, household affairs and political offices (36b-c). The life that Socrates has tried to live is a life that has been useful, both to himself and to others:

I did not follow that path that would have made me of no use (*ophelus*)

either to you or to myself, but I went to each of you privately and conferred upon him what I say is the greatest benefit (*eyergetin ten megisten*), by trying to persuade (*pithin*) him not to care (*epimelisthae*) for any of his belongings before caring that he himself should be as good and wise (*beltistus kae phronimotatus*) as possible, not to care for the city's possessions more than for the city itself (*aytes tes poleos*), and to care for other things in the same way. (36c-d)

Whereas Socrates admonishes the Athenians for their lack of priorities in ranking the three types of goods in his initial discussion, in the passage we are considering we find Socrates reflecting on the worthiness of a life that is dedicated to the state of the soul. What is it appropriate that someone like Socrates should suffer who, having the proper perspective towards conventional goods, has gone around persuading people to care for themselves before any of their things or for the things of the city before the city itself. Socrates is a friend of Athens and has tried to benefit it as much as possible by being useful. What might Socrates have in mind when he describes his conduct as being beneficial and useful? Socrates is expressing the idea that the virtuous soul, that is directed by wisdom, determines how we put bodily and external goods to practical use. Hence, virtue is useful and beneficial.<sup>31</sup>

In the *Meno* we see Socrates considering the practical aspect of virtue in his discussion with Meno. The following exchange between the two amplifies Socrates' assumptions in the *Apology* regarding the practical effect the privileging of the soul in the ordering of his priorities, and the soul's quest for virtue, had on his fellow Athenians and himself:

So virtue is something beneficial (*ophelimum*)?—That necessarily follows from what has been agreed.—Let us then examine what kinds of things benefit us, taking them up one by one: health (*hygieia*), we say, and strength (*ischys*), and

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<sup>31</sup> Xenophon's *Memorabilia* insists that Socrates' central characteristic is usefulness (esp. Xenophon's discussion of Socrates approach to friendship (2. 4-7). Cf. Aristotle, *Rhet.* 1.9.1366a 36-8.

beauty (*kallus*), and also wealth (*plutus*). We say that these things, and others of the same kind, benefit us, do we not?—We do.—Yet we say that these same things also sometimes harm (*blaptin*) one. Do you agree or not?—I do.—Look then, what directing (*egetae*) factor determines in each case whether these things benefit or harm us? Is it not the right (*ortha*) use of them that benefits us, and the wrong use that harms us?—Certainly.—Let us know look at the qualities of the soul. There is something you call moderation, and justice, courage, intelligence, memory, munificence, and all such things?—There is.— ... Therefore, in a word, all that the soul undertakes and endures, if directed (*egumenes*) by wisdom (*phroneseos*), ends in happiness (*eydaemonian*), but if directed by ignorance (*aphrosynes*), it ends in the opposite?—That is likely. (87e—88c)

Socrates benefited the Athenians because his conversations, exhibited through testing, exhorting and examining, sought to persuade others to prioritize their lives in such way that all that they did, from the quotidian to the heroic, would take into account the positive, directing power wisdom has on the soul. The passage being considered is significant because it amplifies Socrates' earlier statement in presenting his counterfactual reflection to the jury: '...while you do not care for nor give thought to wisdom...' (29e1-2); and it clarifies why Socrates proposes dining in the Prytaneum as a counter-penalty to Meletus' assessment of death.

For the Athenians to disregard and not give thought to wisdom, the directing factor, is to disregard the transformative, beneficial effect wisdom can have on the soul. It is only through wisdom that the soul can bring to fruition, by striving towards the appropriate ends through the appropriate means, the power Athens is reputed to excel in.<sup>32</sup> What Socrates' characterization of the transformative power of wisdom in the

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<sup>32</sup> Socrates says as much by voicing (32bff.) his objection while presiding in the Council to the Athenians wishing to try together the Ten Generals who had failed to collect the dead after the naval victory at Arginusae in 406. Socrates is defending the illegality of trying them altogether. Also he prudently thinks it foolish to kill your best generals in time of grave danger.

*Apology* (29d-e4) and the *Meno* suggests is that wisdom has a particular type of nature. The presence of it in one's soul entails happiness; but even the mere thought of it sets one on the path of distinguishing the soul from what the soul uses (i.e., the body and its possessions). Wisdom prioritizes the soul's goods (i.e., the body and its desires). The nature of wisdom also goes some way in explaining why Socrates would propose dining in the Prytaneum as a counter penalty.

The significance of Socrates' proposing such a penalty was that there was no regular penalty provided by the main charge brought against him, corruption of the youth (see Kitchel 1898, 30-36), so Meletus, the plaintiff, proposes death. Socrates, the defendant, is allowed to make a counter penalty, which he does in a rather dramatic fashion:

Nothing is more suitable, gentleman, than for such a man to be fed in the Prytaneum, much more suitable for him than for any one of you who has won a victory at Olympia with a pair or a team of horses. The Olympian victor makes you think yourself happy; I make you be happy. (36d3-37a)

Such a man is a man who has not lived a quiet life or has concerned himself with what occupies the majority of Athenians. When we recall that the Prytaneum was the town hall of Athens where, among other things, Olympian victors were celebrated upon their return home, we see Socrates' counter-penalty as commentary on justice as distribution according to worth or merit.<sup>33</sup> The true victors, like Socrates, have greatly benefited Athens by getting its citizens to adopt a perspective toward themselves that takes seriously the state of their souls. The soul directed by wisdom is the standard of all values which in turn creates justice, good laws and right priorities in the city, which brings happiness to all. The Olympian victor, on the other hand, makes the Athenian seem happy because in the victorious wrestler, boxer, runner or chariot-racer he thinks he

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<sup>33</sup> See the *OCD* 1996, 1268-1269 on the difference between the once-only invitation to dine (*xenia*, *deipnon*) in the Prytaneum and the highly honorific permanent maintenance (*sitesis*) to dine in the Prytaneum. Socrates is requesting *sitesis*.

is witnessing the ‘revelation of the victor’s divine arete’ (Jaeger 1965, 173; cf. Pindar’s Olympian Odes in Bowra 1969, 32, 69, 64, 106, 122). The athletic ideal becomes the standard of all values in the praise of the Olympic victor, but the ideal can only be appreciated properly once it is seen as being subordinate to the role of wisdom in upholding the welfare of the city.<sup>34</sup> Socrates’ concern that his fellow Athenians maintain the appropriate priorities in their lives and the city as a whole makes him worthy of free meals in the Prytaneum.

### ***Alcibiades Major and Priorities***

In the dialogue *Alcibiades Major*, Socrates’ orientation towards Alcibiades struggles with the priorities favored for the Athenians in the *Apology* since Alcibiades embodies big ambitions and ‘great qualities’, such as good-looks, wealth, and a noble pedigree, with limited concern for the state of his soul (104a3). The characterization of Alcibiades recalls Socrates’ admonishing of the Athenians for their lack of self examination and complacency in being the ‘greatest city with the greatest reputation for both wisdom and power’ (29d8-9). In both dialogues we see the interlocutor concerning himself with bodily and external goods as opposed to the cultivation of wisdom within the soul. The difference between the two dialogues, a difference which makes them complementary, is that in *Alcibiades Major* Socrates shows how the proper ordering of priorities plays out in a specific interlocutor with a specific ambition. We find again two instances in *Alcibiades Major* where Socrates addresses the issue of priorities. The first

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<sup>34</sup> Socrates is echoing an earlier concern expressed by Xenophanes regarding the conflict between the old aristocratic culture of sport and the new philosophical ideal of wisdom:

...he [the Olympic victors] does not deserve them [honors and gifts] as I do; for this wisdom of ours is better than the strength of men and horses! It is a mistaken custom: and there is no justice in preferring strength to wisdom. For even if a city has among its citizens a good boxer or a victor at wrestling or pentathlon, it is not any more in right order for all that; and a victory at Olympia gives little joy to the city, for it does not fill its store-rooms (frg. II trans by Jaeger; cf. Leshner’s translation of Xenophanes fragment II). Plato also thinks along the same lines by insisting that within his ideal state the guardians will be more deserving of honors and city-wide support compared to the Olympic victors: ‘...their victory is nobler and their public support more complete for the victory they have won is the salvation of the entire state’ (*Republic* 465d6-8).

occurs in the opening pages of the dialogue where Socrates introduces himself to Alcibiades after having observed him for a period of time (103a-c). Socrates' introduction is designed to pique Alcibiades' wonder in order that he answer Socrates' questions. The issue at hand is why has Alcibiades shunned his pursuers. To Alcibiades' satisfaction Socrates ventures to list the many qualities Alcibiades considers himself to excel at, starting with his body and its possessions and ending with his soul. Socrates eventually explains to Alcibiades that his ambition of becoming a great Athenian leader can be realized only with his help. How Socrates can help brings us to the first instance of Socrates' discussion of priorities in *Alcibiades Major*. In the closing pages of the dialogue Socrates resumes his discussion of Alcibiades' qualities, not merely by listing them as he did initially to pique Alcibiades' interest, but instead by listing them in the proper order in which they should be seen. This is done by getting Alcibiades to see that the user or the craftsman is different from what he uses (128a-131b-c). Thus, Alcibiades should appreciate that he is different from his good-looks, family connections and influential friends, and that his true self, the soul, is in need of wisdom.

Socrates introduces himself to Alcibiades after having observed him for an unspecified period of time. Other suitors had pursued Alcibiades but they soon gave up after having concluded there was not much they could offer him to win him over. Socrates is the sole hold out in the pursuit of Alcibiades. The tact Socrates employs to woo Alcibiades is to congratulate him by reviewing the qualities that made it so easy for Alcibiades dismiss the other would-be lovers:

You say you don't need anybody for anything, since your own qualities (*inae*) are so great (*megala*) there's nothing you lack; I'll list them, starting with your body (*somatus*) and ending with your soul (*psychen*). In the first place, you fancy yourself the tallest and best-looking man around—and it's quite plain to see you're not wrong about that. Next, you think that yours is the leading family in your city, which is the greatest city in Greece: on your father's side you have

plenty of aristocratic friends and relations (*kai entautha prus patrus te soe philus kai syngenis plistus inae kai aristus*) who would be of service to you if there was any need; and your mother's side your connections are no worse or no fewer. And you have Pericles son of Xanthippus, whom your father left as a guardian to you and your brother; you think he's a more powerful (*dynatae*) ally than all those people mentioned put together... (104a-b6)

The glaring omission of qualities pertaining to Alcibiades' soul in contrast to the glib description of both his bodily and external goods is significant. Might Alcibiades pride himself only on his body and what pertains to it? After all, Socrates says he will list the qualities that made Alcibiades attractive to his pursuers but hard to get. In the omission we see Socrates gradually bringing to the fore the issue of priorities in Alcibiades' under appreciation of the state of his soul.

The extent to which Alcibiades valued and excelled at the qualities that Socrates mentions is given more salience when we turn to Plutarch's Alcibiades. Plutarch compares Alcibiades' beauty to a plant because in each stage of his life, from infancy, youth and manhood, it blossomed, giving Alcibiades a grace and charm (Clough, 258). Alcibiades' speech was accented by a lisp which added grace and a persuasiveness to his rapid speech prompting Aristophanes and Archippus to take note of it in their literary works (259). From his youth on Alcibiades was distinguished by ambition and superiority. Such distinguishing characteristics is illustrated by the story of Alcibiades obediently obeying his masters when he began to study, except for his adamant refusal to play the flute because one had to disfigure the face in order to play it and one could not talk while playing. It was due to Alcibiades' opinion that it was unbecoming of a free man to subject himself to such sordid practices that flute playing ceased as a skill to be mastered as a part of a liberal education (259-260). What Plutarch tells us about Alcibiades' aristocratic familial origins and prominent friends underscores another facet of what Alcibiades excelled at. On his father's side Alcibiades was said to have

descended from Eurysaces, the son of Ajax. On his mother's side Alcibiades was said to have descended from Alcmaeonidae, a noble Athenian family prominent in politics whose first member was archon Megacles (c. 632/1 BC), the father of Dinomache, Alcibiades' mother. It is reported that Clinias, Alcibiades' father, had a trireme constructed at his own expense, gaining honor in the sea fight of the battle of Artemisium during the Persian wars (OCD, 184). As far as prominent friends, Alcibiades was raised by one of the most popular Athenian leaders during the fifth-century, Pericles. Having Pericles as a guardian also enabled Alcibiades to benefit from the extensive network of guest-friendships (*xenia*) Pericles enjoyed (Gribble 1999, 82-90).

We are now in a better position to see that Socrates is, in fact, telling us Alcibiades sends his pursuers 'packing' because he sees himself excelling at all the conventional goods when compared to his pursuers, but that he fails to excel at the most important good, which directs properly the use of all conventional goods: cultivating wisdom within his soul. Reminiscent of his concern in the *Apology* for the 'greatest' city of Athens with its reputation for both 'wisdom' and 'power', but blinded by disordered priorities due to the very conventional goods it excelled at, Socrates is concerned that the very goods Alcibiades prominently possesses will impede his combining a concern for his soul with his bodily goods and its possessions. For the city of Athens, and for Alcibiades in particular, disordered priorities might even prove to be destructive if we are to take seriously Socrates' remarks reported by Xenophon in his *Memorabilia* on those who excel at conventional gifts. Socrates tells that those who have natural endowments are in need most of learning and education. Otherwise, those who are most gifted, but without the knowledge to exploit what they excel at, 'become utterly evil and mischievous; for without knowledge to discern their duty, they often put their hand to vile deeds' ... (IV. I. 3-5) After having listed the qualities Alcibiades excels at, Socrates brings to the fore the issue of priorities by explaining why he is the last hold-out in the pursuit of Alcibiades:

I hope to exert great influence (*megistum dynesesthae*) over you by showing you that I'm worth the world to you and that nobody is capable of providing you with the influence (*dynamis*) you crave, neither your guardian (*epitropus*) nor your relatives (*syngenes*), nor anybody else except me—with god's (*tu theu*) help, of course... . (105e-106a)

Socrates' desire to exert great influence over Alcibiades is not unlike Socrates' need to exhort, 'test' and 'examine' Athenian priorities in the *Apology*. Socrates deliberately refuses to remain quiet in the face of Alcibiades' ignorance. It is Alcibiades' great qualities that blind him to the need of tending to his true self, the soul. Only through Socrates' private exhortation, not his guardian Pericles or his relatives, will Alcibiades come to see the great benefit Socrates is attempting to bestow upon him. First Alcibiades must be brought to see that the concern for the state of his soul entails a radical reorganizing of his priorities, which bring us to the second instance of Socrates addressing the issue of priorities in *Alcibiades Major*.

