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# Plato's Villains: The Ethical Implications of Plato's Portrayal of Alcibiades and Critias

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Plato's Villains:

The Ethical Implications of Plato's Portrayal of Alcibiades and Critias

A Dissertation

Presented to the Faculty

Of the Philosophy Department

McAnulty College and Graduate School

Duquesne University

in partial fulfillment of

the requirement for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

by

J. Baynard Woods, Jr.

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## Chapter 1

### Introduction

In an argument claiming that Plato's early dialogues present the historical Socrates, Gregory Vlastos says:

Xenophon's Socrates, pious reciter of moral commonplaces, would have elicited nothing but a sneer from Critias and a yawn from Alcibiades, while Plato's Socrates is just the man who could have gotten under their skin (Vlastos 1971, 2-3).<sup>1</sup>

Vlastos intends to justify a claim to Socratic authenticity.<sup>2</sup> But he also tells us something about the ways in which we read Plato. He shows that when we read a dialogue, we import external knowledge into it in order to supplement our understanding of the arguments and the characters. This external knowledge opens temporal dimensions that the dialogue form cannot include, but must necessarily imply. No dialogue lasts longer than a single day. But, in order to understand the role a particular character plays in a dialogue, we must take into account what we know about their lives from other sources. I argue that we not only do this, but that Plato intends us to, and constructs the dialogues so that they force the reader to take a diachronic view of the characters.

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<sup>1</sup> Elsewhere in the same essay Vlastos characterizes Critias as "that nasty intellectual." (1971, 9).

<sup>2</sup> Brickhouse and Smith offer a good description of Vlastos' influence. "The entire field of Socratic studies has been a busy one lately, stimulated to a large degree by the attention called to it in the work and teaching of Gregory Vlastos. Although we rarely agree with Vlastos' specific positions, our debt to him and our recognition of the great significance of his work will be obvious from our many references to his work ... No doubt, our very selection of topics reflects Vlastos's influence" (1994 vii-viii). For another similar account cf. Beversluis 2000.

This diachronic dimension helps us judge or weigh the arguments that characters put forth. Ruby Blondell calls this diachronic dimension “historical irony.” She describes it as follows:

Plato can exploit his audience’s knowledge of subsequent events in a way that parallels the dramatic irony of the tragedians. Just as the playwright’s audience knew how the main events of a myth would turn out ... so Plato’s readers knew the prominent events and ideas of late fifth-century and early fourth-century Greek history and read the dialogues in their light. Plato uses this technique, which I call ‘historical irony,’ in various ways (Blondell 2002, 32).

I argue that the main purpose of Plato’s use of historical irony is to enable the reader to see the relationship between the lives that people lead and the accounts that they give. One can only see this relationship over the course of time. Plato doesn’t show us Alcibiades and Critias when they are coming to ruin. Rather, he presents them in their youths in order to highlight the importance of arguments and accounts on the outcome of their lives. That is to say, that by the use of historical irony, Plato is able to turn historical individuals into paradigmatic characters.

In a recent book, Frances Pownall shows the ways in which fourth century historians created what she calls a “paradigmatic history” which views the past as a way to illustrate moral points (2004).<sup>3</sup> Thus, I build on Pownall’s concept of “paradigmatic history” in my investigation of Alcibiades and Critias as “paradigmatic characters.” I agree with Pownall that Plato, like the historians who followed him, saw the figures of the past as models of different kinds of living and as potential moral examples. I show, however, that Plato’s use of historical characters is far more complex than what we see in

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<sup>3</sup> She points out that the “influence of Socrates and Isocrates in particular results in a greater emphasis upon the instruction of political virtue in the interpretation of the past by fourth century prose writers. As a result, the moral and didactic elements implicit in Herodotus and Thucydides become overt and the primary focus of the historical works of Xenophon, Ephorus, and Theopompus” (2004, 29).

Pownall's account. Plato uses historical figures in order to show us something about the human experience of time itself and to enable us to evaluate synchronic arguments in a diachronic way. Paradigmatic characters show the relationships between accounts and lives. Plato does this through a complex use of intertextual relations with the historians.

Intertextuality is a term coined by Julia Kristeva and associated with post-modern literary theory.<sup>4</sup> Intertextuality refers to one text's use of and reliance on the resonance of other texts and other genres. Andrea Nightingale uses this concept to show how Plato incorporates the echoes of other genres in order to create the genre of philosophy. Nightingale focuses on Plato's use of tragedy, encomia and comedy. Of these comedy is the most useful for our discussion for it, like the *Socraticoi logoi*,<sup>5</sup> is a genre which uses historical characters paradigmatically. Nightingale does not use the treatment of historical characters to investigate Plato's relation to the historians.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, very little work has been done to show Plato's connections with the tradition of classical historiography. My dissertation shows the relation between the genres of historiography and philosophy by focusing on the figures of Alcibiades and Critias. Plato relies on the knowledge that his reader has of the historical tradition, but he also uses some of the same literary devices and sees history in the same way as many fourth century historians.

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<sup>4</sup> Cf. Barthes "Any text is a new tissue of past citations. Bits of code, formulae, rhythmic models, fragments of social languages, etc., pass into the text and are redistributed within it, for there is always language before and around the text. Intertextuality, the condition of any text whatsoever, cannot, of course, be reduced to a problem of sources or influences; the intertext is a general field of anonymous formulae whose origin can scarcely ever be located; of unconscious or automatic quotations, given without quotation marks" (1981, 39).

<sup>5</sup> See also Kahn 1996, 1-36.

<sup>6</sup> The historical awareness of Plato's early readers would be much more complex: a combination of remembered experience (in some cases) and both oral and written sources. It would more greatly resemble the knowledge that a twenty-first century reader possesses of twentieth century figures such as Richard Nixon or Winston Churchill.

Thus, by combining the key concepts of Nightingale, Blondell and Pownall, I am able to arrive at a philosophically rigorous and historically adequate description of Plato's use of historical characters.

Then I turn to the philosophical purpose behind Plato's portrayal of these characters in particular. It is not as immediately obvious as it is in the case of Xenophon who explicitly defends Socrates against the charges that link him to the corruption of Alcibiades and Critias. Xenophon begins by claiming that "those two men were by nature the most honor-loving of all the Athenians. They wished that all affairs might be conducted through themselves and that they might become the most renowned of all." (I.2.14).<sup>7</sup> Xenophon tells us how bad Alcibiades and Critias were, but Plato shows them exclusively when they were young and promising. Xenophon's employment of Alcibiades and Critias is historical, while Plato's is philosophical.

Plato makes a philosophical use of Critias and Alcibiades in order to show something about the way in which human beings live in relation to time. Most fundamentally, through these characters, he shows that temporal relativism—or the tendency to identify with a particular mode of time as one experiences it—causes one to forget one's true self, or soul. This explains how it is that we think we know things that we don't (*Apology* 29a) and how we always err unintentionally (*Protagoras* 358d). When we are lost in the moment, we forget that it is simply a moment and thus we forget the totality of our lives. When I identify with a particular temporal perspective, I take it as the truth, as in the Protagorean claim that "as each thing appears to me so it is for me"

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<sup>7</sup> Then he says: "If the two of them struck false notes in some way, then, the accuser blames Socrates for this; but does Socrates deserve no praise in the accuser's opinion for the fact that when they were young and likely to be most lacking in judgment and continence he rendered them moderate" (I. 2.26).

(*Theaetetus* 152a).<sup>8</sup> The struggle to overcome this temporal relativism is the attempt to achieve objectivity or to account for the effects of my own perspective.

Plato shows Socrates using argument as a way to remember his true self, and to avoid escaping his own notice. The word *λανθάνομαι*, which means to forget, or to escape the notice of, comes up repeatedly in the discussions of these characters. We escape our notice when we forget that our perspective is a perspective, when we are not aware of our limits and when we think that we know what we don't know. Thus the ability to remember one's self (with all its limitations) is the "human wisdom" of the *Apology* (20e). But, since it is time and change that cause one to forget oneself, we cannot assume that once one comes to know that one knows nothing that one has achieved this state once and for all. Instead one must continually remind oneself of oneself by means of questioning and investigation, as Socrates does. This shows what Socrates gains from his endless questioning. His elenchus is an attempt to account for and eliminate his own perspective.<sup>9</sup> Of course, he hopes to remind others of their souls, but as we see from the examples of Alcibiades and Critias, often he does not. Nevertheless, his questioning enables him to see his life as a whole—i.e. rationally—rather than forgetting himself and the forgetting through the identification with one of the temporal modes of his life.

This means that Plato uses historical characters to show the ways that arguments affect character over the course time. In order to make a strong case for philosophy,<sup>10</sup> it is

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<sup>8</sup> All translations of Plato shall be those in Cooper's edition of the *Complete Works* (Cooper, 1997) unless otherwise noted.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Scott (ed.), 2002, for a variety of views on the elenchus.

<sup>10</sup> See Nightingale for a thorough discussion of Plato's claims for philosophy. In her introduction she says "In order to create the specialized discipline of philosophy, Plato had to distinguish what he was doing from all other discursive practices that laid claim to wisdom. It is for this reason that, in dialogue after

imperative for Plato not only to present Socrates as a positive example but also to show the ways that bad accounts and misunderstandings adversely affect our lives in the long run and explain why the “unexamined life is not worth living” (*Apology* 38a). Thus, Plato presents us not only with Socrates as an example of constancy and the proper relation to time, but he also uses other characters in a paradigmatic way so that we can gauge the effects of different accounts on different lives.

This dissertation analyzes these problems in four parts. The first part consists of four chapters treating various aspects of the *Protagoras*. This dialogue provides the framework for the analysis of the other dialogues in which Alcibiades and Critias appear. The second part consists of separate chapters analyzing the *Alcibiades I* and Alcibiades’ speech in the *Symposium*. The third part similarly consists of a discussion of the *Timaeus-Critias* and the *Charmides* in both of which Critias appears. Finally, in the fourth part, I look at the larger social context of the decline of these two paradigmatic lives in a discussion of *Republic* I, and VIII.

In Chapter 2, I present Plato’s use of paradigmatic lives in the *Protagoras*. Alcibiades and Critias arrive at the house of Callias together in the *Protagoras* (316a). Though subsequent history may associate the two this is the only time they appear together in Plato.<sup>11</sup> Plato uses paradigmatic characters in the *Protagoras* so that we may use them as a way to measure our own lives.

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dialogue, Plato deliberately set out to define and defend a new and quite peculiar mode of living and thinking” (1995,10-11). I would add that Plato must not only show that his ‘specialized discipline’ was different from other discursive practices, but he must show the danger of not adopting his “quite peculiar mode of living and thinking.” One particularly effective way to get this point across is through the use of emblematically disgraced figures.

<sup>11</sup> Lampert and Planeux (1998) argue that Alcibiades is the missing fourth in the *Timaeus*. Their case, however, is largely speculative.

The *Protagoras* begins with a discussion of Alcibiades just after the conversation with Protagoras ended. That is, it begins as retold, where Socrates knows what happens and his friend does not. When we reach the end of the dialogue, this makes sense for there Socrates says that they should “return to inquire about whether it [virtue] can or cannot be taught, so that Epimetheus might not frustrate us a second time” (361d). Socrates is referring to Protagoras’ creation story at 320d. He continues saying that he liked the Prometheus character better. “Since I take promethean forethought over my life as a whole, I pay attention to these things” (361d4-6). I argue that the dialogue is constructed in such a way that the reader is forced to think of it as a whole. Within the whole, Plato presents us with a variety of historical characters in this dialogue, because it is easier for us to see the effects of the arguments on their lives than on ours. In this chapter, I offer an extremely close reading of the opening passages of the dialogue, while elucidating the dialogue with a discussion of Thucydides and Xenophon. This discussion sets up the next three chapters, each of which concern the effects of time on virtue as presented in the *Protagoras*.

In Chapter 3, I turn to the first of several very detailed discussions of the arguments concerning time and the human experience of it. In this chapter, I look specifically at the larger temporal issues of progress and decline as they appear in *Protagoras* 311b-328e. I focus on Protagoras’ views of time, progress and education.

Early in the *Protagoras*, Socrates asks what Hippocrates can expect to gain if he becomes a student of the sophist. Protagoras claims that “the very day you start, you will go home a better man and the same thing will happen the day after. Every day, day after day, you will get better” (318a). Protagoras’ educational claims set up the tension of the

dialogue and the difficulty of virtue in the context of change. Protagoras here spells out a progressive view that is continued in, and justified by, his so-called Great Speech.