Socrates' initial omission of the psychological qualities Alcibiades excels at becomes the topic of conversation once Alcibiades has been shown, through several episodes of the Socratic elenchus (106d-112e) and (esp. in light of the discussion 124c-127b10 of 'doing the things of oneself'), that reliance on his natural endowments without knowledge has not equipped him to give an account of the type of knowledge that would have made it possible to advise the Athenians about their business or distinguish between the things he uses or cultivates and cultivating himself. The root cause of Alcibiades' inadequacy in both regards is not recognizing the difference between the conventional goods he excels at and his soul as his true self. The soul as the topic of conversation, and Alcibiades' complete ignorance regarding the soul as the true self, is on display in the following exchange between Socrates and Alcibiades:

Socrates: Well then, what does it mean to cultivate oneself (*ti estin to eautu epimelisthae*)?—I'm afraid we often think we're cultivating ourselves when we're

not. When does a man do that? Is he cultivating himself when he cultivates what he has (*ar otan ton autu epimeletae tote kae autu*)?

Alcibiades: I think so, anyway. (127e-128a)

Here we see Socrates confronting Alcibiades with the question, ‘What is caring for oneself?’ He suggest that most suppose that they are caring for themselves, but instead are often caring for their possessions rather than the self. Socrates is making a distinction between the parts of the body and the things that the body puts on either to conceal or adorn itself. He illustrates this distinction with examples that resonate with Alcibiades’ preoccupation with his conventional goods by asking him whether caring for things of the feet, such as caring for shoes, is the same as caring for the feet, or caring for a ring of the finger is caring for the finger. Alcibiades is not able to answer the question because he does not understand the distinction Socrates is making. To help the matter along, Socrates clarifies what constitutes care. To care rightly for something is to make it better (128b). The art that makes shoes better, or cares for shoes, is shoemaking (*skutike*). By this art we care for shoes rather than feet, but we make the feet better by that art which we make the whole body better, gymnastic (*gymnastike*). Thus, there are different arts by which one cares for oneself and by which one cares for the things of oneself (128d). Here Socrates is inviting Alcibiades not only to consider the art that would make himself better, but to appreciate that the care necessarily prioritizes the way it goes about making X better in the same way the soul prioritizes among goods of the body and its possessions. The order of priority, which goes from part to whole, is the topic of Socrates’ questions:

Now if we didn’t know what a shoe was, would we have known (*egnomen*) what skill (*techna*) makes a shoe better?—No, we couldn’t have.—Nor would we have known what skill makes a ring better if we didn’t know what a ring was.—

True.—Well then, could we ever know what skill makes us better if we didn’t know what we were? (*tis techna beltio poei aytum ar an pote gnoemen agnountes ti pot esmen aytoe*, 128e)

The assumption is that an art makes its subject matter better; the art of X makes X better, so the art of shoemaking makes shoes better rather than feet better. What is at issue is which art, if any, makes the self better. At 129a Socrates returns to the need to know oneself (*to gnonae eautum*). Socrates asks if such knowledge is easy and for everyone or difficult and not for all. Alcibiades wanders in his thought about whether such knowledge is for everyone or quite difficult. Alcibiades' confusion connects with his ambivalence about caring for himself. Socrates goes on to say,

Tell me, how can we come to know the self itself (*ayto tauto*)? Maybe this is the way to find out what we ourselves are—maybe it's the only possible way. (129b)

The ambiguity in the phrase the self itself is quite interesting. The most plausible reading for the argument being made, which is that the soul is the true self and must be cultivated in order for one to direct properly the body and its possessions, is the self itself is the best part of oneself, i.e., the soul under the influence of wisdom.

Socrates employs several other examples for Alcibiades to illustrate that the true self or soul is different from what the soul uses. One such example that Alcibiades seems to grasp is Socrates' distinction between discoursing (*dialegesthae*) and using *logos*. To the aforementioned passage quoted, Alcibiades responds, 'You say right' (129b4). Socrates refers to what they are presently doing, i.e., exercising *logos*, to indicate what using is and what the self is. Using *logos* pertains both to the answerer or the questioner, but saying things, i.e., discoursing, pertains more to the answerer. Thus, although the soul may use *logos*, perhaps to talk idly, or use *logos* to express itself in authentic ways, the soul is distinct from what it uses.

Socrates now turns to other things that get used, especially the body. In discussing the body we see that it is what he primarily distinguishes from the soul. It is this distinction that resumes his initial promise of listing Alcibiades' qualities from his body

ending with his soul (104a). The remainder of the dialogue is concerned with the soul as the ruling (*archusa*)<sup>35</sup> element of the body and its possessions.

Continuing his discussion of things that can be used, Socrates informs Alcibiades that the shoemaker not only uses his instruments such as knives but also uses his hands and eyes (129d). So the shoemaker will be different from hands and eyes which he uses, and if a human being uses the entire body, the human will differ from this (129e). The human uses the body and so differs from it. The question that remains is what then is the human? Socrates answers that the human is soul, and the soul rules the body by using it (130a). The arts, on the other hand, that care for the body are caring for things of oneself rather than oneself. And the arts that care for possessions of the body are even further from caring for oneself. When Alcibiades exploits the conventional goods he excels at he is caring for the body rather than for things of himself (131b). Socrates' purpose here is to discredit Alcibiades' preoccupation with conventional goods by reorienting his perspective towards the appropriate ranking of his priorities. This reorientation of perspective is captured in the following exchange:

Socrates: And isn't someone who takes care of his wealth (*ta chremata*) caring neither for himself nor for what belongs to him (*oyth heautum oyte ta eautu*), but for something even further away?

Alcibiades: I agree.

Socrates: So the money-earner is not, in fact, doing his own work (*u ta utu ara eti pratti ho chrematistes*).

Alcibiades: right. (131b-c)

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<sup>35</sup> In the passage considered earlier from the *Meno* (87e-88c) Socrates uses the Greek word *egumenes* to describe what the soul does in relation to conventional goods. It can direct harmfully or beneficially depending on whether or not wisdom is present within the soul. In the section we are considering here from *Alcibiades Major* Socrates does not use the same word to describe the relation the soul has to conventional goods (the body and its possessions). Although this is the case, the relation of the soul to conventional goods in both dialogues is to command, lead or rule them. The connotation in both dialogues is the same.

There is nothing more conventionally good than money-making, and we see Socrates turning Alcibiades completely away from it and all the other goods he excels at. The only thing that Alcibiades is left with now is his true self, the soul, and its need for wisdom to rule appropriately the conventional goods he excels at. The prioritizing effect the rule of wisdom will necessarily have within Alcibiades' soul is captured by Socrates' advice to the jury in the *Apology*: 'Wealth doesn't not bring about excellence, but excellence makes wealth and everything else good for men, both individually and collectively' (30a9-10).

### **Other leading ideas found in *Alcibiades Major* and the *Apology***

The issue of priorities as a leading idea in *Alcibiades Major* and the *Apology* tells us a lot about Socrates' conduct during his trial and his approach to Alcibiades. Other leading ideas found in both dialogues that are entertained in a general fashion in the *Apology*, then complemented in a specific fashion in *Alcibiades Major*, may be worthy of attention. The following brief list is intended to suggest such ideas:

1) If the Delphic Oracle in the *Apology* (20e-b) placed its stamp of approval on the type of conversation Socrates was having prior to Chairephon's question, we see more clearly in *Alcibiades Major* that it is not the case that Socrates, as he claims in the *Apology* (32a-b), is just an example, a representative man whom the gods chose to highlight the idea that human knowledge is worthless compared to divine knowledge. Socrates has the gods on his side quite often (see Plato's *Theages*), because the only thing that prevented him from conversing with Alcibiades sooner was the divine. It is only with the gods' help that Socrates says he can help Alcibiades achieve his goal of being a great Athenian leader. Socrates' appeal to the divine in *Alcibiades Major* might be a way of setting up *eudaimonism*: the ultimate human good, i.e., happiness, can be attained by striving to be god-like. The task left to Alcibiades is to follow the course (i.e., a Socratic education) that contributes to happiness.

2) In both dialogues philosophical endeavors need the sanction of something divine or its equivalent. This may suggest that philosophical activity happens for reasons beyond sheer human curiosity.

3) Socrates approaches Alcibiades in a very flattering, seductive manner (103a-106b). The opening pages of the *Apology* is equally seductive, but stemming more from Socrates' self-effacement than fawning over the jurors (17a-21b). Socrates' continued attempt to seduce the jurors is revealed in his statements following the jury's vote of death. His intended audience is not the 501 jurors before him, per se, but the audience both present and absent of his fellow philosophical-types (38d1-4). The seduction is a specific seduction of the few. This is made clear when we recall that Socrates' opening remarks to the judges as "men of Athens" (17a) is an incorrect form of address. Whereas he calls those who voted for his acquittal "judges" (39e-40a), the correct form of address.

4) We will conclude with one other leading idea found in both dialogues, and that is the idea of time. In the *Apology* Socrates recounts the accusations being brought against him by making first the following remark:

Very well then. I must surely defend myself and attempt to uproot from your minds in so short a time the slander that has resided there so long ..., but I think this is very difficult and I am fully aware of how difficult it is ... . (19a-b)

In contrast to Socrates' admission here, in *Alcibiades Major*, ironically, time is the factor holding Socrates back from speaking with Alcibiades. When permission is finally given by the god, from all indications Socrates has all the time he needs in order to 'uproot' Alcibiades' presumptive knowledge of what the ruler needs to know to rule effectively (103a-b).

## Chapter Four: Socratic Traditionalism

In discussing priorities in chapter three we saw how bodily goods and external goods become beneficial when directed by the soul with the oversight of wisdom. Alcibiades' beautiful body and wealth can be potentially harmful to him if he does not acquire the knowledge to exploit properly what he excels at. This chapter will reflect further on the role knowledge plays, but in the context of putting skills to good use. For example, must the orator's skill consist only of speaking well to be persuasive or is something more needed, such as knowledge that would enable the orator to say the right thing at the right time to the right audience in the right way so as to foster some overall good? The focus of our discussion will be Plato's *Alcibiades Minor* and what we call Socratic traditionalism found in the dialogue in the characterization of knowledge as knowledge of utility. The type of traditionalism we find Socrates endorsing in *Alcibiades Minor*, the type that informs traditions of behavior that make up craft knowledge, is explicated by the political philosopher Michael Oakeshott and illustrated by the lyric poet Pindar. In Oakeshott's essay 'Political Education' found in his book *The Voice of Liberal Learning* he discusses tradition as the exploration of intimations or use value which complements Socrates' claim that knowledge of the best is the same as knowledge of utility. Through myth, Pindar's odes illustrate how traditions of behavior that compose an athlete's craft is a type of knowledge based on utility.

### I. Knowledge of Utility

In *Alcibiades Minor* we again find Alcibiades full of ambition, but until Socrates engages him in conversation, unaware of not knowing what he needs to know. The issue at hand is whether or not it is smart for Alcibiades, and humans in general, to pray for anything in particular, considering the fallibility of human knowledge. Because without knowing it, explains Socrates, many pray for what they think are goods, when in fact,

they are praying to receive things that will affect them badly once their prayers are granted by the gods. To illustrate his point Socrates reminds Alcibiades of Oedipus' prayer. Oedipus inadvertently blurted out the prayer that his sons might take up arms to settle their inheritance. The gods granted his prayer, and Oedipus' sons killed one another (138). The cautionary tale Socrates shares with Alcibiades introduces the topic of knowledge and its role within human affairs, that is the concern of the remainder of the dialogue.

There are three significant passages where knowledge and its role is discussed. Each passage gets more specific about the role of knowledge, and in the third passage we finally see Socrates advocating a type of knowledge that is not absolutely good, and an ignorance that is not absolutely evil. Instead we see that knowledge and its role is relative to the activity to which it is applied. For example, the knowledge required of a shoemaker is different from the knowledge required of a theoretical scientist. More importantly, in claiming the relativity of knowledge operative in human affairs Socrates is expressing the idea that knowledge results from existing traditions of behavior, not the other way around. We do not customarily conceive a way of going about an activity in the abstract, apart from the concrete activity of having engaged in the activity. The man who is already a scientist and cognizant of the traditions of scientific inquiry can formulate a plausible hypothesis. However, expertise can be applied to different contexts and prove to be effective, but it would not be as effective as it would be in its native context. In pointing this out we are showing that craft knowledge does not arise *ex nihilo*, but from the activity of practicing the craft. The first passage (140e-141a) claims the wise act and speak appropriately; the second passage (143d-e) looks at wisdom in relation to ignorance. The claim made here is that human error is due not to ignorance in general, but ignorance of the best; the third passage (145b2-c) claims that those who act and speak appropriately and have knowledge of the best are wise, which is knowledge of utility.

After having explained to Alcibiades the difference between madness and stupidity, characterizing the latter as big-heartedness (*megalopsychus*) and the former as simply having large quantities of stupidity, Socrates resumes his discussion of the lessons learned from Oedipus and others who were not circumspect in what they prayed for. Socrates asks Alcibiades the following questions:

Is it your view that the wise (*phronimus*) are those who know what should be done and said?—Yes.—And who are the stupid (*aphronas*)? Those who know neither of these things?—Just so.—And those who know neither of these things will say and do what they ought not, without knowing (*lesusin*) that this is what they are saying and doing?—So it seems. (140e-141a)

Here we see Socrates reflecting on the role of wisdom in prayer, and more broadly, its role in human affairs. The way Socrates discusses this wisdom suggests that the wise judge appropriately that their knowledge is right for an occasion and how it is to be applied to that occasion. For those like Oedipus neither know that their knowledge is appropriate in occasion-X nor once occasion-X arises, how to recognize and apply their knowledge to it. We also see that Socrates' description of wisdom lacks any sort of mystical qualities. Wisdom is practical reasoning that allows us to do the right thing in the right circumstances. When we look at the passage (145b2-c) we will see that practical reasoning, or what comes to be called knowledge of utility, is due to experience gained through activity (i.e., practicing certain crafts).

The next passage (143d-e) continues the discussion of knowledge and its role in human affairs, but it is widened to include a discussion of ignorance, and knowing what the best is as a criterion for right actions. We again return to the issue of prayer and how it can bring many evils. Alcibiades gives an account of those who think they are praying for good when in fact they are praying for evil by saying that all evil that befalls man is due to ignorance (143b). In part, Alcibiades' account is correct, but he has cast his net a little too wide. Socrates says as much by insisting that Alcibiades 'specify what it is

ignorance of' (143b) because ignorance is not an evil to certain people in certain states. To illustrate his need for specification, Socrates mentions the shocking story of Orestes and Alcmaeon who murdered their mothers to avenge the death of their fathers.

Alcibiades' response to the story is quite emotional:

Alcibiades: Spare me, for God's sake, Socrates!

Socrates: It isn't the person who says that you should not ever want to behave like that whom you should ask to spare you, but rather any who contradicted (*enantia*) him; for the act to you seems so horrendous that you do not like to hear it spoken of even by way of example. But do you think that Orestes, if he had been of sound mind and known what was best for him to do, would have dared to commit any such crime?

Alcibiades: No, I don't.

Socrates: Nor, I think, would anyone else.

Alcibiades: Certainly not.

Socrates: It seems then that it is ignorance (*agnoeia*) of the best (*beltistu*), failing to know what is the best, that is a bad thing. (143d-e)

Socrates limits Alcibiades' blanket indictment of ignorance as the cause of evil by adding that ignorance of the best is the cause of human evil. When we consider the context of the passage under consideration we see that the best is not talked about as if it were only a logical notion lacking content. Orestes and Alcmaeon were ignorant of what would have been best to do under the circumstances they found themselves in. Both were consumed by rage, and in the case of Orestes, he also killed his mother's lover Aegisthus for plotting the murder of his father (see the *Odyssey* 1. 29ff; 298ff; 3. 303ff.) If they had been of sound mind and not ignorant of the best, perhaps they would have exacted a punishment upon their mothers but one short of death. The larger point to be gained is that the best is a criterion. All human affairs make use of a criterion (see 145a-b). There are quite a number of human affairs, so it may do us some good if we speak about a

criterion within the context of an objective to be achieved, such as the orator giving us advice on war or peace. Now we have introduced means-ends reasoning that helps us to appreciate the psychological aspect several choices among means to ends reveal about the one choosing. Socrates' claim is that there is *a* best means to a given end. What if we are ignorant of the best as the story of Orestes and Alcmaeon and Oedipus illustrate, but we have other skills (*techne*) or abilities in our possession that make it possible to pursue what we mistakenly think is the best. If Oedipus had suddenly lost his voice before he blurted out his prayer his sons would not have been harmed; or if Alcmaeon had failed to recognize Clytemnestra he would not have killed his mother (144c; and cf.144a-b Socrates' shocking example of Alcibiades wanting to kill his mentor Pericles, but unable to do so because he cannot recognize him). Socrates intends for us to draw two lessons from these stories. The first lesson is that for certain people in certain states, ignorance, ironically, turns out to be the best situation for those ignorant of the best; and second, not knowing the best, combined with skills, usually brings harm to their possessor.<sup>36</sup>

The third passage (145b2-c) is critical in our attempt to survey knowledge and its role in human affairs as found in *Alcibiades Minor*. So far we have learned that the wise are those who know what should be done and said on the appropriate occasion due to practical reasoning in contrast to the ignorant, who fail to act appropriately because they are ignorant of the best. The passage we will now consider is a more comprehensive look at the role of knowledge in human affairs because we get a summation of how knowledge has been characterized up to this point, and we see also the traditionalism that characterizes Socrates' conception of knowledge.

To illustrate the idea that possessors of skills who lack knowledge of the best will be harmed, Socrates discusses with Alcibiades the role of orators. In focusing on the

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<sup>36</sup> Thus, we hear Socrates telling Crito: 'My dear Crito, your eagerness is worth much if it should have some right aim; if not, than the greater your keenness the more difficult it is to deal with you' (46b).

orator Socrates not only emphasizes the harm that is done to the orator who lacks knowledge of the best, but also the harm done to those who act on the orator's advice:

Well, do you call a man wise who knows how to give advice, but not what advice is better (*beltium*) to give or when it is best to give it?—Certainly not.—Nor, I imagine, a man who knows how to make war, without knowing when or for how long war should best be made? Isn't that right?—Yes.—Nor again a man who knows how to kill or steal or banish people without knowing when it is better to do this, or to whom?—No.—So what we want is the person who knows one or the other of these things but also has the knowledge of what is best—which no doubt is the same as knowledge of utility (*ophelimu*). (145b2-c)

In the passage under consideration Socrates recounts what he has shown us in the other two passages about knowledge and its role in human affairs, but he provides the added perspective that the type of knowledge he has characterized up to this point as a criterion, which is knowledge of the best, turns out to be the same as knowledge of utility.

Socrates' use of the word *ophelimu* to describe this type of knowledge is consistent with our argument that he is endorsing the idea that knowledge results from existing traditions of behavior that are relative to the activity of a particular craft.

In arguing that Socrates is making such an endorsement in *Alcibiades Minor* we will look (1) at Oakeshott's thoughts on traditions of behavior that inform what he refers to as the arrangements of society. We will see that for Oakeshott tradition is useful to the degree it renders behavior efficient when engaged in various activities. The efficiency is due to the accumulation of knowledge gained through the trial and error of the practice of a particular activity which is then distilled into traditions of behavior. Traditions of behavior that are highly efficient are informed by knowledge of the best or utility; and (2) we will look at the examples Socrates cites (145d-146b) to justify his claim that knowledge of the best is the same as knowledge of utility. It is due to Socrates' examples cohering with Oakeshott's reflections on traditions of behavior and the knowledge that

informs those traditions, that we refer to Socrates' endorsement of this type of knowledge as Socratic traditionalism.

## II. Oakeshott on Traditions of Behavior

Oakeshott's reflections upon traditions of behavior in 'Political Education' are motivated by what he sees as its opposite, the ideological style in politics. Although politics *per se* is not our concern in looking at *Alcibiades Minor*, it will prove helpful to consider Oakeshott's description of the ideological style in politics as a foil for the concrete traditions of behavior that are exhibited in any activity or craft. In doing so we are not too far afield because the effective politician excels at the craft of politics, and we are concerned with the type of knowledge that results from the practicing of any craft. The ideological style of politics is an abridgement of ideas from the political traditions of a society. The ideologue fails to recognize that his ideology has been inspired by the concrete traditions of his political community or a political community, but, instead, to have been the product of his intellectual premeditation. What results is a body of free-floating principles with pre-meditated ends that are supposed to determine and guide the arrangements of a political community. The significance of Oakeshott's description of the ideological style in politics is not unique to politics. His description is a rubric, under which many crafts can be mistakenly approached. For example, Oakeshott parallels the ideologues' disregard for the traditions of political behavior from which his ideology was abridged to the craft of cooking:

It might be supposed that an ignorant man, some edible materials and a cookery book compose together the necessities of a self-moved (or concrete activity) called cooking. But nothing is further from the truth. The cookery book is not an independently generated beginning from which cooking can spring; it is nothing more than an abstract of somebody's knowledge of how to cook: it is the step-child, not the parent, of the activity. The book, in its turn, may help to set a

man on to dressing dinner, but if it were his sole guide he could never, in fact, begin: the book speaks only to those who know already the kind of thing to expect from it and consequently how to interpret it. (168)

The problem is not that the ignorant man or the ideologue has an abridged or summary knowledge, the problem arises in not acknowledging that the cookbook and the ideology spring from traditions of behavior that efficiently determine and guide their respective ends. There needs to be constant reference to these traditions or we run the risk of demanding from the cookbook or ideology what it can not possibly give.

The alternative to the ideological style in politics is captured in Oakeshott's concluding remarks regarding the cookbook. The content of the book, its recipes, operates according to several presuppositions: it can only speak to those who know what to expect from it and how to interpret it. Is it not the case that when the cook approaches a cookbook it is a rather traditional affair. The cookbook is filled with recipes which, more often than not, have been handed down generationally. The ceremonial occasions the cookbook commemorates may speak, for example, to the various seasons and what they bring. Those who consult the cookbook will have reasonable expectations of what the cookbook can do if it is followed appropriately. There will also be a familiarity with the appliances needed and what may be needed depending on the type of recipe it is. The cook tacitly understands that there will be an order to the ingredients that he must keep in tact if he wants the desired end. Most importantly, by following the recipe, the cook is replicating activity that has already been determined and so he is guided by the knowledge gained through a specific tradition of behavior. The fundamental difference between these two approaches, the ideologue's disregard for the concrete origins of his ideology and the craftsman who replicates traditions of behavior, is that the former treats knowledge as if it can be decontextualized, neatly packaged and applied to radically different contexts without suffering the slightest attenuation in its effectiveness to render

behavior efficient, whereas the latter operates like a fixed course within which traditions of behavior become highly efficient at achieving their proscribed end.

There is one more aspect of Oakeshott's reflections on traditions of behavior that needs discussion before we look at its relevance to the type of knowledge Socrates endorses in *Alcibiades Minor*. Earlier when we spoke of the fixed course within which traditions of behavior operate, the image conjured up may have been one of behavior ceaselessly operating according to necessity. This image could not be further from how traditions of behavior operate, and Oakeshott explains as much by introducing the concept of intimations. Again, we must keep in mind that Oakeshott's discussion of traditions of behavior takes place within the context of politics and so intimations are spoken of within that context. Nonetheless, we find his discussion of intimations to be applicable to traditions of behavior found in various crafts. The efficiency that results from a tradition of behavior is not due to the 'grind' of necessity that ever pushes on (see 178), but to its ability to use the resources found in its own traditions of behavior to modify and regulate itself. The ability to explore and pursue these resources is to explore and pursue what Oakeshott refers to as intimations:

This activity [traditions of behavior that make up a society's political activity], then, springs ... from the existing traditions of behavior themselves. And the form it takes, because it can take no other, is the amendment of existing arrangements by exploring and pursuing what is intimated in them. The arrangements which constitute a society capable of political activity whether they are customs or institutions or laws or diplomatic decisions, are at once coherent and incoherent; they compose a pattern and at the same time they intimate a sympathy for what does not fully appear. Political activity is the exploration of that sympathy; and consequently, relevant political reasoning will be the convincing exposure of a sympathy, present but not yet followed up, and the convincing demonstration that now is the appropriate moment for recognizing it. (174)

It is the intimations found in traditions of behavior that makes tradition useful. How we utilize the intimations will dictate to what degree tradition can be useful. This is why the idea of sympathy is important for Oakeshott, and goes some distance in accounting for the type of knowledge endorsed by Socrates: crafts, like politics, are recognizable precisely because they operate according to traditions of behavior. They are not seeking innovation at every turn, but the innovation that may be desired results in a piecemeal process in which intimations from within the craft is pursued to achieve a given end. Socrates has this sort of scenario in mind when, in the context of discussing the orator's craft and what advice the orator should be capable of giving, he speaks of knowledge of the best as being the same as knowledge of utility. The orator must know both the traditions of behavior that have defined his craft, considering he is a part of the tradition; and when to tweak the tradition, as the occasion demands, in order to make his oratory most effective.

### III. Knowledge of Utility as Socratic Traditionalism

Following Socrates' admission (145b2-c) that knowledge of the best is the same as knowledge of utility he queries Alcibiades about what more is needed to make one wise other than simply knowing about particular crafts. Here Socrates is rehearsing what he and Alcibiades have already established regarding the inadequacy of the possessor of skills (i.e., the orator) who lacks knowledge of the best. The rehearsal canvasses other possessors of skills that are operative in certain crafts but who have the same lack. About such crafts Socrates poses several questions:

Now suppose we have a person who knows how to ride or shoot, or box (*pycteuin*), or wrestle (*palaein*), or compete in any other sport or exhibit any other skill (*techne*). What do you call the person who knows how best to exercise a particular skill? If it is the skill of riding, I expect you will call him a good rider.—I will.—And if it is boxing, you will call him a good boxer, and if it is

flute-playing (*ayleticen*) you will call him a good flute-player, and so in other cases. Or do you disagree?—No, not at all.—Now do you think that knowing about these things suffices to make a person wise, or is more needed?—Much more, upon my life. (145e)

Knowing about these things does not make one wise because the possessor of the skills Socrates lists do not know when or on whom it is better for them to exercise their skills because they lack what is most important, the knowledge of utility (see page 71). Due to Socrates' grounding of the type of knowledge the possessor of skills must have in a criterion of utility, not some mystical, ahistorical realm, he is endorsing tradition as the arbiter of what is best. We will argue for Socrates' endorsement by using several illustrations from actual crafts highlighted in the aforementioned passage.

As we have seen, what produces the best course of action for the craftsman is the few alternatives among the traditions of behavior that have been handed down to him. Additionally, the traditions of behavior the craftsman chooses to replicate are quite efficient at what they produce. In the passage under consideration Socrates' list of skills are indicative of the traditionalism we are ascribing to him. Among the crafts listed, the most notable are boxing, wrestling and flute-playing. When we look at each of these crafts individually we see that to excel at them requires that the practitioner know the craft's tradition sufficiently to be recognized as a practitioner of the craft, and to know when to tweak the tradition enough to accommodate various circumstances or opponents. However, before we look at each of the three crafts individually, a brief description of each craft, and its significance, is in order.

Boxing, wrestling and flute-playing as traditional, physical education crafts date back to the eighth-century BCE. Homer speaks of boxing and wrestling in the *Iliad* (23. 262-897) and the *Odyssey* (8. 120-130) in accounting for the funeral games for Patroclus. Flute-playing dates back to the sixth-century BCE, and was popularized mainly by the Pythian Games which featured musical contests. The importance of boxing, wrestling and

flute-playing, as well as other athletic competitions, was due to an aristocratic culture of sport which saw physical training occupying ‘the place of honour’ (Marrou 1956, 40). An important factor in gaining competence in these athletic events was to take lessons from a trainer (*paedotribes*) who coached the young on the sports grounds (*palaestra*) with the intention of fielding the best athletes during the pan-hellenic games. The coach was also responsible for having his athletes maintain a strict dietary regimen. From the middle of the fifth-century BCE there were four major venues for athletic competitions, all of which featured boxing and wrestling: Olympian, Pythian, Nemean and the Isthmian Games (see *OCD*, 206). As we have mentioned, flute-playing was featured only in the Pythian Games.

The event of boxing entailed the boxer wearing gloves consisting of hard bandages (*himantes oxis*) with the fingers protruding against leather strips to keep them in place. Unlike modern day boxing, boxing in antiquity did not take place in a ring, there were no rounds, which enabled matches to last until an opponent gave up due to exhaustion,<sup>37</sup> and kicking was allowed (Marrou, 122).

Wrestling was the most popular event at all the Games. Its popularity signified by the use of the word *palaestra* for the gymnasium and for physical education (122). Each wrestler, after drawing lots, was paired off. The object of the wrestling match, of which there were three rounds, was to throw the opponent on to the ground without falling down with him. If both opponents fell, no points were won by the thrower. It did not matter how one’s opponent fell, although leg-holds were forbidden, but tripping was allowed.