The first word to appear in the Great Speech is χρόνος, or time, and I show that the speech is obsessed with time (320d). The myth presents a story in which Prometheus and Epimetheus are given the task of assigning powers to the different kinds of creatures. Epimetheus takes the task from his brother. During the distribution Epimetheus forgot (ἔλαθεν)<sup>12</sup> himself (αὐτόν) and he in so doing also forgot humanity. That is, in forgetting himself, Epimetheus forgot us. This is the basis for our kinship with the gods. Humanity becomes an aporia for Epimetheus and we experience ourselves as an aporia (321c). Humanity is the result of a titanic afterthought.

The fact that Epimetheus does not provide for humans helps Protagoras offer an account of progress, but Epimetheus also becomes the model for the ways in which we forget ourselves in the course of time. These two positions are necessary correlates of one another. As E.R. Dodds notes, any idea of forms makes real progress impossible (1973, 4). Thus Protagoras needs divine error, and no real natures, in order to have his kind of progress. Thus, Martha Nussbaum (1986, 101) is wrong to make Protagoras a conservative essentialist. I show that his view of progress strips the world of forms and he ends up as a proto-existentialist, for whom existence precedes essence.

Both the initial discussion and the Great Speech serve to show the progressive views of Protagoras. Because Epimetheus forgets humanity, humanity is able to improve and thus virtue is teachable. That Protagoras intends the speech as a justification of his art becomes clear in the discussion that immediately follows (324a-327). Here Protagoras

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<sup>12</sup> Recall the opening of the dialogue where Socrates claims to have forgotten Alcibiades most of the time (309b).

claims that everyone teaches virtue in an argument similar to that made by Meletus in the *Apology* 24d-25c. Yet, the presence of Alcibiades and Critias undermine this argument in 433 at Callias' house and again in 399 at Socrates' trial. Protagoras did not see the events that were to befall Athens just a year after dramatic date of the dialogue. Protagoras both helped form and was formed by the great Periclean Age of Athens. Alcibiades and Critias represent different and less golden times thus showing the difficulty—if not impossibility—of progress. The next chapter makes these claims explicit.

Chapter 4 is divided into two parts. The first treats the arguments for the unity of the virtues (329d-333c and 358c-360e). In this part I show that, though it may be difficult to say precisely how knowledge unifies the virtues, we can clearly see the conceit of wisdom as the ignorance that unifies the vices since “anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily (ἄκοντες)” (345e). Thus the first difficulty to virtue is the overcoming of ignorance of ignorance. That is, we must first become aware that we are not aware. It seems extremely difficult to do this in solitary meditation and thus we need conversation with another in order to awake.

In the second part, I deal with Socrates' interpretation of Simonides' poem. I show that—despite the interruption from 334d-339a—Socrates continues to press the same concerns that motivated the initial discussion of unity of the virtues. Here, Socrates shows that the passage of time makes the overcoming of ignorance so difficult.

I show that one must become and not be virtuous, precisely because virtue is a kind of knowledge that is never fully attained, but is instead a constant struggle. One cannot ‘be’ virtuous without succumbing to the conceit of wisdom that thinks it knows what it does not. Becoming virtuous, I argue, is the “human wisdom” of the *Apology*, a

wisdom that constantly guards against this conceit by means of the elenchus. In the next chapter I discuss Socrates' solution to this problem.

Chapter 5 treats the section of the *Protagoras* falling between 351b-358d. This section has been discussed more than any other part of the dialogue in recent years.<sup>13</sup> In this chapter I address the problems of hedonism, akrasia and measurement. In each of these the element of time is central to the argument. By focusing on this common aspect, I am able to show that Socrates may in fact offer the 'hedonistic' argument on an *ad hominem* basis, or from the positions of Protagoras, but that he also takes it quite seriously. That is, he is using pleasure to argue *from* the position of Protagoras *toward* his own position. So in the first stage, Socrates forces Protagoras to acknowledge the role temporal perspective plays in any professed hedonism. Socrates is showing that even the ordinary hedonist is in reality a Protagorean relativist and so, even Protagoras is, in some respect, an ordinary hedonist. He does this by removing temporal perspective and showing the role it played. Socrates has the many argue that pleasure now is very much different than later pleasure and answers:

[t]hey are not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way they could differ. Weighing is a good analogy; you put the pleasures together and the pains together, both the near and the remote, on the balance scale and then say which of the two is more (356b1-5).

This shows that in cases of akrasia it is the presence, not the pleasure that is the deciding factor. Indeed, it is predominantly perspective that causes one to choose as one does.

Protagorean relativism is consistently presented in Plato as declaring the truth of perspective (cf. *Theaetetus* 152a and *Sophist* 236b). The present is the *de facto*

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<sup>13</sup> Gregory Vlastos claims that "more was to be contributed to this topic by English speaking scholars in the following nine years [after his 1956 Introduction to the *Protagoras*] than had appeared in the previous forty" (1995, 43).

perspective and so it is favored by relativism because pleasures appear larger in the present due to the power of appearance. Socrates explains this phenomenon, which Walsh calls a “systematic illusion” (Walsh 1971, 269) by means of a spatial analogy. The Protagorean relativism, which turns out to be the position of the many, is temporally myopic and is lost in the things that appear big because they are nearby. Thus, Protagoras’ claim to make Hippocrates better and better each day cannot be true, for Protagoras sees the good merely as the pleasant present. In order to make Hippocrates better each day, Protagoras would have to have a view of the whole that he does not have.

Socrates then shows that the way that pleasure appears is *not* the way that pleasure is (and to do this he does not have to reject pleasure, but only reject the immediate temporal perspective). Only one perspective of pleasure is correct, precisely not the one that appears, but the one that we arrive at when perspective is accounted for, or corrected (refuted) by questioning. Socrates is committed to hedonism, but only as he redefines it. He succeeds in radically redefining pleasure not as something to be assessed from moment to moment, but rather, over the course of an entire life (351b). This is the elimination of perspective altogether and it succeeds in equating the pleasant and the good. Socrates shows that if one looks at pleasure over the course of a lifetime everyone will see the same things as pleasant. When this has been done, akrasia and the relativism of Protagoras and the many have all been reduced to absurdity.<sup>14</sup>

Chapter 6 brings us to the second major section of the dissertation. In this chapter, I turn to the *Alcibiades I*, where we see that Socrates makes Alcibiades realize that he

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<sup>14</sup> I agree with scholars Martha Nussbaum and Brickhouse and Smith, who argue in different ways that Socrates accepts pleasure as a unit of measurement for goodness and in the chapter I offer a comparison with the *Republic* and I show that Plato presents us with historical characters so that we can measure their lives. I believe that we find that even only in terms of pleasure, once a life has been completed, Socrates lived a far more pleasant life than any of the other interlocutors in the dialogue.

does not know himself and that he is fit to be ruled rather than to rule. Socrates begins by telling Alcibiades that he has been watching him for years (103a-b) but that his *daimonion* has kept him from speaking or acting until now. Ultimately, Alcibiades will admit that he is planning on going into politics, even though Socrates has shown him that he has no knowledge. Thus, in the opening lines, Socrates is setting an example of the proper relationship to time.

Socrates continues, pointing out to Alcibiades that he does not know his real ambition in life (105a). This is another form of not knowing oneself. Alcibiades is dominated by his ambition and yet he is not aware of it in so far as he doesn't prepare for the responsibility that accompanies his ambition. Socrates says, "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 (μείζων)' I think you'd choose to die" (105a5-b1). Alcibiades of course, does not know what "greater" means. After some time, Alcibiades concedes that the "better turns out to be the same as more just" (109c12-13). Socrates asks him "who taught you how to tell the difference between the more just and the less just" (109d4). He is again asking Alcibiades to remember his own ignorance.

At the end of the discussion on justice and advantage Alcibiades has reached the point of recognizing this. "I swear by the gods, Socrates, I have no idea what I mean—I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition (ἀτεχνῶς ἔοικα ἀτόπως ἔχοντι)! When you ask me questions, first I think one thing (ἕτερον), and then I think something else (ἄλλα)" (116e). Alcibiades is without art (ἀτεχνῶς) and ground (ἀτόπως), but he has never noticed it before. Thus the seeming surprise in Socrates' response. "And are you

unaware (ἀγνοεῖς), my dear fellow, of what this feeling (τὸ πάθημα) is?” (116e). Of course, the feeling is one of ignorance. This shows that Alcibiades is ignorant of his ignorance. He is unaware of the feeling of wavering until it is pointed out and even then he slips quickly back into it. Socrates tells Alcibiades “not only are you ignorant about the most important things, but you also think you know what you don’t know” (118b1-2).

Socrates’ description of his previous attitude towards Alcibiades and his comportment here—having this conversation first, with no small talk or flirting—sets up an immediate contrast between himself and Alcibiades and lets him serve as a model for the young man. From here, I go on to show Socrates’ solution to this problem and his prescription for Alcibiades. I show that Socrates offers this prescription in temporal terms. I argue that one of the reasons that Socrates separates the soul from the body and what belongs to the body is to enable Alcibiades to see his life in a rational way. Time belongs to movement and movement belongs to body and not to the soul.<sup>15</sup> Socrates wants Alcibiades to put his soul first so that time will not be so pressing and he will not be caught up in the rush of events. That is, he is pushing him to recognize the divine self-motion of the soul instead of the distracting movement of events.<sup>16</sup> In the discussion of “self knowledge,” Socrates tries to get Alcibiades to see the active part of his soul actively. Socrates tries to get him to think rationally about the rational part of the soul.

In the third and shortest part of this chapter, I show the way that the author of the dialogue plays upon the reader’s knowledge of the historical tradition in order to show

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<sup>15</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s definition of time as the “number of motion with respect to before and after” (*Physics* 219b1). This account largely agrees with Plato’s discussion of time in the *Timaeus* where time is a “moving image of eternity” (37d). This moving image of eternity is a number and this “number, of course, is what we now call time (37d). It is because the cosmos is becoming rather being that it is a *moving* image of eternity.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus* 245c, 245e; *Timaeus* 88eff.; and *Laws* 895b.

another temporal effect and allow us to see Alcibiades' life as a whole in a way that we can't see our own. Again it is through argument and the measurement of other lives that we can come to think of our own lives as whole.

Chapter 7 treats Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*. I show that Alcibiades presents two complex psychological portraits, one of Socrates and another of himself. The portraits are constructed with a temporal care that helps to demonstrate how the souls are contrasted precisely in their relation to—and experience of—time.

Martha Nussbaum sets the frame-tale of the dialogue in 404 and thus making the figure of Alcibiades central to the dialogue (Nussbaum 1986, 170). Nussbaum argues that this date explains the seemingly incongruous interest expressed by a “business man” in speeches made about Eros at a drinking party (that turned out to be over decade earlier). Leo Strauss places the dialogue at 407, when Alcibiades returned to Athens, was granted full powers and lead the procession to Eleusis. Both accounts are possible the constant uncertainty regarding Alcibiades due to his propensity for change. The dialogue also shows us that, as often as Alcibiades' life changed, Socrates was, remarkably, doing the same thing in 404, 407 and 416 (the date of the dinner party). Alcibiades' speech presents us with pictures of memory and forgetting. As Stanley Rosen notes, the dialogue may be “tentatively described as a series of recollections within a recollection” (1968, 2). These recollections show us a Socrates who is split from his appearance and an Alcibiades, split from his reality.

From here I move on to the third part of the dissertation in which I look at the appearances of Critias in Plato's dialogues and I diagnose in him a different form of the same forgetfulness that we saw in Alcibiades. Alcibiades forgets himself due to constant

change and ambition. Critias also forgets himself in ambition, but his ambition is fundamentally nostalgic. In Chapter 8, I show that the Prologues of the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* present tales of memory and forgetting and they cast serious doubt on the project of historical investigation. These dialogues show the ways in which Critias fares poorly due to his relation to time and change.