Flute (*aylus*<sup>38</sup>)-playing was featured in the Pythian Games along with other musical contests such as cithara-playing and singing to the cithara. Although not much is

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<sup>37</sup> Marrou tells the story of the Emperor Titus who tired his opponents out by keeping his guard up for two whole days without letting his opponent get a single blow in. Titus’ tactic sounds a lot like the ‘rope-a-dope,’ the tactic the great American heavy weight champion Mohammed Ali employed to tire his opponents out. Ali simply danced around the ring while guarding himself, leaned against the ropes occasionally, until his opponent, intent on pursuing him, eventually exhausted himself.

<sup>38</sup> Actually the *aylus* was a reed instrument, most likely an oboe.

known about how musical contests were conducted and decided, the tradition of flute-playing is captured in an Ode written by Pindar for a victor by the name of Midas of Akragas, about whom we will say more when discussing the praise offered to the victors of the Games.

When we turn to actual practitioners of these traditional, physical education crafts those who are known to us because of their victories at the various Games, we see that it was not just the athleticism of the victors that is celebrated, it is the tradition of the individual craft, the significance of success and the glorification of natural talent complemented by laborious effort. Indeed, the victors are celebrated as consummately embodying traditions of behavior that call for strict discipline and informed spontaneity. Likewise, the athlete's informed spontaneity is made possible by the resources or intimations of his craft's traditions. The most significant chronicler of the games and its traditions that has come down to us is the sixth-century poet Pindar. Pindar was a conservative Boiotian aristocrat whose interest in the Games was primarily philosophical (see the excellent introductory essay on Pindar in Bowra 1969, ix-xviii). Each of Pindar's odes were commissioned by patrons, often aristocratic families, who wanted to sing the praise of athletes originating from their respective Greek cities. We will look at relevant passages from three of Pindar's odes, each ode commemorates a victor at one of the four Games in boxing, wrestling and flute-playing. The odes we will be looking at are typically divided into three sections. Each ode contains an opening and closing section devoted to the victor's success, while the central section of the ode consist of a mythic narrative addressing the significance of tradition for the victor. The narrative may focus on the deeds of the heroes who are from the city the victor originates, which accounts for the tradition which produced the qualities displayed by the victor; it may serve as a negative contrast to the victor's situation; and it may reflect a generalized aspect of the victor's success. The central section of the odes will be our main focus because in it we

see homage being paid to the tradition of the craft and how well the victor has replicated and added to the craft through laborious effort.

### III. Boxing

In the ode *Olympian X* (c. 474 BCE), which praises the victor Hagesidamos of Western Lokroi, winner in the boys' boxing, we will look at two passages. The first passage is from section two, it accounts for the mythical context in which Hagesidamos' win will be placed. The second passage is from section four, it places Hagesidamos' within the context of winners of various sporting events from the past. Pindar begins his ode by asking the muses and truth, daughter of Zeus, to read him the name of the Olympian victor, Arcestratos' son Hagesidamos in preparation for the praise that was promised him in the past (see *Olympian XI* 4-5) and now must be paid (5-10). He then acknowledges the Lokrians of the West for their local tradition of poetry, mainly love songs, and upon Zeus' request he proceeds to situate Hagesidamos' victory within the grand tradition of the Games:

Without labor few find joy, a light upon life that makes up for all efforts.

The ordinances of Zeus have roused me to sing of the grandest Games,

Which by the ancient tomb of Pelops, with contests six in number, Herakles

Founded when he slew Poseidon's son, fine Kteatos...., (25)

By speaking of the origins of the Olympic Games, Pindar casts Hagesidamos as heir to a noble traditions of behavior that seek to reward the athlete-hero for surmounting the hardships and enduring the labor that inevitably arise from the pursuit and mastery of a craft. The noble tradition consists of Herakles surmounting *the* twelve labors to found the Olympic festival in honor of his father Zeus. Pindar connects Hagesidamos' win with Herakles' fifth labor in particular. The fifth labor requires Herakles to clean the stable of Augeas for a fee, but after Herakles' task is complete Augeas refuses to pay the fee he promised. Herakles exacts revenge on Augeas by leading an army to sack Elis while

successfully repelling an attack by Eurytos and Poseidon's son Kteatos, whom he kills. With the spoils from his conquest of Elis, Herakles establishes the four-yearly Olympic Games in Pisa (see Graves 1996, Vol. I. 490-491). Although Pindar recognizes that Hagesidamos' win is due to the athletes' disciplined labor, its not the only thing that accounts for his success. Pindar reminds us that the Gods have a say in all things and that Hagesidamos needs to acknowledge the divine in the spirit of Herakles who, after having fenced off the area in which athletic contests would be held—'The hill of Cronus', he erected six alters to the Olympian Gods, one for each pair, along side the sacrificial hearth he founded in honor of his great-grandfather Pelops (491). In speaking of the Gods this way, might Pindar be accounting for the unknown element in Hagesidamos' victory? What we refer to as intimations, the various resources that are contained within traditions of behavior that render traditions useful, Pindar refers to as the divine. It is very difficult to account for the informed spontaneity, the split-second decisions, the good athlete excels at without appreciating the degree to which the good athlete knows the tradition of his craft and so is able to exploit its use well. Hagesidamos' victory is due to his knowledge of utility.

Our second passage is from section IV of Pindar's ode to Hagesidamos. In this section Pindar places Hagesidamos' win along side winners of the first Olympic Games and the festive events that greeted them:

All the holy place was loud with song in the glad feasting the music  
banquets. We follow the first beginnings and in the namesake song of  
glorious triumph we shall sing aloud of the thunderbolt and the fire-flung  
shaft of Zeus, the noise-awakener, the flaming lightening, fitting in every  
victory; the luxuriant music songs shall answer the pipe. (80)

The athletes that performed in the first Olympic Games, all of whom are unknown, are: Oionos, winner in the foot-race; Echemos, winner in boys' wrestling; Doryklos, winner in boys' boxing; Phrastor, winner in the javelin throw; and Nikeus, winner in the stone-

throw (70). Pindar's acknowledgment of the first Olympic victors places Hagesidamos' win within a long tradition of athletes excelling at their individual crafts, and Hagesidamos should be celebrated also.

#### IV. Wrestling

In the ode *Nemean VI* (c.461 BCE), which praises the victor Alkimidas of Aigina, winner in the boys' wrestling, the historical record is sparse in accounting for the details of praise bestowed upon Alkimidas' victory. Nonetheless, the ode reflects our central concern with illustrating traditions of behavior as knowledge based in utility, the type of knowledge Socrates endorses in *Alcibiades Minor*. In *Nemean VI* section one will be our main focus because in it we see that Alkimidas descends from a family that includes many fine athletes. Wrestling is only one of the many sporting events that Alkimidas' family has excelled at. Pindar acknowledges Alkimidas' familial descent as follows:

Even now Alkimidas gives visible witness that his race is like the fruitful fields which change about and now give men abounding life from the soil, now rest again and pick up strength. He has come from Nemea's well-loved Games, a boy in the struggle, who follows this calling from Zeus; he has been revealed a hunter and had good sport in the wrestling. (10)

The 'visible witness' Pindar speaks of may, in part, reflect an appreciation of the genetic endowment that laid the groundwork for Alkimidas' victory, but when we consider that 'fruitful fields' need cultivation, and the yield one gains due to cultivation reflects toil ('now rest again and pick up strength'), it is more plausible to read Pindar as putting greater emphasis on the discipline that is demanded from well performed crafts.

Alkimidas' athletic family is composed of craftsmen who hone their craft generationally, which goes some distance in explaining their continued success. Further passages we will consider suggest that traditions of behavior practiced by his family, complemented by toil, is what accounts for Alkimidas' victory.

The last stanza of section one and the beginning of section two is more direct about the connection between traditions of behavior learned in Alkimidas' family and toil. Pindar comments on both:

He plants his feet in the kindred tracks of his father's father, Praxidamas;  
for he, an Olympic victor, first brought twigs from Alpheos to the Aiakidai;  
He was crowned five times at the Isthmus, thrice at Nemea, and saved  
Sokleidas from oblivion, who was first of Hagesidamos' sons. To his delight  
three prize-winners reached the peak of prowess by tasting toil.

With good fortune from God. (15-25)

The descent of the family is Hagesimachos, Sokleidas, Praxidamas, Theon, and Alkimidas (see Bowra, 209). In the passage under consideration it is quite clear that Alkimidas' family embody traditions of behavior that have proven highly efficient at fielding successful athletes in the Games. The familial athletic tradition began with Hagesimachos, and we can only surmise that he, too, was a part of a local tradition that stressed athletic endeavors. The larger point that Pindar expresses is that from Hagesimachos to Alkimidas traditions of behavior were gained through concrete activity which become the basis on which each successive generation relied and replicated, but also a basis on which to learn from the tradition's intimations: how best the tradition could be put to use. This is precisely Socrates' point at 145e-146b in *Alcibiades Minor* when he criticizes craftsmen for having a skill but not knowing how best to use it, which is shown by their not knowing 'when or on whom it was better for them to exercise their skills...'

## V. Flute-playing

The last ode we will consider from Pindar is *Pythian XII* (c.490 BCE) in praise of Midas of Akragas, winner in the flute-playing. The mythical backdrop of the ode is the occasion that inspired Athena to invent the flute and the tune 'The Many-Headed', which

mimicked the voice's lament of the Gorgon Euryala for the killing of her sister Medusa by Perseus (see Graves, 223-230 and Bowra, 30). *Pythian XII* does not directly address mortal practitioners of the craft of flute-playing that may have influenced Midas. What it does treat is the relationship between the human voice and the mimetic quality of the flute. In keeping with its origins as a voice-like instrument, Pindar suggests that the craft of the good flute-player consists in replicating the expressiveness of the voice. Thus, a degree of informed spontaneity goes into the craft of flute-playing due to its ability to relieve and reflect the passions.<sup>39</sup>

The passages we will reflect upon are from the end of section three and the beginning of section four. They read as follows:

And when she delivered from these labors the man she loved, the Maiden created the flute's wide-ranging music, to copy in it that strong and loud lamentation which reached her from Euryala's eager jaws ... Blown through thin bronze, and blown through the reeds which grow near the fair-spaced city of the Graces in the garden of the Nymph of Kaphisos. Wherever dancing is, they are sure to be. Any bliss that man may win (And without labor, none!)... (20-25)

Although Athena invented the flute, she gave it to mortal man without traditions of behavior to follow in the strict sense that Oakeshott describes. If there are no traditions of behavior for Midas to have followed, and a degree of informed spontaneity is part and parcel of flute-playing, what accounts for his success and our reading of *Pythian XII* as an illustration of the type of knowledge of utility Socrates endorses in *Alcibiades Minor*? The role of the Graces in the craft of flute-playing goes some distance in justifying our reading. The Graces were Aglaia (Glory), Euphrosyna (Mirth) and Thalia (Health), and they had a prominent place in local cult at Orchomenos. The Graces make it possible for

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<sup>39</sup> This is one of the reasons why Aristotle says that citizens can listen to it but not learn to play it: 'The proper time for using it is when the performance aims not at instruction, but at the relief of the passions' (*Pol.*1341a20-25; cf. *Republic* 399d).

the flute-player to reproduce, as life-like as possible, the many sounds of the human voice. However, this does not mean that the good flute-player's abilities are inexplicable because his playing is divinely inspired. We think the role of the Graces can be read in pedestrian way: Midas' success is due to his ability to be spontaneous by reproducing a range of emotions, originally conveyed by the human voice, in a very short period of time. Traditions of behavior and its use value (intimations) may be consulted in so far as the flute-player constantly tries to render life-like the sound his flute replicates, and he does so in a piecemeal fashion each time he tries.

## VI. Conclusion.

In this chapter we discuss Socratic traditionalism, the type of knowledge Socrates refers to in *Alcibiades Minor* as knowledge of utility. What constitutes knowledge of utility in the dialogue is traditions of behavior that can be mastered and replicated, as well as serve as a basis of change for the craftsmen to adapt to new circumstances or competitors. For example, if a craftsmen is successful in using his tradition in such a way, not only is he in possession of the skill that defines his craft, he is able to put the skill to good use. Pindar's odes illustrate and celebrate the traditions of behavior of the successful athlete. We can say of the boxer that he is part and parcel of a tradition that renders his behavior recognizable, regimented, and efficient. He is practiced in his craft. Much more than this is not needed to be a boxer. To speak of the successful boxer requires us to assume that a thorough mastery of the craft has taken place. However, in both scenarios we are still dealing with practice, not preconceived notions of the craft of boxing. It is this sort of practical knowledge that Socrates endorses in *Alcibiades Minor*.

The significance of Socrates' endorsing a view of knowledge that functions in this practical way is that it cautions us against the ideologue's failure to see knowledge as the abridgement of concrete political traditions instead of the product of intellectual premeditation.

Chapter Five: Instances of Decision Theory in Plato's *Alcibiades Major* and *Minor*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*<sup>40</sup>

In *Alcibiades Major* we are meant to see the way in which Socrates, after a prolonged period of observation, pursues an ambitious young man who has easily dismissed his other pursuers with disdain. Alcibiades has political ambitions, but lacks the proper philosophical perspective that only Socrates can provide. Socrates notes that the other pursuers thought well of themselves, but there was not one who was not outstripped by Alcibiades' advantages and own estimation of himself. Socrates states, 'You say that you don't need anybody for anything, since your own qualities are so great there's nothing you lack; I'll list them, starting with your body and ending with your soul' (104a). The qualities that Socrates mentions are the young man's great looks and size, his belonging to the leading family in the greatest Greek city, and his having relatives on his father's and mother's side who are among the best and all ready to assist him were he to need assistance. Beyond all these, Pericles whom his father left as guardian for Alcibiades and his brother, hold sway in Athens, in other Greek cities, and in many barbarian places. Given these advantageous, Alcibiades' conceit is that he is completely self-sufficient and is in need of no one.

Here we have Socrates verifying his prior assessment of Alcibiades as a young man motivated by enormous political ambitions. Socrates has been observing Alcibiades since he was a young boy. Why would Socrates be attracted to Alcibiades in the first place? This question is one of the more interesting questions about *Alcibiades Major* and other Socratic dialogues that feature various interlocutors. An interlocutor merits a conversation with Socrates because he is *worthy*. A passage from Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, in which Socrates and Antiphon are discussing the proper way to bestow

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<sup>40</sup> Denyer 2001, 93 discusses imaginary choices offered by god as a prominent feature in the Alcibiades literature. This chapter explores the type of choices found in the Alcibiades literature.

beauty and wisdom on others, illustrates an attitude Socrates assumes when befriending others that is on display in his approach to the young Alcibiades:

...but we think that he who makes a friend of one whom he knows to be gifted by nature (*euphya*), and teaches him all the good he can, fulfils the duty of a citizen and gentlemen. That is my own view, Antiphon. Others have a fancy for a good horse or dog or bird: my fancy, stronger even than theirs, is for good friends. And I teach them all the good I can, and recommend them to others from whom I think they will get some moral benefit. And the treasures of wise men of old have left us in their writings I open and explore with my friends... .  
(I. vi. 10-15.)

This passage not only reveals Socrates' approach to the cultivation of friendships once he enters in to them, but it also specifies a strict criterion for who becomes a candidate for friendship with Socrates (cf. *Apology* 23b-c and 33b-c on Socrates' ironic eagerness to present himself to the jury as the friendly interrogator of all Athenians). But there seems to be a lacuna here. It is clear from Socrates' opening remarks in *Alcibiades Major* that Alcibiades' gift is his nascent philosophical nature that Socrates recognizes in his enormous ambition to be a great political ruler. It is also clear that Socrates, having become interested in Alcibiades, seeks to cultivate a friendship in the manner Xenophon describes. What is not so clear is how Socrates, after his initial judgment that Alcibiades is sufficiently gifted and ambitious to pursue, goes about corroborating his findings. Might there be a testing of the waters to assure himself that Alcibiades is not a dud before he attempts to bestow beauty and wisdom on his friend? Our assumption is that Socrates needs to, and does, confirm the potential of would-be friends because otherwise he would run the risk of judging an interlocutor worthy of friendship only to find he was mistaken. In fact, Xenophon tells us the critics of Socrates claimed he misjudged the natures of both Critias and Alcibiades by teaching them politics before prudence (see *Memorabilia*, I. II. 13-18). Whether Socrates, in fact, misjudges natures is a fit topic for discussion, but

out of the purview of this chapter. We propose the idea that Socrates, indeed, confirms his initial judgment regarding the giftedness (philosophical potential) of a given interlocutor by posing various thought experiments in the form of hypothetical, counterfactual and imaginary choices.<sup>41</sup> How these choices function is to make an interlocutor's desires transparent and to assess degrees of belief as bases for action. Socrates often makes use of these types of choices, which, interestingly enough, we have come to regard as the key feature of modern decision theory. We especially see the employment of decision theory choices and what it reveals about the nature of an interlocutor and his desires in the dialogue *Alcibiades Major*. But we will also discuss general aspects of its role in other Socratic writings such as *Alcibiades Minor*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

### **Decision Theory**

Socrates' use of thought experiments in the dialogues as a way of reassuring himself of an interlocutor's philosophical potential aligns with the general thrust of decision theory as expressed by its founder F.P. Ramsey in his essay 'Truth and Possibility' (1978, 60-100). Although the essay's subject matter, as a whole, goes beyond the scope of what we intend to discuss here, and should be read on its own as a lucid introduction to modern decision theory, Ramsey's discussion of hypothetical choices as a means of measuring degrees of belief will be our focus because it sheds light on the function and type of choices Socrates offers various interlocutors.

The essay sets out a method to measure the degrees of beliefs and other psychological variables through their causal property, that is the extent to which individuals are willing to act on what they believe given hypothetical circumstances.

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<sup>41</sup> Thought experiments like counterfactuals have been discussed in relation to the variety of Socratic refutations (see, for example, Carpenter and Polansky 'Variety of Socratic Elenchi' in Scott 2002, 89-100) but not as a technique to measure the extent to which an interlocutor is philosophically gifted, the way Socrates initially supposes, to benefit from Socrates' type of friendship. That is, how does Socrates confirm if an interlocutor has the philosophical market value Socrates initially claims he does.

Hypothetical circumstances are not concerned with actualized beliefs—beliefs presently at work in our thinking of them, but with dispositional beliefs, beliefs that would dictate actions in the appropriate circumstances.<sup>42</sup> According to Ramsey, beliefs can be assigned a magnitude or degree having a particular position in a sequence of magnitudes which determine the likelihood, given hypothetical choices, of our acting in one way as opposed to another. For example, we can express full belief in a proposition by 1 ('The earth is flat'), full belief in its contradictory by 0 ('The earth is round'), and equal beliefs in the proposition and its contradictory by one-half ('The earth may be flat or round'). Magnitudes are quite simple to assign when an individual has no doubts about anything.

A more complex scenario may demand an individual to take account of various degrees of certainty in his beliefs (e.g., 'I believe in Z two-thirds of certainty'). In order to account for the more complex scenario, Ramsey introduces what he calls Mathematical Expectation.<sup>43</sup> Mathematical Expectation governs all our behavior in so far as we consistently seek to maximize our own or other people's pleasure. How Mathematical Expectation expresses degrees of belief is illustrated by Ramsey in the following instance:

I am at a cross-roads and do not know the way; but I rather think one of two ways is right. I propose therefore to go that way but to keep my eyes open for someone to ask; if now I see someone half a mile away over the fields, whether I turn aside to ask him will depend on the relative inconvenience of going out of my way to cross the fields or continuing on the wrong road if it is the wrong road. But it will also depend on how confident I am that I am right; and clearly the more confident I am of this the less distance I should be willing go from the road to check my opinion. (77)

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Aristotle's discussion of 'first' and 'second' activity in *De An.* 412a22-8 where he contrasts dispositional knowledge with actualized knowledge.

<sup>43</sup> For example, we can formalize mathematical expectation in the following way: Bob's degree of belief in  $p$  is  $m/n$ ; then Bob's action is as he would choose it to be if he had to repeat it exactly  $n$  times, in  $m$  of which  $p$  was true, and the others false. In each of the  $n$  times Bob had no memory of the previous ones (76).

The distance Ramsey is prepared to go out of his way to ask becomes the measure of the confidence in his opinion, the Mathematical Expectation, because individuals conduct themselves in ways that consistently realize the objects of their desires.

Ramsey's supposition is that because the individual has certain beliefs about many things his actions will be determined according to the ranking of his beliefs. A belief entails choices and to offer an individual many choices, according to Ramsey, is to reveal the individual's preference for possible worlds ordered hierarchically according to their perceived value:

If we had the power of the Almighty, and could persuade our subject of our power, we could, by offering him options, discover how he placed in order of merit all possible courses of the world. In this way all possible worlds would be put in order of value... (78)

Schematically the choices offered would look like the following:

Would you rather have world  $\alpha$  in any event; or world  $\beta$  if  $p$  is true, and world  $\gamma$  if  $p$  is false? If, then, he were certain that  $p$  was true, he would simply compare  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$  and choose between them as if no conditions were attached.... (79)

Ramsey's discussion of thought experiments presented as hypothetical choices are the type of choices we see Socrates concerned with in *Alcibiades Major* and to a lesser extent in *Alcibiades Minor* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. Socrates, too, is concerned with degrees of belief, but not their measurability in magnitudes. Socrates is concerned with degrees of belief in so far as the choices he offers Alcibiades confirm or falsify Socrates' initial observation that Alcibiades has what it takes to benefit from Socratic friendship. Once Alcibiades begins to entertain the hypothetical choices offered him, his desires are rendered transparent. Socrates then judges Alcibiades' desires as providing a basis for a virtuous life, and secondarily, great Athenian statesmanship.

## **Types of Hypothetical Choices**

In Plato's dialogues the choices offered to interlocutors are outlandish and contrived, and assume the tone of a psychotherapist. There are three distinctive categories under which these choices are usually offered. The first category we can refer to as The Call of Ambition. Here the hypothetical choices offered by Socrates to the interlocutor are concerned with establishing as fact from prior observation that an interlocutor is worthy of being befriended by Socrates due the interlocutor's ambition. When we speak of ambition we mean those overriding emotions or desires causing an individual to act in a particular way repeatedly to achieve a particular end. We are not speaking here of petty desires that are strongly felt and, as a result, cause an individual to act. Otherwise in characterizing ambition as we have, we could just as easily be referring to obsessive-compulsive disorders. The ambition we are arguing Socrates has in mind in each of the three categories is *grand* ambition. The second category we can refer to as The Limits of Ambition. When we speak of limits we are referring to the length an interlocutor is willing to go in order to satisfy his desire(s). One way to assess the length an interlocutor is willing to go to fulfill a particular desire is to determine how strongly or to what degree he holds a particular belief. The significance of knowing how strongly an interlocutor holds a particular belief is that it allows Socrates, by offering hypothetical choices, to establish limits surrounding the subject-content of the conversation. In the Socratic conversation limits are established in order to prevent the interlocutor from assuming a sophistic stance (see *Alcibiades Major* 106b-c), and to facilitate the protreptic experience of the interlocutor by having virtue serve as the goal of the interlocutor's ambition. The third category we can refer to as The Transparency of Ambition. When we speak of the Transparency of Ambition we are referring to the use of hypothetical choices to disclose the gulf between an interlocutor's true beliefs that are instantiated in his deeds, as opposed to his stated beliefs. The interlocutor often agrees to abide by Socrates' prescription to do what it takes to realize the goal of his ambition, arduous though it may

be, but we then find the interlocutor acting as if he were oblivious of his agreement. In the dialogues the comedic aspect is often brought about by the following trope: the interlocutor insists that we take his words, speeches and intentions seriously, but he makes himself look foolish because his actions are glaringly at odds with what he professes.

### *Alcibiades Major*

Of the many interlocutors we find in the Socratic discourses, Alcibiades' relationship with Socrates gives us a good opportunity to assess these categories of choices. Three episodes in which we find Alcibiades considering hypothetical choices are in Plato's dialogues *Alcibiades Major* and, to a lesser extent, in *Alcibiades Minor* and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*.

Socrates' attraction to Alcibiades in the opening pages of *Alcibiades Major* is shown to be particularly strong. After a long period of observation, Socrates approaches Alcibiades with the intention of befriending him. Unlike the majority of the interlocutors featured in the Platonic dialogues who claim to have a strong, presumptive knowledge of X—(e.g. friendship (*Lysis*), piety (*Euthyphro*), bravery (*Laches*), etc.—Alcibiades makes no such strong claim. In *Alcibiades Major* Socrates' conversation with Alcibiades is generated solely on *ad hominem* grounds. From the opening pages of the dialogue to its conclusion, Socrates appeals not so much to reason in trying to make virtue the goal of Alcibiades' ambition, but to Alcibiades' aristocratic prejudices and emotions.<sup>44</sup> The uniqueness of Alcibiades lies in a type of arrogance (*megalophronon*), 103b2-104a) that is even more acute than the arrogance of his older pursuers. Alcibiades also has a

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<sup>44</sup> (Denyer, 2001, 121) convincingly shows that Alcibiades' aristocratic statement at 111a1 (*to ellenizin*) 'to speak Greek' does not assume that a mere knowledge of one's native language is superior to 'something as rare as being good at playing draughts'. In fact, Alcibiades is relying on three commonly held Greek ideas: (1) One's native language indicates sharing in particular customs, manners, values and political allegiances; (2) It is unfavorable (*barbarus*) if one's native language is not Greek; (3) The moral superiority of the Greeks over the barbarians is due to their obedience to the law and sense of justice.

psychological advantage over his pursuers, which also makes him unique in the eyes of Socrates; he is beautiful physically, from a prominent Athenian family, and has influential friends (104b5). Although Socrates eventually convinces Alcibiades that he is self-sufficient for all the wrong reasons (*see* 127d-e), that had allowed him casually to brush aside his eager pursuers, Socrates engages Alcibiades in conversation to confirm whether he is sufficiently ambitious to pursue and thus worthy to receive Socrates' friendship (104a-c). In addition to confirming his initial impression of Alcibiades through choices we refer to as The Call of Ambition, the following exchange between Alcibiades and Socrates brings into play the other two categories under which hypothetical choices are offered.

After having gained Alcibiades' confidence by appealing to his conceit and sense of wonder, Socrates offers the following hypothetical choices to Alcibiades:

Suppose one of the gods asked you, "Alcibiades, would you rather live with what you now have, or would you rather die on the spot if you weren't permitted to acquire anything greater?" I think you'd choose to die.... And if that same god were then to tell you that you should have absolute power in Europe, but that you weren't permitted to cross over into Asia or get mixed up with affairs over there, I think you'd rather not live with only that to look forward to; you want your reputation and your influence to saturate all mankind, so to speak. (105a-c)

### **The Call of Ambition**

Alcibiades coyly admits (106a8) that Socrates is right regarding the presence of his enormous ambition. This brief exchange confirms the initial impression Socrates gained from observing Alcibiades as a young boy. In *Alcibiades Major* Socrates does not recount many episodes that might have given him the impression that Alcibiades was a promising youth with ambition. At 110a-c Socrates recounts an episode in which a young, brash Alcibiades accuses a playmate of cheating in a game of knucklebones.

Socrates recounts the episode to illustrate the larger point that even at a young age Alcibiades was confident that he understood justice and injustice. Plutarch, however, recounts several episodes that illustrate Alcibiades' budding ambition, which Socrates may have in mind. Plutarch prefaces his remarks about Alcibiades' childhood by stating that the desire for superiority was the strong passion 'of his real character' (Clough 259). We are told of Alcibiades being placed in such a difficult position while wrestling he bit his opponents' hand to gain the advantage. The opponent accused Alcibiades of biting like a woman; Alcibiades replied 'No'... 'like a lion' (259). In another episode we are told that while playing a game of dice with friends a loaded cart was to pass before the part of the street Alcibiades intended to throw during his turn; he demanded the cart to stop but to no avail. Once the game was over Alcibiades having decided to teach the cart driver a lesson threw himself on the cart and dared the driver to drive on. The driver was so startled '...that he put back his horses, while all that saw it were terrified, and, crying out, ran to assist Alcibiades' (259).

Even if Socrates has these episodes in mind, how might this exchange between Alcibiades and Socrates employ elements of decision theory? First and foremost we see the use of thought experiments in the form of hypothetical choices. Socrates needs to establish as fact his prior observation that Alcibiades is sufficiently ambitious to pursue. Socrates can not establish this fact by focusing on Alcibiades' actualized beliefs, he must focus on Alcibiades' beliefs as a causal property in dictating what Alcibiades would do in the appropriate circumstances. In other words, Socrates must focus on Alcibiades' dispositional beliefs. Under the category The Call of Ambition we believe Socrates is not concerned so much with the content of choices of what is being offered and the intensity or degree of what Alcibiades believes as he is with the mere aspect of employing hypothetical choices as a method to gauge Alcibiades' probable behavior in various circumstances. The category The Limits of Ambition will address the content of choices and Alcibiades' degree of belief in the choices offered to him.