The identity of the Critias of the dialogue has been hotly contested within the scholarly community. In this chapter, I argue, first, that Plato intended the temporal inconsistencies and resulting confusion about the identity of the character. Then, I show the way that Plato uses this temporal confusion to characterize the soul of Critias. Critias is a conservative aristocrat who sees authority in the relation to the past. He knew the genealogy of his family for six generations. I show that many of the inconsistencies are lies intended to bolster his authority. This characterizes his discourse as an attempted coup of the city described by Socrates on the previous day. Critias claims that he will take Socrates' mythological city and make it actual by placing it in history (26d).<sup>17</sup> Thus he shows that he misunderstands Socrates' and Timaeus' discussion, partly because he was remembering the account he heard from his grandfather. In the *Critias*, he becomes so wrapped up in remembering that he forgets himself, and the dialogue, an intentional fragment, goes blank and once again we see that forgetfulness is most forgetful of itself. This forgetfulness uses memory—and historical inquiry—to forget itself. Critias is full of memory, but these memories cause him to forget himself. This has the most dismal consequences for Athens.

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<sup>17</sup> When he does so he reintroduces the family and the private household.

Chapter 9 investigates these same concerns in the *Charmides*. Plato shows the difference between Socrates and Critias in terms of their arguments and their respective understanding of their own accounts of *sophrosune* (σωφροσύνη), or temperance. Plato sets the dialogue just after Socrates' return from Potidaea. The setting of the dialogue asks us how these accounts will fare when tested by war. I show that Socrates thinks of his life as a whole and thinks about it rationally and in so doing, at the very beginning of the long war, he minimizes the distinction between the battlefield and the city as far as his soul is concerned. Critias, however, erases the difference between war and peace when he turns the city itself into a bloody battleground at the war's end. Both Critias and Socrates present conceptions of the knowledge of knowledge and how it may rule a city. If the accounts are struggling for the soul of Charmides, it is clear who's account wins and at what cost.<sup>18</sup>

Charmides gives an account of *sophrosune* that was provided to him by Critias (161c). In it he says that “temperance is minding one's own business” (161b4). This is remarkably similar to Cephalus and Polemarchus' attempt to define justice as “to give each what is owed to him” (331d). Such a definition is of no use if one does not know what one's proper business is, or what is owed to whom.<sup>19</sup> Such “knowledge” is only possible if one knows that one does not know and remains aware of oneself. This is lost on Critias and in the final part of this dissertation I will deal with the larger social implications of this account of time and forgetting in two chapters treating the *Republic*.

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<sup>18</sup> Charmides died fighting Thrasybulus, with Critias.

<sup>19</sup> In the *Memorabilia*, Xenophon reports the following story: “For when the Thirty were killing many citizens—and not the worst of them—and turning many to the commission of injustice, Socrates said somewhere that it would be a wonder, in his opinion, if someone became a herdsman over a herd of cattle and made the cattle fewer and worse didn't agree that he was a bad cattle-tender, and still more a wonder if someone who presided over a city and made the citizens fewer and worse were not ashamed and didn't think himself a bad president over the city” (II.2.32).

In the first of these—Chapter 10—I offer an intertextual reading of *Republic I* and Lysias’ *Against Eratosthenes*. I locate and examine a number of intertextual parallels between the two works. The *Republic* takes place at the house of Polemarchus and the scene at the beginning of the *Republic* mirrors the arrest of Polemarchus in street in Lysias. The theme of time, degeneration and violence is everywhere in introductory discussions of the nocturnal *Republic*. I move from here to a discussion of the conversation with Cephalus and finally to Polemarchus’ inheritance, death, and relation to philosophy. This chapter makes clear the extent to which the ghost of Polemarchus—and thus the hand of Critias—haunts the *Republic* and raises the problem of intergenerational, or political, decline.

In Chapter 11, I follow the proposed analogy between the city and the soul and move from the discussion of the decline of specific individuals over the course of a lifetime, to the corruption of populations over the span of generations as described in *Republic VIII*. I show how important generational difference and generational conflict are to Plato’s conception of education and of the ideal city. I argue that the elimination of the generation gap is one of the fundamental motivations behind the proposals of the ideal city. Plato is quite clear that the individual household (οἶκος) is the seat of generational conflict and miseducation. It is the household that disrupts the proper isomorphism between the city and the soul and its elimination is one of the most important steps in the establishment of the ideal city. It is important to remember this is one of the aspects of the ideal city that Critias overthrew when he put the city in history and the same thing happens here. When decline begins in the *Republic* (549c-d), the household has already surreptitiously been reintroduced and the timocratic man is explained in terms of the

different desires of his mother and father. This initial marital difference creates generational difference. The existence of generational difference and private households all but ensures that, if a regime is not just (and static) it will devolve into tyranny, sooner or later. If it does not, it is only by chance. Thus, in order for a city to remain stable, generational difference must be eliminated as much as possible. For the city, as well as the individual, it seems, Plato holds that the unexamined life is not worth living.

The characters of Alcibiades and Critias have shown that even the worst of characters do not intend to act viciously, but suffer a progressive ethical and cognitive deterioration due to an original set of false beliefs. This means that in all but the ideal case (the true account) one will deteriorate. A false opinion cannot be maintained; it must be eliminated or it will always be compounded. The previous discussions of Critias and Alcibiades have dramatically shown us that even the most promising people can become wretched and vicious even if they have regular access the special attention of Socrates. If one never chooses to do wrong, but so many people do so many bad things then, Plato seems to say, drastic change is necessary. The *Republic* offers a model of change in order to achieve stability.

In *Republic VIII*, Plato offers a political account of the same diachronic deterioration he has dramatically shown through the characters of Critias and Alcibiades. Alcibiades and Critias are not neutral examples. They represent the two competing political positions. If democracy produces an Alcibiades and oligarchy a Critias, what is one to do? Plato uses these characters to make the same point as *Republic VIII*, which shows that in all but the just polis and the just individual, tyranny is a possible and eventually ineluctable outcome. Unless justice is obtained, extreme injustice is

inevitable, given enough time.<sup>20</sup> There are exceptions within any city—such as Socrates—but Alcibiades and Critias make us ask whether this is enough.

In this way the accounts of the effects of temporality in the *Protagoras* and the *Republic* offer an explanation of Plato's use of Critias and Alcibiades in the other dialogues and we arrive at a coherent picture of their incoherent relationships to time. We are blind to such effects unless we read Plato intertextually with the historians. Vlastos and the scholars who have followed him want to find the historical Socrates in the work of Plato. I show Plato's thought on the relation between the human being and time and history. In a brief conclusion, I present some of the implications of my work and make some general conclusions outside of the framework of any particular dialogue.

In this dissertation I show that Plato turns historical characters into paradigmatic characters by means of the historical irony that is produced by the intertextual relations between the Socratic dialogue and the historical narrative. Plato uses these paradigmatic characters in order to evaluate the effects of the accounts that they give over the course of time. This entire process, the measuring of arguments with examples and vice versa, is designed to help us avoid escaping our own notice; they are designed so that we might recollect ourselves.

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<sup>20</sup> This is what Popper refers to as Plato's 'historicism' (1950).

## Chapter 2

### Promethean Readings and the Measurement of Paradigmatic Lives

In the introduction, I offered a general theory of Plato's use of historical characters in order to add an implicitly diachronic element to the dialogues. In this chapter, I offer a close analysis of temporal narrative strategies of the *Protagoras*. In the following chapters, I will show that the philosophical theme of the dialogue is the relationship between time and virtue and that we can understand the unity of virtue only when we understand the unity of life. Here I prepare this study with a careful reading of Plato's presentation of the historical characters included in the dialogue and the narrative structure that contains them. I will focus particularly on the young Athenians, Alcibiades, Critias, and Callias. These characters are in a situation similar to that of the reader in so far as they are forced to choose sides. And yet, the lives of all of the interlocutors are "closed" whereas the life of the reader is still open. Thus the reader can use the fates of these characters in order to help evaluate his or her own life.

Ruby Blondell says that the "reader of Plato's dialogues is seduced by a dazzling interplay of unity and multiplicity" (2002, 1). She attributes this "dazzling interplay" to "a tension between 'philosophical' content and 'literary' form" (2002, 1). One could interpret this as a tension between narrative and argument. Narrative consists in the presentation of consecutive events, but argument—though it moves in stages—deals

primarily with the synchronic relations.<sup>21</sup> This tension in many ways models that between being and becoming that is central to Plato's philosophy. Plato uses historical characters because it enables him to suggest temporal possibilities that argument cannot, but the arguments allow us to contemplate stasis and totality.

Though there are many scholars interested in a "literary" reading of Plato, such readings have not often been rigorous enough in their analysis of Plato's narrative strategies, particularly as they relate to time. In the early twentieth century scholars (such as Zielinski 1901<sup>22</sup>) began to question whether or not Homer was able to represent simultaneous events. Scholars of Plato have not been equally rigorous regarding his narrative strategy, and as a consequence, very few commentators have asked how Plato represents the passage of time or consecutive events within a single dialogue.<sup>23</sup> This chapter will offer a careful reading of the narrative techniques of the *Protagoras*. It is particularly important to show how Plato treats the time and character from a literary perspective in a dialogue that is philosophically so concerned with precisely these issues of time and character.

Plato does not use just any characters, but often makes specific use of characters of historical significance. In doing this, he incorporates the works of the historians into his dialogues. Thus, the characters are paradigmatic. That is, he can use the knowledge the reader has obtained from many sources in order to make his own philosophical point. By his paradigmatic use of characters, Plato uses the art of measurement so that we can assess what constitutes a well-lived life. Though the dialogue begins with Alcibiades,

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<sup>21</sup> This seems to be one of the points of *Sophist* 252a-263e. Relations can exist in a way that involves neither time nor change.

<sup>22</sup> I am grateful to Lorenzo F. Garcia for pointing out this reference.

<sup>23</sup> I will avoid the more difficult issue of temporal relations between dialogues.

many of the other Athenian characters offer us alternative fates to contemplate.<sup>24</sup> In this chapter I will offer the lives of these characters in outline, while setting up the apparatus we will need to understand the dialogue as a whole. I will pay particular attention to the frame within which the entire dialogue occurs and to those points at which discussion breaks down in order to allow an interplay between characters. In doing this I will show the complex ways in which Plato represents and makes philosophical use of the passage of time on human life.

Writing on Apuleius' *Golden Ass*, John Winkler makes a distinction between a first and second reader.<sup>25</sup> The second reader knows what will happen and is therefore aware of the structure of the whole. "No reader can really be expected to see what is coming the first time through. There were, one later recalls, or rereads, premonitions" (Winkler 1985, 10). Winkler continues, saying that it "is only a second-time reader, a rereader, who will be fully alert to the ambiguities and traps" that point towards the conclusion (1985, 10). In his own discussion of the *Golden Ass*, Winkler champions an artificial, or hermeneutic, first reader, who remains open to such ambiguities.

When discussing the *Protagoras*, however, it may be wise to begin at the end, as second readers. In the final lines of the dialogue Socrates suggests that they continue to seek virtue and "then to return to inquire about whether it can or cannot be taught, so that Epimetheus might not frustrate us a second time in this inquiry (μη πολλάκις ἡμᾶς ὁ ἑπιμηθεὺς ἐκεῖνος καὶ ἐν τῇ σκέψει σφίλη)" (361d). Socrates is referring back to

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<sup>24</sup> I agree with Friedlander 1964 ii, 10, that there is a political element involved in the discussion. It is partly for this reason that I focus on the lives of the Athenian youths present, rather than those of the sophists. This is true of Socrates himself, who conducts his discussions with the sophists for the sake of the youths who listen. Patrick Coby 1997 reads the dialogue in terms of the character of Protagoras. See his introduction, 13-17.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Winkler 1985, 1-22.

320d and suggesting that, as first readers we had been tripped up by Epimetheus, who had somehow caused us to fail. Socrates says that he liked the Prometheus character better. He says, “It’s because I have forethought for my life as a whole that I go into all these questions” (ὄ χρώμενος ἐγὼ καὶ προμηθούμενος ὑπὲρ τοῦ βίου τοῦ ἑμαυτοῦ παντὸς πάντα ταῦτα πραγματεύομαι) (361d4-6). Protagoras misunderstands entirely. He tells Socrates, “We will examine these things later, whenever you wish; now it is time to turn our attention elsewhere (καὶ περὶ τούτων δὲ εἰς αὐθις, ὅταν βούλη, διέξιμεν· νῦν δ’ ὦρα ἤδη καὶ ἐπ’ ἄλλο τι τρέψομαι)” (361e). His words reflect the concern with time that dominates the dialogue, while mirroring the attitude of Epimetheus, who waits until later to address the rational (321c); in the meantime, he turns his attention elsewhere. Socrates responds that he will leave; he should have gone some time ago.