### **The Limits of Ambition**

The fact that Alcibiades would be willing to die if he could not achieve anything greater than he already has or is prevented from ruling over the continent of Europe and Asia, tells us that Alcibiades will order his actions in such a way he thinks most likely to realize his ambitions. Here we see Ramsey's mathematical expectation. The distance Alcibiades is willing to go to acquire greater things is the measure of his ambition and the confidence he has in his abilities. Otherwise the lack of these greater things, which would call for the necessity to remain content with what he has acquired up to this moment, would be a peculiar kind of death by proxy. A belief entails choices, and the choices Socrates offers Alcibiades reveal his preference for hierarchically ordered worlds according to their perceived value in facilitating his ambition to attain greater things, as well as saturating all mankind with his influence and reputation. Schematically, the hypothetical choices offered to Alcibiades by Socrates might look like the following:

Would you rather have world  $\alpha$  ('to live with what you now have') in any event; or world  $\beta$  ('to die on the spot') if  $\rho$  ('if you weren't permitted to acquire anything greater') is true, and world  $\gamma$  (implied: Alcibiades is allowed to acquire greater things) if  $\rho$  is false?

If Alcibiades were certain that  $\rho$  was true, he would then choose, as if no conditions were attached, between  $\alpha$  and  $\beta$ . Alcibiades seems to suggest that he would most likely choose  $\beta$ . (We say 'most likely' because Alcibiades will be shown to have inconsistent thoughts about death when we discuss The Transparency of Ambition.) The relevance of laying out the hypothetical choices as we have underscores Socrates' push to get Alcibiades to show, for all to see, the value he places on possible courses of the world offered to him. We can infer from the value Alcibiades places on possible courses of the world that he may be willing to do whatever it takes to realize his ambition. Alcibiades' ambition may be limitless, at least dispositionally. Socrates can now tailor his conversation to

Alcibiades' enormous ambition by establishing parameters beyond which the conversation is prevented from going. In limiting the conversation, Socrates offers Alcibiades other possible courses of the world which entail different courses of action based on different rankings of beliefs.<sup>45</sup> These other possible courses of the world can be thought of as Socratic counter-offers to Alcibiades' possible world preferences. For example, when we look at *Alcibiades Major* we see the conversation revolving around three weak claims Alcibiades makes regarding knowledge, justice, and the soul. In response, we see Socrates limiting Alcibiades' claims by making claims of his own regarding knowledge, justice, and the soul:

Knowledge (106b-113d): Alcibiades claims he has the general knowledge to go before the Athenians and instruct them in their 'own business' (107d). Socrates makes the counter-claim that there was never a time when Alcibiades learned about justice, what the better tend towards, or 'in keeping the peace or in waging war with the right people' (109a6).

Justice (113d-118b): Alcibiades claims that when the Athenians are conducting their business they are not, in fact, concerned with what is just so as much as they are concerned with what is advantageous, and the just is not the same as what is advantageous (113d3). Socrates makes the counter-claim that the just is always advantageous. In making this claim Socrates argues indirectly that despite how the Athenians and other Greeks think of justice, Alcibiades must always see justice as advantageous and admirable (115a-116e).

Soul (128-135e5): Alcibiades tacitly claims that the user of a thing is not different from all the things he uses. He is inclined to cultivate what he uses, not his true self. Socrates makes the counter-claim that the user of a thing is different from all things he uses because the soul is the true self. The body is an instrument of the soul.

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<sup>45</sup> E.g., Johnson 1999, 11-11 is basically discussing a possible world where Alcibiades' priorities are both limited and transformed by the realization that God is the true self. Cf. Annas 1999, 52-71 on the Middle Platonists' idea that we become god-like by engaging in depersonalized, abstract thinking.

Socrates' counter-claims, initiated by the type of hypothetical choices we find under the category The Limits of Ambition, are an essential feature of Socrates' attempt to have virtue be the goal of Alcibiades' ambition. Not only does it attempt to curtail the length Alcibiades is willing to go in order to satisfy his desires by offering possible worlds that may weaken his allegiance to particular possible worlds and their concomitant beliefs, it highlights how strongly or to what degree Alcibiades holds particular beliefs.

### **The Transparency of Ambition**

The aim of the last category under which hypothetical choices are offered, The Transparency of Ambition, is to disclose the gulf between an interlocutor's stated beliefs and his true beliefs. If Socrates can discern an interlocutor's true beliefs, he is in a better position to facilitate a protreptic experience: To turn the interlocutor towards virtue. The gulf between the two beliefs is either disclosed through the interlocutor's deeds portrayed dramatically or through contradictory statements made by the interlocutor. In the case of Alcibiades we learn, through the use of hypothetical choices offered to him, that he would rather die if he could not rule all of Europe and Asia. So for Alcibiades death is bad. However, when we review relevant passages of the elenctic exchange between Alcibiades and Socrates on whether the just is advantageous (113d-118b), we see Alcibiades assent to the proposition that death is not just bad. The overall aim of the elenchos is to get Alcibiades to say that the just is always advantageous.

Alcibiades holds that some just things are advantageous and some just things are not advantageous (115a). But all just things are admirable (*kala*). Alcibiades supposes it is always admirable to do just things but one might come off much worse by doing them. The question becomes: are admirable things good, or are some bad? Alcibiades believes some admirable things are bad, and some contemptible things (*aischra*) are good. Alcibiades allows for doing admirable things from which one does not benefit. Socrates

suggests the following illustration, which Alcibiades accepts: someone might stay alive in war through not trying to rescue friends or relatives. Trying to help is brave and admirable, but could lead to wounds and death. Therefore: *Trying to save friends is admirable inasmuch as it is brave, but bad inasmuch as it brings death.*

Alcibiades' assent to the conclusion of the elenctic exchange indicates contradictory thoughts about death. This is significant because it suggests to Socrates that Alcibiades' ambition is still quite conventional, although still quite enormous. Alcibiades is not so unusual that he disagrees with traditional moral notions, and how these notions apply to existential situations such as death. Socrates is in a better position now to facilitate Alcibiades' turn towards virtue.

### **Alcibiades Minor**

In *Alcibiades Minor* we find the young, ambitious Alcibiades on his way to say prayers, encountering Socrates on the way, who, by the conclusion of the dialogue, convinces him that he is ignorant of what he needs to know regarding the nature of prayer. At issue is Socrates' insistence that it would be better not to pray for anything specific, but, instead, like the Spartans, pray for what is good. Socrates' thinking is that human knowledge is fallible, we do not know what is best for us or what happiness is, and so it would be best not to pray for anything specific. The use of the type of hypothetical choices we find under the category The Limits of Ambition is prominent in *Alcibiades Minor*. The employment of these choices is prefaced by a discussion of Oedipus. Socrates relates a cautionary tale to Alcibiades about being careful of what he asks for in prayer because Alcibiades may 'be praying for great evils when you think you are asking for great goods (138b6)'. The cautionary tale is the story of Oedipus who inadvertently blurted out the prayer that his sons use arms to settle their inheritance, that eventually came to pass. Socrates then introduces the following hypothetical choices through a personified god:

Suppose that the god to whom you are about to pray were to appear to you and ask you, before you began praying, whether you would be happy to be sole ruler of the city of Athens—or, if that seemed mean and tiny, were to offer you all the Greeks as well—or, if he saw that you regarded that too as insignificant unless the whole of Europe were included, were to promise you all of that plus simultaneous acknowledgement by the whole human race of the rule of Alcibiades son of Clinias. If that happened, I imagine, you will go home very happy and think you had come into possession of the greatest goods. (141a5-b1)

Alcibiades agrees with what Socrates has just said, but Socrates queries Alcibiades whether or not he would be willing to give up his life in exchange for the territory and all of Greece; or if he were to receive these great goods, would he use them badly.

Alcibiades quickly answers a definitive no (141c).

Here we have hypothetical choices similar to the choices offered to Alcibiades in *Alcibiades Major*. In *Alcibiades Major* Socrates was interested in Alcibiades because his nascent philosophical nature needed cultivation, which Socrates recognized in his enormous ambition to be a great political ruler. The whole confrontation at the beginning of *Alcibiades Major* was geared towards confirming Socrates' prior assessment of Alcibiades' ambition, what we have termed The Call Of Ambition. In *Alcibiades Minor* the hypothetical choices offered by Socrates give us a better glimpse of the limits of Alcibiades' Ambition, and, consequently, the limits around which the conversation will revolve. Alcibiades is still very ambitious as his responses to the hypothetical choices indicate, but it is not a reckless ambition. Alcibiades is willing to forgo the territory and rulership if it means giving up his life, or if it means gaining these gifts but using them badly. The caveat Alcibiades makes regarding the hypothetical choices offered to him reveal, at least dispositionally, that he recognizes the impossibility without knowledge of distinguishing between precious and pernicious things. Of course, Socrates will be of some help in getting Alcibiades to distinguish between the two.

As for the limits of the conversation around which the conversation revolves, Socrates is now in the position to hammer home the idea that ignorance of the best is what is bad in the use of possessions and actions. There are many examples that Socrates furnishes to reinforce this idea. For example, if we were in a state of good archers and flute-players, good athletes and craftsmen, each one in possession of a particular skill, but none of which had the knowledge of what is best, that state would be ‘a hotbed of dissention and lawlessness’ (146b2). The idea that Socrates is expressing is that skilled practitioners need knowledge of utility (*ophelimos*) in order to be a benefit to themselves and the community; the knowledge to apply their craft in the real world. What we have here is the thought that practical knowledge serves as the basis of virtue when it is acknowledged that the Spartans only pray that they receive what is good and noble instead of praying for anything more (148c-150b3).

Might this idea of practical knowledge serving as the basis of virtue hit home with Alcibiades? After all, Alcibiades has ambitions to be a great ruler. If he were to go before the Athenian people claiming to give advice on making war, like the orators claim to give advice on various topics, but was ignorant of what advice is best regarding war, might he fail to understand when to go, or for how long, and with whom? Alcibiades must not be an irresponsible intellectual, and Socrates says as much to Alcibiades:

For most people, then, it is an advantage neither to know nor to think they know anything, if they are going to do themselves more harm than good by rushing to do what they know or think they know.—Very true.—So you see it seems that I was quite right when I said that it looked as if other skills, if not combined with the knowledge of what is best, are more often than not harmful to their possessors. (146d1-e1)

### **Xenophon's Memorabilia**

Xenophon's *Memorabilia*: (1) Can be placed within the tradition of apologetic writings that seek to vindicate Socrates from the charges brought against him in the *Apology*, and (2) Is designed to recount the philosophical influence, anecdotally, Socrates had on various acquaintances and friends through conversation (Gray 1998, 26-40). In Xenophon's discussion of Socrates' relationship with Alcibiades, we find most prominently the type of hypothetical choices offered under the category The Transparency of Ambition. Socrates is concerned with distinguishing between Alcibiades' stated beliefs and his true beliefs. Why Alcibiades assumes such importance even for Xenophon is because Alcibiades' subsequent career plays into the hands of those who accused Socrates of corrupting the youth (*see* Plutarch's 'The Life of Alcibiades'), among other things. His accusers argued that Socrates taught his companions to scoff at established laws. Xenophon tells us that Socrates' accusers focused on Socrates' criticism of appointing public officials by lot. Xenophon comments, 'none would choose a pilot or builder or flautist by lot, nor any other craftsman for work in which mistakes are far less disastrous than mistakes in statecraft' (I. II.9-13). In fact, it was Socrates that believed the practice of choosing statesman by lot corrupted the youth, according to Xenophon.

Alcibiades' insolence and licentious under the democracy is held up as being the result of the corrupting influence of Socrates. Although Alcibiades eventually brought great harm to Athens, Xenophon explains that it was through ambition that he came to associate with Socrates (I. II. 14-17). With the exception of Critias, Alcibiades was unlike any other Athenian in his desire to control everything and outdo every rival in notoriety. What Alcibiades saw in Socrates was simplicity, independence, and moderation in all his pleasures. He observed that Socrates was able to do what he liked with any disputant. Xenophon concludes that the apparent reasons Alcibiades sought Socrates' company is because he wanted to benefit from Socrates' simplicity and knowledge. The real reason

Alcibiades sought Socrates' company, Xenophon admits, is to gain proficiency in speech and action in order to realize his ambition.

Xenophon's talk of apparent and real reasons Alcibiades sought Socrates' company is concluded by reflection on the thought that the hypothetical choices offered by god to Alcibiades would confirm Alcibiades' real intentions (Xenophon mentions both Alcibiades and Critias, our focus remains Alcibiades):

For my part I believe that, had heaven granted them the choice between the life they saw Socrates leading and death, they would have chosen rather to die. Their conduct betrayed their purpose; for as soon as they thought themselves superior to their fellow disciples they sprang away from Socrates and took to politics; it was for political ends that they had wanted Socrates. (I. II 13-18)

Xenophon's reflections on Alcibiades' true reasons for associating with Socrates is somewhat unlike the other two examples taken from *Alcibiades Major* and *Minor*. In Xenophon it is not Alcibiades being dramatically offered hypothetical choices; it is rather Xenophon's hypothetical reflection that envisions hypothetical choices being offered to Alcibiades by god. We might argue that the choices do not make transparent Alcibiades' true desires, but they simply tell us the impression Alcibiades made on Xenophon. Yet we surely see the resemblance with Plato's presentation. And, the hypothetical choices offered by the god between death for Alcibiades or adopting the simple life of Socrates, with Xenophon concluding that Alcibiades would choose the former, render Alcibiades' true desires transparent in light of Alcibiades' biography.

Xenophon's hypothetical reflection is not an idle one. It dramatizes the gulf between Alcibiades' preferred reason for associating with Socrates, and the life he eventually led away from Socrates. For Alcibiades to prefer losing his life to imitating Socrates' life suggests a particular order of value in which various beliefs are ranked. Since Socrates values virtue most highly, to be appalled at the prospect of living Socrates' life seems to be a rejection of virtue. In the relevant circumstances,

circumstances away from Socrates' influence, Alcibiades' actions would be guided by licentiousness and insolence (I. II. 12-13). The tentativeness of Alcibiades' actions occasioned by relevant circumstances speaks to the dispositional nature that hypothetical choices reveal. Perhaps Alcibiades would never act in such a manner, but given the choice accepted, there is a high degree of probability that Alcibiades will act in such a manner under the relevant circumstances.

### **Conclusion**

An effective way of ascertaining an interlocutor's degree of belief is through assessing its causal force by determining the extent to which he will act on what he believes given hypothetical choices. The use of hypothetical choices as a method of measuring degrees of belief was explored by the founder of modern decision theory F.P. Ramsey. Whereas Ramsey sets out a numerical formula to measure degrees of belief brought by hypothetical choices and circumstances, we have found hypothetical choices similarly employed by Socrates, though without quantitative measurement, to assess various psychological states of an interlocutor. We have discussed three distinctive categories under which these choices are offered in relation to the figure of Alcibiades in *Alcibiades Major* and *Alcibiades Minor*, and Xenophon's *Memorabilia*. These categories are The Call of Ambition, The Limits of Ambition, and The Transparency of Ambition. The relevance of hypothetical choices can operate on many different levels, and in many different contexts.

By offering hypothetical choices Socrates confirms his initial impression that Alcibiades, as a child, had a nascent philosophical potential that now needs cultivation. We see Socrates employing hypothetical choices to limit his discussion with Alcibiades to certain themes and concerns. Socrates also renders Alcibiades' desires transparent by offering hypothetical choices, that are designed to reveal his true beliefs as opposed to his stated beliefs or deliberate actions. Often the glaring difference between what an

interlocutor professes in words and what he discloses in action, gives rise to bitter, comedic situations for the observer.

We can point to several instances of the use of hypothetical choices in Socratic writings because it is an effective means of ascertaining the psychological momentum of the topics explored. Which reminds us that in Socratic writings, especially the Platonic dialogues, ideas and doctrines are not deracinated, they animate real lives for better or worse.

## Chapter Six: Women, Moral Insight and Marriage

Women play a prominent role in the Spartan and Persian speech in Plato's dialogue *Alcibiades Major*. Assisting Socrates' concern to help a reluctant Alcibiades see how he is at a disadvantage compared to his rivals, the kings of Spartan and Persia, the women of the tale are forthright in their disdain towards Alcibiades. They find it laughable that Alcibiades fails to appreciate what it takes to be a great ruler. Questions that arise due to the prominence of women are: why would Plato cast the women in the Spartan and Persian speech to serve as moral templates? And what might this suggest about the role of women in regard to male achievement, generally? *We conclude that Plato assumes women provide moral insight regarding male goals and achievement.*

The place to begin in support of our conclusion is within the context of familial, female relationships portrayed within the dialogue. After all, it is mainly mothers and wives who deem Alcibiades unfit to challenge their husbands and sons. We will argue that when it comes to Alcibiades' desire to achieve greatness, Plato assumes in the Spartan and Persian speech that women have and continue to play the traditional role of providing a uniquely, feminine moral insight. In addition to the discussion of male achievement and women, we will also look at the social scientist George Gilder, who provides a contemporary perspective on feminine moral insight from the vantage point of men and marriage. As we will discuss, it is within the domain of marriage that we moderns come closest to understanding Plato's assumption about the role women's moral insight plays in male achievement.

The context in which the Spartan and Persian speech is introduced is Alcibiades' repeated failure before Socrates' questioning to give an account of what he knows, how he knows it, and from whom he learned it. Alcibiades' ambition is to present himself to the Athenian people to show them that he deserves to be honored more than Pericles or any other politician that ever was. But we find that Alcibiades is in no position to know

better than the Athenians what they propose to discuss in the assembly. After repeated attempts at refutative and paradoxical arguments that fail to convince Alcibiades, Alcibiades is still unprepared to see the need for education and the lengthy and taxing project of caring for himself. Socrates and he have this exchange:

Socrates: Very well. What do you propose for yourself? Do you intend to remain in your present condition or practice some self-cultivation (*epimelian tina poeisthae*)?

Alcibiades: Let's discuss it together (*koene bule*), Socrates. You know, I do see what you're saying and actually I agree—it seems to me that none of our city's politicians has been properly educated (*apaedeutoe*), except for a few.

Socrates: And what does that mean?

Alcibiades: Well, if they were educated, then anyone who wanted to compete with them would have to get some knowledge and go into training (*askesanta*), like an athlete. But as it is, since they entered politics as amateurs (*idiotikos*), there's no need for me to train and go to the trouble of learning. I'm sure my natural abilities will be far superior to theirs.

Socrates: Good god, my dear boy, what a thing to say—how unworthy of your good looks and your other advantages (*anaxion tes ideas kae ton alla on ton soe hyparxonton*, 119a-c)

It looks for a moment as if Alcibiades is willing to be directed by Socrates, but then he turns away. Rather than aspiring to be superior to other politicians by taking the effort to be educated and know what he is doing, Alcibiades seems content to wander in his thoughts and possibly make mistakes in action and merely surpass the other politicians by his native abilities. At this point, Alcibiades seems to have lost sight of his overall objective of having his name and power be known far and wide because he supposes that he simply needs to surpass the local, Athenian politicians. Socrates compares the case to skippering a naval ship against the enemy. The skipper should try to surpass those he is

warring against and not merely his fellow sailors. Alcibiades should be preparing himself to be better than his city's real competitors rather than his fellows, the real competitors being the kings of Sparta and Persia.

The Spartan and Persian speech, proper, is framed by some judgment about men and what they aspire to achieve. There are three instances in the speech where the judgment takes place, one of which is directed at men in general who try to run the city's affairs without proper preparation, the other two are directed at Alcibiades' political aspirations. From each of these three judgments we will contextualize and discuss the most relevant passages, and then survey the literature to reflect on what others have said about the prominence of women in the Spartan and Persian speech.

## **Midias**

Our first mention of women as judges is prompted by Socrates' frustration with Alcibiades for taking the wrong competitors seriously. The conversation reaches the point where Socrates says:

But no sir, you've got to keep an eye on Midias the cockfighter and such people—people who try to run the city's affairs with their 'slave-boy hair styles' (as the women say) still showing on their boorish minds. They set out to flatter (*kolax*) the city with their outlandish talk, not to rule it. These are the people, I'm telling you, you've got to keep your eyes on. So relax, don't bother to learn what needs to be learned for the great struggle to come, don't train yourself for what needs training—go ahead and go into politics with your complete and thorough preparation. (120a7-c)

Little is known about Midias, other than he was an Athenian politician who was mocked in Aristophanes' *Birds* (1297-8) for being lower-class, an embezzler, and interested in quail fighting. The women referring to politicians with 'slave boy hairstyles' calls to mind the Athenian custom of slaves having their hair cropped short in order to make it

easier to do menial work, but then trying to grow their hair long in order to conceal the tattoo often placed on the forehead to indicate those sold into slavery (Denyer 2001, 168). Considering Alcibiades' low estimation of the Athenian politicians, the juxtaposing of Alcibiades' laziness, in the form of Midias, and his aristocratic prejudices, is quite remarkable. It is as if the wives, with Socrates' full agreement, are warning Alcibiades that no one is more likely to be arrogant than a lately freed slave. Alcibiades' aristocratic prejudices are turned against him.

### **The Persian King's Mother**

The second mention of women as judges come towards the end of the Spartan and Persian speech. Socrates has gone to great lengths to show Alcibiades how negligible his wealth is compared to Spartan wealth. But Spartan wealth is nothing compared to that of the Persian King. To give an idea of the Persian wealth Socrates refers to a trustworthy traveler's report that large tracts of land in Persia were named for parts of the Queen's wardrobe, and devoted to supporting it (123b-c). This discussion of the Persian wealth leads into the following claim:

Now suppose someone were to say to Amestris, the king's mother and the widow of Xerxes, 'the son of Deinomache intends to challenge your son; her wardrobe is worth only fifty minas at best, and her son has less than three hundred acres of land at Erchia.' I think she'd be wondering what this Alcibiades had up his sleeve to think of competing against Artaxerxes. I think she'd say, 'I don't see what this fellow could be relying on, except diligence and wisdom—the Greeks don't have anything else worth mentioning.' (123c-d)

The point is that Alcibiades cannot be counting on his wealth in competing with Artaxerxes but can only be considering the care he must take of himself and his wisdom. Yet we have seen that Alcibiades does not suppose that he has to take much care of himself because his competitors, he thinks, differ hardly at all from other men. Though he

is but twenty years old and largely uneducated, he believes he can compete with the Persian King. But Socrates, referring to the Persian monarch's mother's judgment can hardly believe him:

What in the world could this youngster be relying on? Suppose we were to reply, Good looks, height, birth, wealth, and native intelligence. Then, Alcibiades, considering all that they have of these things as well, she'd conclude that we were stark raving mad. (123e)

The case has been made that Alcibiades can hardly count on surpassing the Persian or Spartan Kings by his personal advantages. Clearly he must take care of himself to seem to be competitive.

### **Lampido, Daughter of Leotychides**

The third mention of women as judges is at the conclusion of the speech. Here Socrates speaks in his own voice as if generalizing the consensus on how the Spartan and Persian women feel about Alcibiades' lack of preparedness in competing against their men:

Again, I think that Lampido, the daughter of Leotychides, wife of Archidamus and mother of Agis, who were all Spartan kings, would be similarly amazed if you, with your bad upbringing, proposed to compete with her son, considering all his advantages. (123e-124a)

Socrates recognizes that it should be shameful to Alcibiades that the women of his enemies should have a better appreciation than he does of what he needs to undertake to compete.

### **What commentators have said about the prominent role of women in the Spartan and Persian Speech**

When we survey the literature on *Alcibiades Major* and the Spartan and Persian speech we find, as a rule, very little discussion, if any, of the role of women. Discussions

that have focused on the role of women in the speech tend to find it peculiar, but not significant; or if an account is offered it is exaggerated, and in the wrong direction. Of the two, the latter comes closest to seeing the role of women in the speech as we do, as judges. Typical of the discussions that find the role of women in the speech peculiar, but insignificant is Nicholas Denyer's commentary on *Alcibiades Major*. Although Denyer, for example, takes note of what the women say about Midias the cockfighter and politicians who flatter the city, the most significant thing he says is that Socrates gives a feminine pronunciation to the word 'slave-boy hair style' (168). Denyer claims that women's speech was more conservative than men's, and had its characteristic pronunciations (169). We can plausibly infer from what Denyer has told us that because women's speech was conservative, women's judgments were conservative. Subsequently, they are attuned to the malaise of immoderation that demagogic politicians are prone to in trying to gratify the city. Denyer makes no such inference. As for the Persian king's mother, Amestris, expression of disbelief about what Alcibiades could possibly be relying on to challenge her son, Denyer only says that "Amestris is represented as feeling disdain when she is represented as referring to Alcibiades, in his absence, by such a combination of the article with the demonstrative pronoun and his name (188). Lampido's comment (see *Alcibiades Major* 124a) that she, too, would be amazed if Alcibiades tried to compete with her son considering Alcibiades' bad upbringing is left without remark by Denyer.

The discussions of the Spartan and Persian speech that take notice of the prominence of women exaggerate their significance, and often in the wrong way. Steven Forde's short, but insightful commentary, on *Alcibiades Major* is typical of this. Forde rightly sees the women's comment regarding Midias' 'slave-boy hair style' as significant for Alcibiades' political aspirations (229). The challenge of Midias for Alcibiades is that entering into a contest with him is tantamount to Alcibiades' neglecting himself. For those politicians who are like Midias, Forde suggests, will prove successful most often

because they create the illusion that their competitors need not try very hard to defeat them. Hence, the competitors become self-defeating. How can the Midias types be stopped? Forde's proposal is that by putting women in control of Athens they will know how properly to despise Midias (229). We are most sympathetic to Forde's insight that women may know how to despise the Midias types because it is in line with what we think Plato presupposes about women: they provide moral insight regarding male achievement. We are most opposed to Forde's proposal that only if women are in power can they properly disdain unworthy politicians. To the contrary, we will argue the more moderate position that women, regardless of whether they are in power or not, are capable of knowing how to despise due to a uniquely, feminine moral sense. All of Forde's subsequent remarks about the Spartan and Persian speech are premised on this over exaggeration of the prominence of women. For example, Forde's reading of the trustworthy traveler telling Socrates about parts of the land in Persia being named for parts of the Queen's wardrobe echoes his proposal about women having to be in a position of power to exercise moral insight. Forde claims:

The word that Socrates uses to designate each of these [the queen's wardrobe] is kosmos, a term used often enough to designate at least ornamental or cosmetic furnishings but one whose primary meaning is 'order' and one that in this acceptance is of great philosophical significance. Indeed, what we learn from the trustworthy traveler whom Socrates cites is precisely that the Persian domain is cast onto a very well defined order; that order revolves somehow around the person of the queen. (230)

We do not think it is obvious that Socrates' trustworthy traveler is saying what Forde is claiming he is saying: the queen is at the center of the Persian domain. As Amestris' observation attests regarding the wide disparity in material wealth between Alcibiades and her son, it is the king's mother's summation of what she knows about Alcibiades and what she knows about her son that makes her judgment about Alcibiades likely failure so

powerful. An observant woman, though, on the fringes of the Persian domain, knowing what Amestris knew, would have made the same judgment. Forde concludes his comments on the Spartan and Persian speech with several points we are in agreement with. The queens of Sparta and Persia recognize true superiority. And because of this recognition, or what we call, moral insight, the wives and mothers of the Spartan and Persian kings will judge Alcibiades fit to achieve his goal of being a great ruler only when he makes himself superior to their kings and sons (231-232).

### **Women and Moral Insight**

The two questions with which we began this chapter, and the answer we proposed, steers clear of the two extremes that comprise the discussion of the role of women in the Spartan and Persian speech. We find the role of women significant and prominent, but not exaggerated. The assumption that women provide a degree of moral insight in regard to male achievement is taken for granted both by Socrates and Alcibiades in the speech. As we mentioned, women's judgments about boorish politicians and Alcibiades' potential frame the beginning of the speech and the ending, but Alcibiades does not seem to mind, and Socrates encourages it. What we mean by moral insight is *the power or act of seeing into a situation with regard to standards of right behavior*.<sup>46</sup> Necessarily this definition would render women a conservative element within the social order given that standards of right behavior operate according to precedence. When we look at the three instances of women judging, we find that the political behavior of politicians are being judged in relation to a generic standard or pattern of non-slavish politicians and Alcibiades is being judged in relation to the

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<sup>46</sup> Cf. Aristotle's comments on how tyrants favor putting women in positions of power because women tend to conserve the mores of regimes. In tyrannical regimes the hope is that women will inform against their husbands' political opposition to the tyrant (*Politics* 1313b30-40).

standard or pattern represented by the kings of Sparta and Persia. Each of these judgments tends toward conserving right behavior.

The judgment made about Midias, in particular, is used by Socrates against the prejudice that Alcibiades expressed earlier that politicians of dubious and slavish backgrounds are not real Greeks. Midias genuflects before and flatters the people, as the word *kolax* indicates. He desires to massage other people's self-esteem with the hope of benefiting himself. Ordinarily, the word *kolax* is used in reference to a private life, but in the Spartan and Persian speech the term is extended to cover the demagogic activities of politicians. So Alcibiades is being forewarned by the women not to continue down the course he is presently on, but to follow the course of the genuine statesmen by pursuing a genuine education. The women are implicitly praising what Alcibiades can become and blaming what he is presently on the grounds that objective social standards are such that if he accepts what Socrates offers he, too, can be formidable.