*After* speaking these words and leaving the house of Callias, Socrates meets his associate to whom he will narrate the dialogue. Plato has set up the *Protagoras* so that the whole dialogue begins as retold (or reread). Thus, from the first words, Plato offers us models of both first and second readers. As we read the dialogue, we are becoming more like Socrates and less like the ‘associate’ to whom the dialogue is recounted, unless, like Protagoras and the others, our attention takes us elsewhere and we forget ourselves. Ultimately, Plato encourages us to think of the dialogue as a whole so that we can think of our lives as a whole.

### **Time and Appearance: 309a-c**

The discussion of Alcibiades that begins the dialogue circles around the theme of perspective. The dialogue opens with Socrates' anonymous associate asking "Where have you just come from, Socrates? (Πόθεν, ὦ Σώκρτατες, φαίνῃ;)" (309a1). A more literal translation is "From where, Socrates, have you appeared?" These opening words establish the theme of appearance. An appearance is always from 'somewhere;' i.e. appearance is by definition perspectival.<sup>26</sup> This is one of the reasons that appearances are so unreliable. The danger of appearance is that we take the characteristics of our limited perspective as part of the thing itself. If it appears from somewhere, it appears "to us" and not "by nature," but we take the way that it appears to us as its nature.<sup>27</sup> This is the essence of Protagorean relativism. Socrates puts it in the *Theaetetus*, "that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you" (ὥς οἷα μὲν ἕσκατα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὐ σοί)(152a6-8). Perspectives may either be spatial or temporal (cf. *Sophist* 235d-236a).

In the *Protagoras*, when the associate says that it is clear (δῆλα) to see that Socrates has been hunting Alcibiades, it is, in fact, far from clear. This does not mean, however, that it is not true. In a sense, Socrates has been hunting Alcibiades, as he hunts the souls of all the Athenian youths at Callias' house. The associate does not know this and continues, "Well I saw him the other day and he certainly still is a beautiful man (καὶ μὴν μοι καὶ πρόρην ἰδόντι καλὸς μὲν ἐφαίνετο ἀνὴρ ἔτι)" (309a). Again the Greek

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<sup>26</sup> Coby's claim that "He greets Socrates as an appearance (*pothen phaine*), as an apparition that has suddenly materialized before him" (1987, 19) seems either exaggerated, or pointless. He is not treating Socrates as an apparition, but Plato is pointing out an essential feature of appearance.

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Aristotle *Physics* 184a17-20.

says more literally: “To me seeing (μοι ἰδόντι) him in the recent past (πρώην) he still (ἔτι) appeared (ἐφάνετο) to be a beautiful (καλός) man.” Here we have another form of φαίνω and two temporal markers.

The ‘ἔτι’ is of special importance. It signals that Alcibiades was beautiful in the past and has remained so, but that he may not always remain so. Like the English ‘still’ it holds the relation between the three temporal modes of past, present and future. The only reason that we would remark that something is ‘still’ a certain way—it is still sunny outside, for instance—is because of the expectation of change. Appearance is temporal, it is formed by what may be called the structural difference between the past present and the future. This structural difference is analogous to the spatial difference between “here” and “there.” The closer something is to here or now, the larger and more important it seems.

The associate remarks to Socrates upon the social impropriety of his relationship with the “man” Alcibiades, whose “beard is already (ἤδη) filling out” (309a). This phrase tells us a great deal. It is a comment on the *erastes/eromenos* relationship that is essential to Athenian intergenerational relations. Such relations are essential to the experience of time and history. In Athens such relationships were subject to relatively strictly enforced codes.<sup>28</sup> When the associate comments on Alcibiades’ age, he implicitly scolds Socrates on the impropriety of the relation.<sup>29</sup> Socrates asks, “Well, what of it? I thought you were an admirer of Homer, who says that youth is most charming when the

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<sup>28</sup> See Dover 1978 and Davidson 1998 for two different views on this institution. We will have occasion to return to this subject more explicitly when we discuss the *Symposium*.

<sup>29</sup> Taylor thinks that it is a question of desirability rather than propriety. “Sexual attractiveness was considered to fade with maturity; *cf. Alc. I* 131d. Hence Alcibiades, who is now a man, is (from the erotic point of view) ‘past his best,’ though still handsome (1976, 65). It is interesting that he is ‘past his best’ however when from our point of view he has not achieved or failed in the ways that we know him for.

beard is first blooming—which is just the stage Alcibiades is at” (309b). More literally, the Greek says “which Alcibiades now ( $\nu\tilde{\upsilon}\nu$ ) holds.” If we remember that Socrates has just finished his conversation with Protagoras about temporal distance, the  $\nu\tilde{\upsilon}\nu$  takes on a heightened significance. Wisdom is superior to beauty (309c) because the kind of beauty that Alcibiades has is determined entirely by perspective, either spatial or temporal.

There are two passages in Homer to which Socrates could be referring, one in the *Iliad*, the other in the *Odyssey*. Both of them refer to Hermes. Zeus sends Hermes who is described as appearing “for all the world like a young prince, sporting his first beard just in the prime and fresh warm pride of youth” (*Iliad* XXIV 346-349)<sup>30</sup> to lead old Priam, unseen, past the Achaean ships. The passage in the *Odyssey* is also referring to Hermes. Here, he is protecting Odysseus from Kirke. Both cases specifically concern appearance. We may wonder whether Socrates is comparing Alcibiades to Hermes in some way. Or is he (like his friend) commenting on the transitory nature of what is called beauty? In either case, it is likely that Plato uses these references to bring the mutilation of the Hermae to the reader’s mind. If an ancient reader were aware of the passages, he would most likely not fail to recognize the connection that remains between Alcibiades and Hermes.

The “mutilation” is in the ‘future’ of the dialogue, which is set “shortly before the outbreak of the first Peloponnesian War, probably about 433” (Taylor 1976, 64).<sup>31</sup> Socrates would have been about 37 and Alcibiades 17. I want to argue that Plato would not stress Alcibiades’ youth if he were not using the historical characters included in the

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<sup>30</sup> Unless otherwise noted, all translations of Homer are Fitzgerald’s.

<sup>31</sup> A rough consensus has developed on the issue of the dramatic date of the dialogue. Cf. Guthrie 1969 iv, 214 and Nussbaum 1986, 443.

dialogues to open up a diachronic temporal dimension in the dialogues. Whatever the dramatic date, it is prior to Alcibiades' political and military career. It is also prior to the mutilation of the Hermae, which is the turning point, or crisis, in that career.

### **The Mutilation of the Hermae**

Alcibiades

In the summer of 415, Athens voted to give the generals Alcibiades and Nicias the power to recruit the forces necessary for the invasion of Sicily. Thucydides says, "In the midst of these preparations [for the invasion] all the stone Hermae in the city of Athens, that is to say the customary square figures so common in the doorways of private houses and temples, had in one night most of them their faces mutilated" (6.27).<sup>32</sup> The population thought that this was a bad sign for the expedition "and a part of a conspiracy to bring about a revolution and upset the democracy" (6.27). To these charges were added those of profaning the mysteries in private houses (6.28). Those who were opponents of Alcibiades "magnified the matter and loudly proclaimed that the affair of the mysteries and the mutilation of the Hermae were part and parcel of a scheme to overthrow the democracy and that nothing of all this had been done without Alcibiades" (6.28). Alcibiades asked to be tried before he left on the expedition, in order to prove his innocence, but this request was refused. His enemies wanted "to have him sent for and brought home for trial upon some graver charge which they would easily trump up in his absence (6. 29).<sup>33</sup> Here we see the themes of presence and absence, now and later, that

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<sup>32</sup> All translations of Thucydides are Crawley's unless otherwise noted. Gomme, Andrews and Dover point out that "whether early in the period or very shortly before the expedition was due to sail, neither Thucydides nor any other ancient source tells us" (1970 iv, 271).

<sup>33</sup> For a comparison between Thucydides and Andocides, see Gomme, Andrews, and Dover (1970 iv, 273).

come to dominate the later half of the *Protagoras*. Alcibiades displays a certain degree of forethought in his attempt to settle the matter before the expedition. It seems as if Alcibiades was acting wisely, but was overcome by his enemies.<sup>34</sup>

Thucydides explains that once the ships had sailed “the Athenian people grew uneasy and suspicious of those involved in the affair of the Mysteries, and became convinced that all that had taken place was part of an oligarchic and monarchical conspiracy” (6.60). The suspicions were wide-ranging,<sup>35</sup> but they fell most harshly onto Alcibiades. Thucydides writes:

Now that the Athenians fancied that they had got at the truth of the matter of the Hermae, they believed more firmly than ever that the affair of the Mysteries also, in which he was implicated, had been contrived by him in the same intention and was connected with the plot against the democracy...in short, everywhere something was found to create suspicion against Alcibiades (Thucydides 6.61).

Alcibiades was recalled and left Sicily, though he never returned to Athens (6.61). Instead, “Alcibiades, now an outlaw, crossed in a boat...to the Peloponnesus; and the Athenians passed sentence of death by default upon him and those in his company” (6.61). He would, however, continue to play a major role in Athenian politics (and the self-conception of the Athenians) long after this sentence was passed. These incidents seared the image of Alcibiades into the minds of the Athenian public. Ten years later Aristophanes was able to produce the *Frogs*, in which the deciding factor in a contest (in the underworld) between Euripides and Aeschylus was the opinion of the poets on the recall of the fallen general (1422ff).

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<sup>34</sup> Cf. Chapter 4 for a discussion of the role of external events in our misfortunes.

<sup>35</sup> Murray (1990, 149-161).

Plato's reference to the Homeric passages at the beginning of the *Protagoras* alerts the careful reader to the importance of this future on the discussion. The reference not only links the life of Alcibiades to that of Socrates, but also to a whole cast of historical characters, who were both "present" at the house of Callias for the discussion with Protagoras and involved either in the mutilation of the Hermae or the profanation of the mysteries.

References to these events will reappear throughout the dialogue. For instance, when Socrates and Hippocrates arrive at Callias' house, they are greeted by a eunuch (314c). It is reported that the faces and the genitals of the Hermae, which also guarded doorways, were mutilated that night in 415. Socrates refers to the house as the underworld (315c-316a), setting the true drama of the dialogue into the dark future.<sup>36</sup> The underworld is the future of each interlocutor, but it is a distant future. We are interested in what these characters did in the interval between birth and death. We can learn from the ways in which they lived and died. Though the setting is compared to Hades, on a more mundane level the dialogue takes place at the house of Callias (311a).

#### Callias

To readers of Plato, Callias, is most often thought of as a very rich man who lavishes money on sophists (*Apology* 20a-b) and he is portrayed that way here. He was known for his lavish spending, but he was also known as a priest. Regarding this spending and the priesthood it has been said,

He was famous also for dissipating his personal wealth, at one time among the greatest in Greece, so that by 387 he had only two talents (while his grandfather's

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<sup>36</sup> The reference is to *Odyssey* XI.

wealth amounted at one time to two hundred talents), and near the end of his life he could be called the ‘beggar priest’ (μητράγυπτης) (Clinton 1974, 49).<sup>37</sup>

Callias was also known for his relation with Alcibiades and the mysteries, over which he was perhaps *daduch*, or torch bearer, during the affair of 415. Clinton describes the relation thus:

The office of the *daduch* was involved in the accusation of Alcibiades for impiety in this year. The charge was that Alcibiades called himself hierophant, Polytion *daduch*, and Theodorus of Phegaia herald. The *daduch* was certainly among the priests and priestesses of Eleusis who cursed Alcibiades in 415 and who had to rescind their curse in 408...Callias may well have been the *daduch* at this time (Clinton 1974, 48).

Not only was Callias one of the officials at Eleusis, but he was also Alcibiades’ brother-in-law. Alcibiades treated his wife Hipparete horribly and yet he and Callias argued over the size of his dowry, when Alcibiades argued that he was owed ten additional talents (Clinton 1974, 48-49). Finally, as Clinton reports, “Alcibiades was also said to have planned the assassination of Callias in order to acquire his wealth” (Clinton 1974, 49). Thus emerges a web of political, familial and religious connections that explode in the mutilation. In addition to this we know that Callias was proxenos to Sparta, a position which Alcibiades’ “paternal grandfather, Alcibiades II is known for having renounced...in 462” (Nails 2003, 13). This is an office which Thucydides (5.43.2 and 8.891) shows that Alcibiades would try to reclaim.<sup>38</sup>

### Charmides and Critias

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<sup>37</sup> The phrase ‘beggar priest’ (μητράγυπτης) comes from Aristotle citing Iphicrates *Rhetoric* 140519-24. cf. Nails 2003, 73.

<sup>38</sup> Cf. Nails on Callias. “Thus he is a prominent example of Plato putting well-known living persons into the dialogues; since Callias III remained active in Athenian politics well after the establishment of the Academy, members would have known the man and his character” (2002, 69).

It is well known that one of the main charges against Alcibiades is that he profaned the mysteries by performing them in a private house. What is less widely discussed is the fact that it was not at any private residence but that of Charmides (Nails 2002, 18).<sup>39</sup> Charmides is also among the guests in the *Protagoras*. Charmides is generally known to readers of Plato as the ward of Critias and one of the Eleven who ‘policed’ the Piraeus under the Thirty. Like Critias he died fighting the forces of Thrasybulus and the democracy.

Alcibiades arrives at the house of Callias with Critias, who was also involved in the profanation and is generally believed to have been instrumental in one of Alcibiades’ recalls (under the condition that the democracy was deposed)<sup>40</sup> and, ultimately, in his assassination (Nails 2002, 15). He was exiled at some point by the Democracy at the time of the recall in 407. Xenophon provides an interesting detail of this exile. He has Theremenes say that Critias “was establishing a democracy in Thessaly along with Prometheus and arming the serfs against their masters (*Hellenica* 2.3.36).<sup>41</sup> In the *Memorabilia* he claims that Critias lost control of himself in Thessaly (I.2).

It is difficult not to think of Socrates’ claim in the *Crito* that in Thessaly “you will find the greatest license and disorder” (53c). It is not clear whether an ancient reader would have seen a connection between his time in Thessaly with a “Prometheus” and the story presented by Protagoras, but it is worth pointing out.

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<sup>39</sup> Eryximachus is also present and was implicated in the mutilation of the herms.

<sup>40</sup> Nails (2003) points out that the literature speaks of “the’ recall of Alcibiades when there were at least three (ad loc). Critias himself claims credit for his role in, though which one is uncertain. “One of his elegies is addressed to Alcibiades iv., claiming credit for the proposal to recall the general” (Nails 100, *Plu. Alc.* 33.1).

<sup>41</sup> All translation of the *Hellenica* are Brownson’s, in the Loeb edition, unless otherwise noted.

We readers know what happens to Critias, Callias, Alcibiades and Socrates. Their lives are closed in a way that ours are not. For Plato the difficulty is pushed back onto each of us. We know how they turn out, but what is important is how we turn out. It is this implied future that allows Plato to present us with the consequences of living “an unexamined life” (*Apology* 38a).

The presentation of paradigmatic characters lets Plato suggest the major events in the infamous career of Alcibiades to good philosophical effect. It also allows him to place numerous histories side by side. As we have just seen, the future of Alcibiades intersects with that of Callias, Critias, Charmides and Socrates.<sup>42</sup> If we “weigh” the lives of these paradigmatic characters we may see that Socrates’ support of hedonism is not as scandalous as many commentators believe. Socrates need not actually be a hedonist or be committed to hedonist principles, but Plato can be asking us to evaluate the philosophical life in comparison with a variety of other lives.<sup>43</sup> Even if pleasure is the only standard, Socrates lived the best life.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Cf. Friedlander “Socrates, too, has his following. Alcibiades and Critias follow him—by chance as it were; but this a chance arrangement designed by the poet, for, as we know, together with Charmides, both men later are of the greatest importance in politics. That ‘Socrates the Sophist’ was executed ‘because he educated Critias’ was a popular view for decades after the event (*Aischines I* 173). It is common knowledge also that, after the death of Socrates, there was an agitated literary debate about his relationship with the politically subversive Alcibiades. Thus, the reader who understands these implications realizes that, as far as Socrates is concerned, more is at stake than academic philosophy: the search for *arête* involves the nature of the state” (Friedlander 1964, 9-10. Cf. also. 22). Friedlander is certainly correct when he says that the presence of Alcibiades and Critias shows the political nature of the search for virtue. But there is more to their presence than that. For both met ignoble ends and Plato wants to show us the philosophical reasons behind this decline.

<sup>43</sup> Pleasure acts as a (somewhat) quantifiable standard of measurement. It would be difficult to believe that Socrates lived less pleasantly than Alcibiades, Critias or any of the other characters, including Protagoras. Pleasure is certainly not the only criteria, but as both the *Republic* (580a-588a) and the *Nicomachean Ethics* (1099a5-20) argue, the philosophical life is the most pleasant life as well as the best. In fact, in the *Republic*, Socrates shows by exactly how much the pleasure of a king—who must, of course, be a philosopher— exceeds that of the tyrant. He tells Glaucon that “a king lives seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasantly than a tyrant and that a tyrant is the same number of times more wretched” (587e). I will return to this discussion in the following chapters.

<sup>44</sup> I mention this here, but treat the problem of hedonism thoroughly in Chapter 5.

### **Interruptions of Memory 334d-336e4 and 347b-348c**

As first readers, we are like Socrates' associate and we do not know what is to come. Socrates admits that he had seen Alcibiades. His associate asks Socrates how he appeared to Alcibiades (ἦ παρ' ἐκείνου φαίνη) (309b). Socrates responds, saying: "Pretty well, I think, especially today (οὐχ ἥκιστα δὲ καὶ τῆ νῦν ἡμέρα), since he rallied to my side and said a great many things to support me" (309b). Socrates' associate cannot know what this means, since he does not even know that Protagoras is in town, much less that Socrates has just finished a conversation with him. But, as Friedlander points out, after "the introductory frame of the dialogue we look forward with excitement to Alcibiades" (1964, 10). The associate and the first reader share in this excitement, and a second reader can evaluate the role that Alcibiades' comments at 336b and 347b have on the discussion.

Socrates says something surprising to his associate. He says that he "forgot all about" Alcibiades "most of the time" (ἐπελανθανόμεν τε αὐτοῦ θαμά) (309b). Alcibiades, it turns out, forgets about himself most of the time as well. The wording of this passage gives us a clue as to how Socrates forgot Alcibiades and how we forget ourselves. The word 'θαμά' is a form of 'ἄμα.' It can refer to either space or time. Spatially it means "together in crowds, close, thick" (Liddell and Scott 1897, *ad loc*). Temporally, Liddell and Scott say that the word means "often, oft-times, frequent" (1897, *ad loc*). Here Lombardo and Bell translate it as "most of the time." Any of these translations works if we think carefully about the entire sentence. The temporal concept of 'often' is a discontinuous one, one of temporal change. It is occasional, or episodic. It

presents us with moments coming thick and fast as if in a crowd. It is a plurality of discontinuous moments. It is due to this discontinuity that constitutes much of the human experience of time, that we forget our lives in the moment. In the next chapter, I will show that this forgetfulness, in the *Protagoras*, is the true enemy of virtue. No wonder we find it so easy to see a plurality of virtues, when we experience our lives in a fragmented, momentary manner. Self-knowledge is opposed to forgetfulness and this self-knowledge unifies the virtues. Here, however, it is necessary to show how it is precisely this forgetfulness, which reappears throughout the dialogue, that both establishes and destroys the art of Protagoras. Socrates claims to forget Alcibiades, but Plato will not let the reader forget him.<sup>45</sup> The very fact that Plato has already made the reader expect a defense of Socrates precludes this possibility.

At 334d Socrates claims that he can no longer engage in the discussion as it has been going, due to his forgetfulness. “Protagoras, I tend to be a forgetful sort of person (ἐγὼ τυγχάνω ἐπιλήσμων), and if someone speaks to me at length I tend to forget (ἐπιλανθάνομαι) the subject of the speech” (334d). Socrates asks that the conversation be tailored to his forgetfulness.

Now, if I happened to be hard of hearing and you were going to converse with me, you would think you had better speak louder to me than to others. In the same way now that you have fallen in with a forgetful person (ἐπειδὴ ἐπιλήσμονι ἐνέτυχες), you will have to cut your answers short if I am to follow you (334d).

The claim to be forgetful is, of course, a classic example of Socrates’ seemingly self-deprecating irony, but Socrates is making a serious point about people in general and the ability to follow long discourse carefully. After Callias defends the length of Protagoras’

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<sup>45</sup> He is pointed out as an example at 320, “jumps in” to the conversation at 336c (where he is once again followed by Critias), and does so again at 347b, 348b-c (where he is followed by Callias).

answers (336b), Alcibiades points this out, showing he has understood the purpose of Socrates' remarks. "At this point (οὖν) Alcibiades jumped in (ὑπολαβών)" (336b) to defend Socrates. He says of Protagoras,

let him engage in a question-and-answer dialogue and not spin out spin out a long speech every time he answers, fending off the issues because he doesn't want to be accountable, and going on and on until most of the listeners have forgotten (ἐπιλάθωνται) what the question was about (336c-d).

Alcibiades recognizes that most people are dazzled by such long speeches and forget the issue at hand. Alcibiades may recognize his own tendency to forget (Cf. *Symposium* 216b) but, he knows that "Socrates won't forget (μὴ ἐπιλήσασθαι), no matter how much he jokes about his memory (οὐχ ὅτι παίζει καὶ φησιν ἐπιλήσμων εἶναι)" (336d).

Alcibiades claims that Socrates is not forgetful, as he claims to be, but Alcibiades is, like Socrates, acutely aware of the power of forgetfulness that long speeches induce. Thus, it seems as if question and answer discussions are the remedy to forgetfulness (334d-e).<sup>46</sup>

In this passage Plato weaves the characters together, forcing us to consider them together, to compare them, just as they (the audience have to decide between Socrates and Protagoras). Critias, once again, follows closely behind Alcibiades.

After (μετά) Alcibiades it was Critias, I think who spoke next 'Well, Prodicus and Hippias, it seems to be that Callias is very much on Protagoras' side, while Alcibiades as usual wants to be on the winning side of a good fight. But there's no need for any of us to lend partisan support to either Socrates or Protagoras (336d-e).

In narrative, events always fall one after (μετά) another. Argument allows us to present sequential options simultaneously. If we think in sequential terms about the outcomes of

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<sup>46</sup> Of course, any reader trying to keep the entire discussion of even a short Platonic dialogue in mind at once, knows that it is easy to forget the topic of a short answer discussion as well.

our actions, assuming perhaps that we will become better each day, then we will simply want to be on the winning side and the tide will always change. We shall all be forced to choose a life, there is no non-partisan position to take. If we leave this up to chance, then it is only by chance that we do not end up a short-lived tyrant like Critias.

In the next interruption of dialogue, after the discussion of the poem, it is Hippias who has forgotten the purpose of the conversation when he plans to offer his interpretation of the poem. Now, it is Alcibiades who remembers the purpose. Instead of deferring the conversation at hand until later, as Protagoras will do (361e), Alcibiades holds Hippias back saying, “some other time (αὐθις), though. What should be done now (νῦν) is what Socrates and Protagoras agreed upon” (347b). Alcibiades then succeeds in embarrassing Protagoras (348c). The reader must remember that this is not yet Alcibiades the general, but a young man of seventeen years who defers the demonstration of one older sophist and embarrasses another in order to keep him engaged in the contest. Here, Plato is showing some of the spirit that must have later motivated the confidence of the Athenians in Alcibiades. But, the impulsiveness also shows us something about his ruin.

In this chapter I have shown the ways in which Plato uses historical characters in the *Protagoras* in order to open a diachronic dimension to the dialogue. This diachronic dimension allows us to measure or assess the lives of the interlocutors and their arguments. In the process of evaluating the interlocutors’ lives, we are forced to think of our own lives as a whole and thus we evaluate our own lives in the same way. In the next chapter, I continue to explore the theme of the effects of the passage of time on human virtue. I will show that the Great Speech, the discussion of Simonides, and controversial

claims about hedonism, akrasia and measurement, all make more sense in this temporal context.

## Chapter 3

### Progress and Decline in the *Protagoras*

In this chapter I will look at the issues of temporal change—progress and decline—as it occurs in the *Protagoras* from 311b-328e. I show that the theme of education—with which this section begins and ends—is given its foundation in the Great Speech and that both express an explicitly progressivist point of view. In this chapter I focus primarily on Protagoras’ view and will turn to Socrates’ treatment of this problem in the next chapter, which details the Simonides poem and the discussion of the unity of virtues. It will, however, be necessary to touch on views expressed by Socrates in order to make those of Protagoras clear within the larger context of the dialogue.