When we turn to the judgment of Amestris, the Persian king's mother, we find her assessment of Alcibiades' wealth to be in accord with what we have been arguing regarding moral insight. Alcibiades' intention to rival her son Artaxerxes is seen by her the way the women see flattering politicians, as the petty strivings of people who have 'slave-boy hairstyles.' Whereas before Socrates used what the women said about the slavish-minded Midias in relation to a generic standard or pattern of what it is to be a genuine statesmen, Amestris knows specifically what it will take for Alcibiades to be a formidable competitor in rivaling the Persian king. Here we may appeal to Aristotle's characterization of the magnanimous man in order to appreciate what it is that informs Amestris' bewilderment towards Alcibiades:

The result of good fortune, however, seems to contribute to magnanimity. For the well-born and the powerful or rich are thought worthy of honor, since they are in a superior position, and everything superior in some good is more honored. Hence these things also make people more magnanimous, since some people

honor their possessors for these goods. In reality, however, it is only the good person who is honorable. Still, anyone who has both virtue and these goods is more readily thought worthy of honor. (*EN* 1124a20-25)

Alcibiades has proven deficient in all the traditional assets of an up and coming king when compared to the assets possessed by the Spartan and Persian kings. He is superior in no goods Amestris recognizes as meriting honor (i.e., wealth, birth, power, intelligence). Thus, all the traditional avenues to greatness have seemingly been closed to Alcibiades, according to Amestris, and there is no room for finagling.

The judgment of Lampido concludes the speech, and supplements the reaction of Amestris with the weightiness of tradition. Lampido speaks as one whose grandfather was a Spartan king, Leotychides, husband was a Spartan king, Archidamus; and her son is a Spartan king, Agis. In Lampido we have moral insight distilled generationally. She, too, would be similarly amazed if Alcibiades were to compete with her son considering his bad upbringing. Might we conclude that, in fact, Lampido's judgment is the summation of what Socrates has been trying to convince Alcibiades of all along: the ease with which he considers himself to be the equal of the kings of Sparta and Persia is in direct proportion to the knowledge gained by struggle and self-cultivation that keeps the kings in power.

### **Conclusion: Men, Marriage and Moral Insight**

We have argued that when it comes to Alcibiades' desire to achieve greatness, Plato assumes in the Spartan and Persian speech that women provide moral insight, which is the power or act of seeing into a situation with regard to standards of right behavior.<sup>47</sup> Perhaps a contemporary audience might approach a discussion about the role

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<sup>47</sup> The Milesian Aspasia is another example of this type of women we have in mind, and her much sought after moral advice echoes the advice offered to Alcibiades in the Spartan and Persian speech. Plutarch tells us that Aspasia was charming, and that she emulated, from old Ionian times, the courtesan Thargelia. The fact that Aspasia strove to emulate Thargelia underscores the point we have been making that when it comes to standards of right behavior women operate according to precedence. We also learn from Plutarch

of women in male achievement in terms of the popular cliché: *behind every great man is a woman*. Maybe so, but we feel the cliché confirms Plato's assumption about the role women's moral insight play in any endeavor involving male achievement. When we look at the modern institution of marriage, for example, we see little difference between the judgments of expectation made about Alcibiades' desire to rival successfully the Spartan and Persian kings and the judgments of expectation a wife imposes on her husband. In both situations there is a standard of right conduct to be followed, for Alcibiades it is the genuine rulers and the Spartan and Persian kings, and for the husband it is the role of good provider.

In describing marriage and the transformative power of women's moral insight on husbands, George Gilder's book *Men and Marriage* gives a contemporary description of what the *enemies' wives* were telling Alcibiades. He must rid himself of ignorance and become civilized:

In creating civilization, women transform male lust into love; channel male wanderlust into jobs, homes, and families; link men to specific children; rear children into citizens...divert male will power into a drive to create. Women conceive the future that men tend to flee.... (5)

Gilder's comments on women's role in marriage and the civilizing affect it has on husbands foregrounds historical continuity that allows us to appreciate Plato's assumption regarding the role of women in male achievement. Gilder's argument is that in webs of relationships between males and females, most notably in marriage, wives act as moral judges of their husbands, "spurring attainment of the highest male purposes" (177). In *Alcibiades Major* Plato's thinking parallels Gilder in that he suggests the idea that moral insight women disclose in judging male achievement is most effective in

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that Aspasia resided over a political salon that included Socrates and her renowned statesman-lover, Pericles. It was thought that by keeping Aspasia company and heeding her words any man could succeed at what he set out to accomplish. For example, we hear of Lysicles, a sheep-dealer, a man of low birth and character achieve great things in Athens after having kept Aspasia company (Plutarch's *Pericles* Vol.1, 221).

specific male/female relationships. With the exception of the general designation ‘the women’ (see 120b-c) who judge men slavish who undertake the city’s affairs without knowledge, the women judging Alcibiades in the dialogue are referred to as having familial, specific relationships (i.e., as mothers, sisters, or wives). We find Plato’s distinction important because it suggests two lines of thought Gilder pursues in arguing for the existence of moral insight women disclose in judging their husband’s goals and achievements: (1) The civilizing role women as wives play through their moral insight is inscribed in their bodies; and (2) Due to this inscription wives display a singular, feminine moral sense rooted in intimacy and caring.<sup>48</sup> Marriage becomes the field in which the feminine moral sense vis-à-vis a husband’s goals and achievements is given the greatest scope for judging.

The civilizing role women as wives play through their moral insight, according to Gilder, is accounted for by her breasts and womb which symbolize a female specific potentiality that extends through pregnancy, “childbirth, lactation, suckling, and long-term nurture” (9). For the woman who has gone through such experiences they prove to be critical psychologically. They are times of great emotions signifying life altering

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<sup>48</sup> Recently we have seen the emergence of a distinctively feminine role in ethics expressed by feminists. The most prominent of these feminists is Carol Gilligan and her influential book *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women’s Development*. Gilligan sets out to counter developmental psychology’s privileging of masculine defense of justice and equality (i.e., rules and abstractions) as the highest level of moral development by privileging a feminine moral perception rooted in webs of relationships and responsibilities. We find Gilligan’s argument for the existence of a feminine moral sense persuasive, but it fails to account squarely for the *origins* of a feminine moral sense. For example, Gilligan’s introduction states the following about the intention of her book:

The different voice I describe is characterized not by gender but theme. Its association with women is an empirical observation, and it is primarily through women’s voices that I trace its development.... No claims are made about the origins of the difference described or their distribution in a wider population, across cultures, or through time. Clearly, these differences arise in a social context where factors of social status and power combine with productive biology to shape the experience of males and females and the relations between the sexes. (2)

Surely Gilligan equivocates in discussing the origin of the differences between the sexes because initially she says no claims will be made about the origins of the differences, but she goes on to tell us that these differences are due to social status, power and biology. In fact, Gilligan’s book accounts for the differences between the sexes by the interplay of social status and power only, not biology. Each page of her book strenuously argues that women’s moral sense is merely an equal counterpoint to masculine ideals and in no way connected to biology. There is a uniquely, feminine moral sense rooted in webs of relationships and responsibilities but we feel it originates in the womb and at the breast.

choices both on the personal level and societally. Even for the childless women what her body represents is a powerful symbol because it is a continuous reminder of her unquestionable importance to herself and the community.<sup>49</sup> Although a woman may experience anxiety about her sexual role and how to perform it, she, nonetheless, takes her sexual identity for granted due to its importance and symbolism.<sup>50</sup> Gilder's argument is shown to be most insightful when we reflect upon the sexual identity of men in relation to their bodies. The male body has no civilizing role inscribed within it. "Masculinity," Gilder exclaims, "is at bottom empty, a limp *nullity*" [emphasis added] (9). Unlike the female body, a man's body is full of undefined energies in need of the guidance of culture. The masculine roles a male assumes are all cultural inventions, with the roles husband and father being the most enduring and productive of inventions for civilized life. Even the civilizing role males assume as fathers and husbands emphasize the primacy of women's sexual identity because men can only define and defend the extant of their sexual identities through external activity (i.e., male achievement).

Because men can only externalize their male identities through activity, women as wives are in the unique position of perpetually judging their husbands' activities. What accounts for the wife's ability to judge her husband's activity, explains Gilder, is a singular, feminine moral sense rooted in caring and intimacy due to the biological basis of female sexuality. The feminine moral sense assumes a civilizing role in the guise of wife and mother when we turn to the two most enduring cultural constructs available in defining male identity, husbands and fathers. The biological bases of men's sexual identity, as we have seen, depends on men proving themselves by *doing*. Outside of marriage the single male has no enduring cultural script to follow, so the constant *doing*

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<sup>49</sup> Cf. The discussion and its implications regarding the symbolic significance of femininity found at (*Alcibiades Major*, 121b-c) on the length to which both the Spartan and Persian kings are willing to go in order to protect the chastity of their queens.

<sup>50</sup> (Hole and Levine, 306) highlight typical female confidence and complacency regarding women's sexual identity.

eventually provokes a sense of male dispensability. Men begin to see themselves as sexually optional. This sense of dispensability is the impetus that makes young males good soldiers, martyrs and crusaders, but undesirables when it comes to marriageability.<sup>51</sup> Upon entering into marriage men must commit to a sense of futurity by adapting to a feminine requirement that demands long-term responsibility and discipline. Men must perform, and they perform best, and most confidently, when they are in a durable relationship with a women (14). Through marriage the limp nullity that characterizes masculine sexual identity is transformed; it is “conceived and experienced as having specific long-term importance like a woman’s” (14). It is the women’s judgment of a particular man, though, that enables the transformation to take place.

In fatherhood we also see the civilizing role the wife’s moral sense of intimacy and caring plays in transforming male sexual identity. It must be emphasized that the role of father is the product of marriage and other cultural contrivances, not biology. The fact that there is no biological basis for the father to be around when the baby is born attests to this fact. Only the mother has an easy and dependable connection to the child (7). She is organically indispensable, both physically and emotionally. The father becomes an integral part of his child’s life only when the mother acknowledges his paternity, and “his position must be maintained by continuous performance, sexual and worldly, with the woman the judge” (13).

Gilder’s discussion of marriage between a man and a women attributes immutable qualities to women that are grounded in their bodies. These qualities give rise to a uniquely feminine moral sense that is expressed quite vividly in the ability of women in marriage and *mutatis mutandis* the various women in the Spartan and Persian speech, to judge male performance. We maintain that the women in *Alcibiades Major* play the part of perpetuating traditional sexual roles (i.e., demanding that Alcibiades be a man of

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<sup>51</sup> Cf. The discussion of Alcibiades’ sexual exploits and his demise caused by a lady of a noble house (Plutarch’s *Lives*, Vol. 1).

excellence who leads the people instead of a politician who slavishly ‘flatters’ [κολαξ  
120b5] the people, and that Gilder’s contemporary perspective on male and female  
sexuality foregrounds Plato’s sincere, but benign, point that when it comes to male  
achievement, women provide moral insight into what is needed and how best to get there.

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

In its choice of themes, the dissertation's aim has been to scrutinize the ideas expressed in *Alcibiades Major* from a number of different perspectives. To that end, the overarching idea of the dissertation is captured in the dissertation's title, Socratic Encounters: Plato's Alcibiades. *Alcibiades Major* is so ripe with philosophical themes that, apart from how the themes animate the dialogue, they prove illuminating in other contexts, as we have shown. We conclude the dissertation by reflecting briefly on the implications of our approach to reading the dialogue this way.

The main implication of our approach is the challenge it poses to the rumors that the ancients are not as relevant as they once were. Two chapters of the dissertation, in particular, show the continuing relevance of the dialogue and its timeless insights.

Chapter Two's title alone, 'Listening in Plato's *Alcibiades Major* and Plutarch,' is instructive for modernity. What could be more rewarding than learning how to listen appropriately in an age that places a premium on quickness? It behooves us to look with admiration at the Graeco-roman tradition (first century B.C. through the second century A.D.) of reflecting upon listening, and how to benefit morally from what one listens to. As we pointed out, Plutarch is only one of many fine writers who composed short treatises on listening. Others include Pliny, Seneca, and Epictetus. In this chapter we showed the origins and likely consequences of listening inappropriately in *Alcibiades Major*. Its relevance for modernity lies in accounting for Alcibiades' failure to benefit from the Socratic conversation. Although Alcibiades' dispositions prevented him from benefiting from Socrates, the fact that one's psychological states can affect what one hears invites us to consider their causal factors. The chapter offered an answer to such concerns. Socrates' conversation was not simply an intellectual exercise (i.e., analyzing arguments) to convince Alcibiades he needed a genuine education. It was also an attempt to moderate Alcibiades's desires. Socrates' approach to Alcibiades was, in part,

motivated by the assumption that Alcibiades' desires (or sentiments) were anterior to his reason. If he can alter Alcibiades' feelings he can alter Alcibiades' thinking. Socrates wagers that if he can get Alcibiades to recognize that his states of envy, excessive admiration, and inability to listen actively while engaged in conversation are impediments to realizing his ambition, he may be able to convince Alcibiades intellectually that his ambition is misdirected.

Chapter six, 'Women, Moral Insight and Marriage,' goes some distance in revealing the timelessness of the ancient insight on the relationship between men and women illustrated in *Alcibiades Major's* Spartan and Persian speech. On first reading the speech one is left with the impression that it is a nice, literary excursion in a dialogue chronicling the quest for a genuine education by the young Alcibiades, but without applicability to modern concerns. In fact, we showed how important and relevant the prominent role given to women in the speech by Plato is by comparing it to the role feminist thinkers, such as Carol Gilligan, envision women playing in contemporary society. For both Plato and Gilligan women provide moral insight regarding male goals and achievement. The difference, of course, between the two is that feminist thinkers tend to account for the role women play in male achievement by saying, as Gilligan does, that the role is to be seen as a descriptive phenomenon only, which obviates any need to make claims about the origins of the role. Plato, on the other hand, locates the difference precisely where Gilder locates it in modern society: webs of relationships initiated through female specific potentiality that extends through pregnancy, childbirth, lactation, suckling, and long-term nurture. The role that women play in male achievement is biologically based.

Despite the biological bases of the role of women in the Spartan and Persian Speech, the speech could be read as an introduction to Gilligan's *In a Different Voice*. They each portray women in the same manner, but from different perspectives. By adjoining the Spartan and Persian Speech to *In a Different Voice*, the former would serve

as the *mythos* and the latter would serve as the *logos*. The pairing of these two thematic tropes would be in keeping with several of Plato's other dialogues (e.g., *Protagoras*, *Hipparchus*, *Phaedrus*) that communicate to its audience on a number of different levels.

These are just a few examples of how the ideas expressed in *Alcibiades Major* can resonate in the lives of modern readers when broadened to apply in a variety of different contexts. The dissertation has shown that the ancients can be a source of inspiration and guidance to those who seek it.

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