#### Progress and Education

When Socrates and Protagoras meet, Socrates asks Protagoras what Hippocrates can expect to gain if he becomes a student of the sophist. Protagoras’ response makes explicit one of the central themes of the dialogue: progress. “Young man, this is what you will get if you study with me: the very day you start, you will go home a better man, and the same thing will happen the day after. Every day, day after day you will get better (καὶ ἐκάστης ἡμέρας ἀει ἐπὶ τὸ βελτίον ἐπιδιδόναι)” (318a). The formulation of this last sentence is worth noticing. We have ἐκάστης ἡμέρας juxtaposed with ἀεί. The first terms represent time’s division. Each (ἐκάστης) differentiates those of a kind as individuals and ‘day’ (ἡμέρας) is perhaps the most fundamental division of time, and

certainly the most obvious.<sup>47</sup> In contrast, always (ἀεί) is a word that describes the unity of time, its unchanging quality.<sup>48</sup> This is the tension of the dialogue and the difficulty of virtue in the context of change. If Protagoras is right and one may become better each day then change predominates. Change, however, may as well be for the worse. If people may change every day they may also become worse every day. We shall see this in the character of Critias, both in this dialogue and the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*.

For Socrates, this is not an issue yet. The question remains in what respect will the pupil become better (318c-d). Socrates certainly thinks that humans can and do learn. He points out that even with his age and wisdom, Protagoras could become better if someone taught him something he “didn’t happen to know already (μὴ τυγχάνοις ἐπιστάμενος)” (318b). Socrates’ wording hints that Protagoras’ wisdom may have been acquired by chance (Cf. 319e-320a). What sort of things do we pick up by chance and how valuable are they? We do not pick up skills like playing the flute or painting—which take a concerted effort towards a pre-established set of ends—haphazardly (318b-d). Socrates points to both painting and flute-playing as clearly defined areas in which it is clear in what ways one may get better. This clarity seems to come from the object of each of these arts. If these subjects were actually the point of the inquiry, their teachers could probably be far more specific, telling the pupil precisely how much time will be spent on the scales of each mode, or learning to mix colors. But in areas like those in which the sophists specialize, the object itself is unclear. Socrates asks “exactly how will

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<sup>47</sup> Cf. *Republic* 588a where Socrates speaks of the calculation of pleasant and just lives. “Yet it’s a true one, and one appropriate to human lives, if indeed days, nights, months, and years are appropriate to them.”

<sup>48</sup> Though ἀεί can mean ‘ever,’ ‘always,’ or ‘forever,’ (Liddell and Scott 1897, *ad loc*) these definitions are joined in their stress on temporal unity.

he go away a better man and in what will he make progress each and every day he spends with you?” (318d).

After a jab at Hippias (318e), Protagoras answers:

What I teach is sound deliberation (εὐβουλίᾱ), both in domestic matters (τῶν οἰκέων)—how best to manage one’s household (οἰκίαν), and in public affairs (πόλεως)—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success and political debate in action (καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν) (318e-319a).

This is the “art of citizenship” or—to translate it differently—the “political art” (πολιτική τέχνη). It is a kind of council regarding economic (in the Greek sense) and political affairs.<sup>49</sup>

The reader knows that Socrates has already rehearsed this conversation with Hippocrates. The line of questioning there focused on “what you expect to become” (311b-312a) by going to an expert. Socrates terms his questioning in a way that one is tempted to call more “existential.” He is asking the student what he wants to *become* by studying with the sophist (ὥς τίς γενησόμενος). If he goes to a doctor as a student<sup>50</sup> he expects to become a doctor (311c), if he goes to a sculptor, he expects to become a sculptor. When Socrates asks Hippocrates what he expects to become by going to

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<sup>49</sup> Coby says, “Under the direction of Socrates’ guiding hand, the subject that Protagoras professes to teach (*euboulia*)—but that Socrates disallows as teachable—has been transformed into a virtue that at once partakes of the knowledge of *techne* but that transcends *techne*” (1987, 48). Coby thinks of this part of the dialogue as “one continuing ascent: (1) from betterment to learning; (2) from good counsel to political art; (3) from private gain to good citizenship; and (4) from good citizenship to virtue, understood as art with moral component” (1987, 48). A continuous ascent may easily transfer to a continuous descent.

<sup>50</sup> John Beversluis questions the analogy as a whole. He says, “The professional expertise of the doctor, which is ordinarily valued as a means to the desired end of health is, from the point of view of the prospective practitioner of medicine, valued as an end in itself and the very thing he wants to learn. The point is well taken but the analogy is not thereby rehabilitated. Although it is plausible to say that medical students consult doctors to become doctors, it is implausible in the extreme to say that people consult sophists to become sophists” (2000, 249-250). Puzzlingly, the reasons Beversluis cites for the disanalogy are precisely those brought up by Socrates himself. “The doctor’s [expertise] consists in a specific, clearly defined and comparatively narrow range of skills” (2000, 250).

Protagoras, Hippocrates is embarrassed to say that he would become a sophist (312a).<sup>51</sup> When pushed, however, Hippocrates says that a sophist is one “who has an understanding of wise things” (312c). Socrates uses painters and carpenters to make his point this time. “But if someone asked us ‘wise in what respect?’ we would probably answer for painters, ‘wise as far as making images is concerned” (312d). Hippocrates answers that the sophist will make him a clever speaker. Socrates, still not satisfied, saying that the answer is “true but not sufficient” (312d). Socrates says that a lyre-player is an expert at speaking about the lyre (312e). This may be a dubious example. The lyre player cannot necessarily speak well about the lyre. But it seems as if Socrates’ better point could be expressed by saying “if a lyre-player can speak well about something, it is about the lyre.” Hippocrates doesn’t notice either way and when Socrates asks him about what the sophist will make him a clever speaker (312e), Hippocrates is unable to answer.

Socrates takes a slightly different track of questioning with Protagoras. The elder sophist has already defended the name “sophist” against the embarrassment of a prospective student (316d-317d). Protagoras has also begun to answer Socrates’ final question to Hippocrates, i.e. about what he enables his student to speak well: “domestic matters (τῶν οἰκέων)—how best to manage one’s household (οἰκίαν),” and “public affairs (πόλεως)—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success and political debate in action (καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν)” (318e-319a). Hippocrates has already heard Socrates warn him that “those who take their teachings from town to town and sell them wholesale or retail to anybody who wants them” most likely have no idea “which of their products are beneficial and which detrimental to the soul” (313d).

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<sup>51</sup> In the *Gorgias*, Polus feels no such shame (cf. 461b).

Instead of asking for the meaning of εὐβουλία, Socrates cuts Protagoras off and says instead that he believes that such virtue cannot be taught, that it is “not something that can be imparted from one human being to another” (319b). The following example about Pericles’ sons show that they did not gain it by birth, nor by teaching. If the “political art” cannot be passed on from one human to another, one must ask how might someone be, or become, virtuous.<sup>52</sup>

Socrates begins his account with *endoxa*. He says that the Athenians seek experts when they are deliberating about matters where training and teaching (and thus expertise) are possible. But, he says, because the political art may not be taught, the Athenians think everyone capable of offering political advice (319c-e).<sup>53</sup> Some, however, such as Pericles are listened to more than others. Yet, even these figures cannot manage “to hand on the others the excellence which they possess” (319e). This is true of both domestic and political expertise and Pericles stands as Socrates’ example.

Socrates says, “Look at Pericles,” and points out that Pericles educated his sons very well in those subjects for which there were teachers, but he doesn’t—and by implication is unable to— teach them, or have any one else teach them, the things about which he is wise. Thus “his sons have to browse like stray sacred cattle and pick up virtue on their own wherever they might find it (αὐτόματοι περιτύχωσιν)” (319e-320a).<sup>54</sup> In Plato, Pericles often appears as a model of this inability to teach virtue.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> I will take up the difference between being and becoming virtuous in the next chapter.

<sup>53</sup> Cf. C.C.W. Taylor for a useful summary of the argument (1976, 72).

<sup>54</sup> Cf. *Alcibiades I* 118c-119b and *Meno* 93a-94d.

<sup>55</sup> “The sons of Perikles, half brothers Kallias, follow on the scene. They are always (as they are here) witnesses to the thesis that ‘arête cannot be taught’” (319e) (Friedlander 1964 ii, 9).

Indeed, this recurring example helps us establish that Plato uses historical characters in a paradigmatic way.

The claim that Pericles cannot instill virtue is not an attack on Pericles, whatever Plato or Socrates thought about him. If so, it would be nothing more than an *ad hominem* argument against a dead man and would not be of any philosophical importance. Rather, it is an example employed to make the larger point. The argument seems to go: if virtue could be taught, then certainly Pericles would have either instructed his children himself or had them instructed by someone else.<sup>56</sup>

This claim puts Protagoras in a peculiar position. In order to claim that he can teach virtue, Protagoras must first show that it is teachable (instead of, as often, what it is; Cf. 361d). Since Socrates appealed to the democratic Athenians as his “witnesses” that virtue is not teachable, Protagoras must claim that everyone teaches virtue,<sup>57</sup> before he can claim that is “uniquely qualified” (328b) to do so. He seems to agree with Socrates that it is not inherited. He defends the idea that a father such as Pericles may educate his sons well, while also claiming that a sophist educates them better than others (presumably including Pericles). Socrates, however, claims that the youth wander around like cattle hoping to achieve virtue by chance. If one is lucky and achieves virtue by chance, then

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<sup>56</sup> The “someone else” may be Protagoras himself. Pericles was also associated with Protagoras. Plutarch reports a discussion that says something about the perceived relation between Protagoras and Pericles. Schiappa summarizes thus, “A young man, Epitimus of Pharsalus, was killed accidentally with a javelin. Pericles and Protagoras supposedly spent an entire day trying to decide whether one should regard the cause of death as the javelin, the man who threw it, or the supervisor in charge of the grounds. According to Giuseppe Rensi, ‘In fact the answer to the problem could be any one of those three and be always right according to the point of view — and so according to the person to whom the problem had been submitted.’ To a doctor the best answer (*orthos logos*) would be the javelin; to a judge in a law court the best answer would be the person who threw it; and to an administrator the best answer would be the supervisor” (Schiappa 1991,126).

<sup>57</sup> Coby correctly calls this an “entrapment” of Protagoras. He describes it as follows: “If Protagoras claims to select students on the basis of native ability (and assuming that he is master of an art that can be taught), he threatens democratic Athens with an aristocracy of the wise; and if he welcomes students who are able to pay...he threatens democratic Athens with an oligarchy of the rich” (1987, 51).

one may just as well have achieved vice.<sup>58</sup> If Protagoras can clearly define neither his art nor its ‘field’ then a student will have no choice but to wander to him like a cow.

The next example (320a) plays on the presence of Alcibiades. The demonstrative *τουτουί* indicates that Socrates points at him when he mentions Clinias. We know very little about Clinias. In the *Alcibiades I*, he is called a maniac (118e), in precisely this same context. There Socrates asks whom, if anyone, Pericles has improved.<sup>59</sup> In the *Protagoras*, Socrates tells those present to “take a good look at Clinias” (320a) in order to illustrate how the young “browse like stray cattle” (320a).

When Pericles became his guardian he was afraid that he would be corrupted (*διαφθαρή*), no less, by Alcibiades. So he separated them and placed Clinias in Ariphron’s house and tried to educate him there. Six months later he gave him back to Alcibiades<sup>60</sup> because he could not do anything with him (320a-b).

The point here seems to be that Pericles had no real educational strategy. He was afraid that Alcibiades would corrupt Clinias, but he “haphazardly” sent him to someone who could not improve him. Pericles was wrong that Ariphon could educate Clinias, but that does not mean that he was wrong about Alcibiades corrupting him. Nevertheless, he haphazardly takes him back. Pericles, it should be noted, did not send Clinias or Alcibiades to be a student of Protagoras, despite friendly relations with the sophist.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> The predicament is that if Pericles can teach virtue, why are his sons with Protagoras? If he cannot, how does he know that Protagoras is competent?

<sup>59</sup> In the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates asks who “Pericles has made into an expert?” (118d). When Alcibiades calls the sons of Pericles idiots, Socrates asks “What about Clinias, your brother?” Alcibiades replies “There is no point talking about him, he’s a madman” (318e). Cf. Nails 2003 ad loc.

<sup>60</sup> Both C.C.W. Taylor and Lombardo and Bell make it read that “he” presumably Pericles gives Clinias back to Alcibiades. There is no compelling textual or logical reason for this. The text simply says “he gave him back to him, not being able to do anything with him” (*ἀπέδωκε τούτῳ οὐκ ἔχων ὅτι χρήσαιτο*). Ariphon, Pericles’ brother gives Clinias back to Pericles because Ariphon could do nothing with him. He does not give him “back” to Alcibiades, who never had custody of him in the first place. He is sent back into the possibly corrupting sphere of Alcibiades, but the charge of Pericles.

<sup>61</sup> Cf. Coby 1987, 52.

Alcibiades was as ambitious as Pericles, but less self-controlled and less successful. This was, of course, not entirely his fault.<sup>62</sup> This is, however, precisely the point. If one gets one's teaching regarding virtue by chance, then one will not be prepared for the difficulties that fortune may present. The world in which Alcibiades pursued his political career was a much different one than that in which Pericles flourished. We do not know how Pericles would have weathered the long war; he died during the first year of the event that would soon dominate and in many cases break the next generation.

Martha Nussbaum puts it well, saying:

Plato chooses to set this dialogue right on the 'razor's edge.' It is a time of pride and prosperity—about two years before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War, three years before the great plague that devastated Athens, both physically and morally. Diseases of the body, diseases of character, the disease of war—all, we know, will shortly strike, unforeseen, this intelligent city that prides itself so much on artfulness and foresight. Since the reader, by hindsight, is aware that a vulnerable moral consensus is soon to be unhinged by external pressures, by the pull of conflicting obligations, by the strength of the appetitive desires, since he knows that among the dialogue's characters some will soon be dead and others will soon be killing, he will feel impatience with the lack of foresight that says that things in Athens are all right as they are (Nussbaum 1986, 91).

Nussbaum sees Protagoras' philosophical position as a product of the age in which he lives. She continues,

One reason for the conservatism is satisfaction. Protagoras has lived the prime of his life in the greatest age of Athenian political culture. He still seems to us to be a part of this glorious, relatively happy past...He is not gripped by the sense of urgency about moral problems that will soon characterize the writing of younger thinkers, for example Euripides, Thucydides, Aristophanes... It is no surprise that the dialogue compares Socrates' interview with these sophists to a living hero's visit to the shades of dead heroes in the underworld. It is a dead generation, lacking understanding of the moral crisis of its own time (105-106).

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<sup>62</sup> Cf. *Memorabilia* I.2 for a discussion between Alcibiades and Pericles. Xenophon's account makes the haphazard nature of Pericles' education of Alcibiades clear. The "punchline" makes it clear that Alcibiades was also aware of this. Cf. also Ellis (1989) 9-16.

Here, however, Nussbaum seems to miss what may be the point. Protagoras may be satisfied, but he is not a conservative. He may not have been “gripped by the sense of urgency” but he holds a progressive view of history. He is not a radical utopian, or a social pessimist, but he is far from being conservative. He is a moderate progressive.<sup>63</sup> Nussbaum is wrong when she faults him for not sensing the change that was to come. He only missed the nature of the change. He thought that every day people would “get better and better” (318b).

C.C.W. Taylor describes the available positions as follows “(a) that represented here, the naturalistic tradition, developed in the fifth century from traditional antecedents, of progress from primitive beginnings; (b) the older Hesiodic tradition of progressive decline from an original state of innocence.” (1976, 78).<sup>64</sup> By this standard, only position (b) could be considered conservative, whereas Protagoras clearly holds (a).<sup>65</sup> It is precisely position (a) that Socrates is attacking. The “naturalistic position” assumes change, but it assumes that this change is progressive. Very often, however, people become worse from generation to generation. Socrates seems to be asking whether this would be possible if virtue were transmittable.

The presence of Alcibiades and Critias together demonstrate the possibility of decline. It is not only that the intellectuals have been “gripped” by the urgency of moral problems, but that moral and political problems forced this view upon them. They in turn

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<sup>63</sup> Nussbaum’s confusion between a moderate progressive and a revolutionary, shows something of the logic whereby radicals work.

<sup>64</sup> He claims that “Plato’s own theory combines elements of both traditions” He cites *Statesman*. 273-4 *Timeaus* 72-73, *Crito* 110-12, *Laws* III, 676-82.

<sup>65</sup> McCoy points out the differences between Protagoras’ Prometheus myth and those found in Hesiod and Aeschylus. She is correct to see that it is in the Protagorean account that “the natural world and human nature—not woman—is the cause of human suffering” (1998 24) but she leaves out the fundamental difference between progress and decline. It is in Protagoras’ myth that human life gets better, rather than worse.

compound the problem and create new ones. If Pericles was the paradigm of a fifth century politician, and Alcibiades was the next step, after him would come Critias, the final political paradigm of the fifth century, a tyrant ruling briefly but brutally, perhaps as a puppet, over a defeated Athens.

Certainly, Plato might just as well have had Socrates use Solon or some other member of Plato's own family as an example of decline. As Guthrie says of Critias,

We are left with the picture of a man of brilliant intellectual and artistic gifts, plunging eagerly into the philosophical discussions of his time, all the more so as many of them had direct bearing on political life. But some of the headier theories conspired with his own ambitious, headstrong and unstable character, the product of generations of politicians and poets, to lead him away from the wisdom of Socrates to violence, cruelty and death in civil strife (1969 iii, 304).

This state of affairs must have presented some difficulty for Plato (cf. *Letter VII* 324c-d). Critias becomes an example of human decline, although he was known for his espousal of progress. Guthrie says that

he shared with Protagoras, Democritus and others a belief in the progressive evolution of mankind by their own efforts, that he thought of laws as neither inherent in human nature from the beginning nor a gift of any gods...Religion was for the subject, to ensure his obedience, not for the enlightened ruler (1969 iii, 301).

The philosophical position described above sounds remarkably like that espoused by Protagoras in the dialogue.<sup>66</sup> While explicating the myth of the origin of humanity in what follows, I will show that Plato is using the historical character and the reader's knowledge of his fate and his ideas in order to show the effect that irresponsible intellectuals had on the young Athenian nobles. I am not saying that Plato is trying to

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<sup>66</sup> It is unclear to what extent the historical Protagoras held these positions. Unless otherwise noted, I focus only on the positions presented by the sophist in the dialogue.

blame the fate of Critias on Protagoras, but rather that he wants to show that the progress espoused by both takes on quite a different appearance depending upon the historical circumstances. Plato uses the presence of Critias to give the lie to the easy progressivism of Protagoras in order to show all of the potential students of sophists, that the accounts we give (or hear) affect the soul over the course of time. I will show that error is essentially built in to any account of progress. This is particularly clear in the Great Speech of Protagoras.

### **The Great Speech**

The first noun to occur in Protagoras' myth is 'χρόνος,' or time. This is telling, for the speech is obsessed with time. It tells us that "there was a time when the gods existed but the mortal races did not. When the time came for their appointed genesis the gods molded them inside the earth" (320d). In this account there is time before there is death and before there is genesis. The time here is closer to the cosmic time of the *Timaeus* than the span of an individual's life. One is tempted to say that there are no individuals, but only kinds,<sup>67</sup> and yet under closer inspection the opposite will turn out to be the case: there will not really be kinds except for those that are improvised.

There are a number of strange points early on in Protagoras' story. Martha Nussbaum describes the opening scene thus,

At this point, Titans Prometheus and Epimetheus are charged with the task of distributing 'to each kind' powers or capabilities that will enable its members to survive and reproduce. Distinctions among the kinds appear, then, to pre-exist the

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<sup>67</sup> McCoy points out that "human beings are wholly material in origin" (1998, 24). She stresses that for Protagoras "human nature is also layered" (1998, 24), beginning with this "underlying material stuff" (1998, 24).

distribution of arts and capabilities. The gods talk of kinds, even of allotting suitable powers to each kind; but the species, mere lumps of material stuff, are not yet in possession of any of the distinctive capabilities and ways of acting that currently constitute them as the species we know” (Nussbaum 1986, 100).

Nussbaum rightly points out the “incoherence” (101) of this account, asking, how would a horse be a horse without any of the characteristics of a horse. Nussbaum continues,

the oddness is blatant and sounds like a deliberate pointer. What can it mean, we wonder, to speak of using powers upon the non-rational, so there is nothing left for the human being, when we know (and will be told again) that the human being (or whatever it currently is) is not yet a rational being? The distinction between the rational is presupposed in the very story of the gift of rationality. Protagoras lets us see that there is no coherent way of talking about the human being, and contrasting him with the rest of nature, without mentioning the distinctive capabilities and ways of acting that make him the creature he is. Rationality is not just an instrument given to a creature already constituted with a nature and natural ends; it is an essential element in this creature’s nature (1986, 101).

Nussbaum is correct to see the “oddness” as a “deliberate pointer,” but her explanation of that to which the oddness is points is lacking. Indeed, Protagoras may see the difficulty of contrasting the human with the rest of nature, but it seems more fruitful to think of Protagoras as an early existentialist. Protagoras could easily say with Jean-Paul Sartre that “Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself” (Cahoone, ed. 1996, 259).

Nussbaum sees Protagoras as an essentialist, but it seems that his story is intent on undermining the very notion of fixed natural kinds. As a result of seeing Protagoras in an essentialist light, Nussbaum’s account also neglects the importance of the ‘mistake’ or ‘error’ inherent in Protagoras’ account.

Marina Berzins McCoy, to the contrary, claims that “It is only because Epimetheus failed to give humans claws, speed, or other means of protection before he exhausted his resources on the other animals that we possess uniquely human abilities at

all: they are a huge mistake” (1998, 24). McCoy is correct in this assessment, for an initial error (or lack of perfection) is necessary for any idea of human progress.

Protagoras has already made his progressive beliefs clear (318e-319a) and now offers this myth as an account of these beliefs. This is the only way that a story of progress can occur. Error, or imperfection, is essential to the concept of progress. Something that is perfect, does not progress.

E.R. Dodds points out that any conception of forms or essences impose “a more fundamental limitation on the idea of progress” (Dodds 1973, 14). He explains that

for Plato all progress consists in approximation to a pre-existing model; the model has existed and will exist to all eternity in the unchanging world of transcendent Forms. There is, strictly speaking, no open future, no such thing as invention (Dodds 1973, 14-15).

The other side of this equation is that, if one holds what here appears as Protagorean progress then one must hold that things were not good in the beginning and that there are no really fixed natures. If one believes in gods, then the gods must have made some mistake and humans must be able to correct that mistake, however gradually. According to this view, humans can make things better, but they can also make them worse. When you have an open future both progress and decline are possible.<sup>68</sup>

Epimetheus errs due to his absorption in the present. He is engaged in the moment, distributing this to that animal and that to that, without looking at the whole. In fact, he goes through several rounds of distribution without ever thinking of the “human.” He begins by first giving means of preservation (ἔσφαζεν) (321a). Then he adjusts these

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<sup>68</sup> This interpretation is by no means universal. Both Hegel and Marx—like Protagoras—believe that an open future ensures that things will generally get better as time advances. See Hegel 1977, 22, 92, 156 et passim and Marx 1978 155-163. Of course, in both thinkers the “negative” or contradiction is necessary for the teleological progression of history.

“taking precautions against the possible extinction (ἀιστωθείη) of any of the races” (321a). Next he “devised for them protection against the weather” (321b). After this he “shod them” and “provided them with various forms of nourishment” (321b). Each of these has concerned the salvation of the individual, or of the kind through the individual. Finally he assigns them either few or many births to allow for the salvation of the individual by means of the kind. For, before any thing else, these creatures are mortal (θνητά).

Epimetheus has gone through four distributions without attending to the ‘human.’ The text acknowledges, in Lombardo’s and Bell’s translation, that “Epimetheus was not very wise, and he absentmindedly used up all the powers and abilities on the non-reasoning animals” (321c). The Greek is more direct. He forgot (ἔλαθεν)<sup>69</sup> himself (αὐτόν) and he lavishly spent (καταναλώσις) the powers on the irrational animals. He was so enrapt lavishing preservation, protection from the weather, sturdy feet and reproduction on the irrational animals, that he also forgot humanity. That is, in forgetting himself, Epimetheus forgot us. This is the basis for our kinship with the gods. Humanity becomes an aporia for Epimetheus (321c). Humanity is the result of a titanic afterthought.

The fact that Epimetheus does not provide for humans helps Protagoras offer an account of progress. Prometheus “stole from Hephaestus and Athena wisdom in the practical arts together with fire (without which this kind of wisdom is effectively useless) and gave them outright to the human race” (321d). If Protagoras does not believe in the gods and thinks they are a human invention, as many scholars believe (cf. Guthrie

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<sup>69</sup> Recall the opening of the dialogue where Socrates claims to have “forgotten” Alcibiades most of the time (309b)

above), we must ask what the purpose of this part of the myth may be. It is because of this stolen fire and the arts that accompany it that humans

alone among animals worshipped the gods, with whom they had a kind of kinship, and erected alters and sacred images. It wasn't long before they started articulated speech and words and had invented houses, clothes, shoes, and blankets and were nourished from food from the earth (322a-b).

This account places the worship of gods prior to the advent of speech. This seems unlikely and strange. Instead of attributing crafts and fire to the gods, it is possible that Protagoras is attributing the worship of the gods to the “discovery” of fire and crafts. Patrick Coby makes this case. He says: “This kinship is man’s inventive intelligence, by which early man invented all the tools and crafts requisite to his survival” (1987, 55).<sup>70</sup> He continues saying that “Man invented the tale of Prometheus and the Olympians in order to explain his otherwise inexplicable inheritance of wisdom” (1987, 56).<sup>71</sup> According to this account, we may ask with Nietzsche: “Is humanity God’s mistake? Or God just a mistake of humanity” (Nietzsche 1997, 6). Gods look bad when we use them to explain the difficulty of life prior to technology and invention.

It is worth comparing this interpretation of Protagoras’ myth with Sextus’ comments on Critias and his account of the origin of religion.<sup>72</sup> “And Critias...says that the ancient lawgivers fabricated the deity as an overseer of men’s successes and failures

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<sup>70</sup> Similarly Cropsey says “Epimetheus is man’s looking around himself, his circumspection, his observing the manner of coming to be and passing away of living things, the compensatory balance of consumption and being consumed that constitutes the cycle from which forethought alone can liberate him” (1995, 7).

<sup>71</sup> The quotations from Coby are part of a larger argument to which it is not necessary to subscribe. Coby’s argument rests on the use of the singular and the plural forms of ‘theos,’ or god. Coby argues that “in Protagoras’ lexicon, ‘god’ in the singular betokens human intelligence, or the creative faculty that manufactures ‘gods’ in the plural” (1987, 56). This argument is interesting, but is neither conclusively demonstrated, nor required, by the text.

<sup>72</sup> Others attribute the *Sisyphus* fragment to Euripides.

in the interest of no man secretly injuring his neighbor, guarding against retribution on the part of the gods” (Sprague 1972, 259).

Critias’ account is more extreme than that offered by Protagoras in the dialogue. Protagoras does not say that the gods are pragmatic fictions, but it is easy to see how a bright and ambitious young man may read this into the myth that Plato gives to Protagoras, especially in light of the worsening political situation and its attendant intellectual climate. Nevertheless, there are important similarities. Immediately after Protagoras says that Prometheus was punished, that he reports on the worship of the gods “with whom they had a kind of kinship (322a). In the account of Critias, we invent gods in order to justify punishment and to create a “panopticon”<sup>73</sup> whereby people police themselves out of fear of an ever-watchful eye. Punishment is also central to Protagoras’ account, as will become increasingly clear.

In the next stage of the myth it is precisely some kind of punishment, or justice that is needed. The arts—human inventiveness—kept humans alive, but they lived in a sort of Hobbesian state of nature where their lives would have been “solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short” (Hobbes 1994, 76). At this stage we had houses, clothing, shoes and blankets but “lived in scattered isolation; there were no cities” (322b). Humans were “being destroyed by wild beasts because they were weaker in every way” (322b). Human art was not enough to make us superior to the beasts, it only accounted for those things that Epimetheus had supplied them. Despite our “kinship” with the gods, the beasts are stronger than us in every way. People were in danger due to the beasts and the beastliness of humanity. “The wisdom it [the human kind] acquired was for staying alive;

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<sup>73</sup> Bentham 1969, 194-208. Cf. Foucault 1980, 146.

wisdom for living together in political wisdom, it did not acquire” (321d). When people did band together in cities “they wronged each other because they did not possess the art of politics” (322c-e). Thus we find humanity in a position where its arts cannot fend off the beasts, but are sufficient to enable them to wrong one another, that is to steal one another’s “houses, clothing, shoes and blankets” so that there would really be “no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain” (Hobbes 1994, 76).

Protagoras makes a clever move at this point. He does not say that Zeus instructs Hermes to distribute the “political art” in order to save humanity, but rather to distribute “justice and a sense of shame to humans” (322c). From what we saw earlier “justice” (δίκη) and “a sense of shame” (αἰδώς) should be equivalent with “sound deliberation both in domestic matters—how to best manage one’s household, and in public affairs—how to realize one’s maximum potential for success in political debate and action” (319a). If they are not Protagoras equivocates between “justice and shame” and “the political art.”

Both δίκη and αἰδώς are used in the context of political goods. They are given by Zeus so that we may live together. McCoy argues in the case of αἰδώς that it is significant that “the motivation for self-restraint is concern for the opinion of others” (1998, 23 n. 23).<sup>74</sup> Being concerned with the opinions of others is necessary for everyone in the city. It is necessary that everyone have justice and shame “for cities would never come to be if only a few possessed these” (322d). It may be that, despite appearances, Protagoras’ justice and shame are simply the “advantage of the stronger” (*Republic* 339a). Bartlett argues that “Protagoras is a teacher of injustice” (2004, 74). If this is the case then Protagoras is actually practicing a certain esotericism here in the dialogue. He

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<sup>74</sup> She cites 323a-c.

presents his case as if no one could be denied justice and shame by the gods. But, he does not say that a human cannot secretly reject these.

It seems that for Protagoras, this is the difference between the political art and justice and shame. The πολιτική τέχνη is a τέχνη something that αἰδῶς, at the very least, is not. For Protagoras the εὐβουλία that constitutes this πολιτική τέχνη consists of knowledge of “how best to manage one’s household (οἰκίαν)” and “how to realize one’s maximum potential for success and political debate in action (καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν)” (318e-319a). These are both “self-oriented” or beneficial to the agent rather than the community. In Protagoras’ account justice and shame are community oriented, or beneficial to the collective. It is necessary for everyone to have shame and justice, and for a few to have the political art which enables its possessor to reject these.

Protagoras establishes the difference between the political art or εὐβουλία and justice later when Socrates gets him to say that “some people are being sensible (σωφρονεῖν) when they act unjustly” (333d). When Socrates supplies the word σωφρονεῖν he is referring to the σωφροσύνη discussed between 329c-333c. But, Socrates immediately defines σωφρονεῖν as εὖ φρονεῖν. Socrates then, pointedly defines εὖ φρονεῖν as εὖ βουλευέσθαι a virtual cognate of the εὐβουλία that defines Protagoras’ political craft. People who have “good judgment (εὖ βουλευέσθαι) in acting unjustly” (333d), have the good judgment “Only if they get good results” (333d) out of their injustice. Here Protagoras admits the nature of his teaching. It may be by acting with injustice that one can “realize one’s maximum potential for success and political debate in action (καὶ πράττειν καὶ λέγειν)” (318e-319a).

That one is seeking what is advantageous to oneself, rather than the polis, is clear in what follows. When Socrates asks if good is what is “advantageous to people” (333e), Protagoras balks. “And even if they are not advantageous (ὠφέλιμα) to people (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις), I (ἔγωγε) can still call it good” (333e). Socrates lets Protagoras off the hook because he “could see that Protagoras was really worked up and struggling by now and he was dead set against answering anymore. Accordingly, I carefully modified (εὐλαβούμενος)<sup>75</sup> the tone of my question” (333e). Socrates asks whether Protagoras means that things are “advantageous to no human being, Protagoras, or of no advantage whatsoever” (334a). Socrates allows Protagoras to save face and make a well-received relativistic point (334a-c). But, Protagoras did not intend his remarks in the way that Socrates generously interpreted them. When Protagoras calls things good even if they are not good for people (τοῖς ἀνθρώποις) he is not thinking of the “human” as opposed to the beasts or the trees (as Socrates allows him to reinterpret his statement), but rather his statement focuses on the plural aspect of people. He is contrasting τοῖς ἀνθρώποις with a very emphatic ἔγωγε.

In this passage Protagoras makes it clear that the political craft that he teaches is not justice or shame, but is something for the good of the agent. It is precisely this difference between the political art and justice and shame that allows Protagoras to teach his art as one “uniquely qualified to assist others in becoming noble and good” (328b) without denying that the Athenians are able to teach their children the “one thing which all citizens must have for there to be a city” (324e). Protagoras declares this openly for

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<sup>75</sup> εὐλαβούμενος is playing on εὖ βουλεύεσθαι.

he has just shown that he does not highly value shame, except in others. Socrates cannot hope to make Protagoras blush, as he did Hippocrates (cf. 312a and 316c-317c).

Thus, Protagoras claims to give “good judgment (εὖ βουλευέσθαι) in acting unjustly” (333d), while Zeus gives the δίκη and αἰδώς that make cities possible by keeping everyone from acting like Protagoras’ potential students. The art of Protagoras is possible if only a few possess it. It is truly an art of ἔγωγε and neither πολιτική nor for the good of τοῖς ἀνθρώποις.

Protagoras claims that people act as if everyone has a share of justice and that “everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not... since one must have some trace of it or not be human” (323b-c) and that they do not regard it as “natural or self-generated, but as something taught and carefully developed” (323c). Here Protagoras is saying that if we do not have a share of justice, we are not human, but we were human (presumably) when we had fire and the arts. But, it is also developed. Again it seems as if Protagoras is pushing a proto-existentialist line that “existence precedes essence” (Cahoone 1996, 260). This tension between what we might call nature and nurture runs throughout Protagoras’ account. The tension informs his discussion of punishment and child-rearing, or education.<sup>76</sup> Protagoras follows the myth with a discussion of education that reinforces the idea of justice as punishment. I show that for Protagoras punishment and education are inextricably bound.

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<sup>76</sup> McCoy points out the extent to which “the idea of punishment dominates Protagoras’ view of conventional education” (1998, 27). In her view of Protagoras “While self-interest is natural, the capacity to consider others’ well-being must be taught through violence” (1990, 28).

## Education

Punishment corrects injustice and allows for progress. Protagoras claims that the “the true significance of punishment” lies in the future. But, Protagoras does not think—as Socrates does—that just punishment is good for the one who is punished. He does not see punishment as primarily “corrective,” i.e. its purpose is not so that those who have become bad, can be made good again (though it may be good to punish children in order to educate them (cf. 325c). He claims that

reasonable punishment is not a vengeance for a past wrong—for one cannot undo what is done—but is undertaken with a view to the future (τοῦ μέλλοντος χάριν), to deter the wrong-doer and whoever sees him being punished from repeating the crime (324a-c).

People are punished pedagogically and pragmatically. One person is punished in order to deter others. This view of punishment ignores retribution as a rationale for punishment and takes a utilitarian view, i.e. the punishment causes one member of the community pain in order to serve as a model for the entire community and thus increases its overall pleasure. Socrates will refer to this definition when he discusses painful things that result in pleasure (354e). If, as many commentators suggest,<sup>77</sup> Socrates uses hedonism as an *ad hominem* attack, it may be at this point that he sees the hedonism inherent in Protagoras’ position.<sup>78</sup> Protagoras wants what is good for the agent (if the agent is a student of Protagoras or Protagoras himself) and what is good for the community. The good, in either case, is a minimum of pain.

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<sup>77</sup> Cf. Zeyl 1980; Kahn 1996; Obrien 1967; Weiss 1990, Dyson 1976; Hemmenway 1996. I will offer a full discussion of this in the coming chapters.

<sup>78</sup> In the next chapter, I show precisely how the hedonism works.

Protagorean punishment relies on people's ability to see themselves in one another's shoes.<sup>79</sup> His educational ideas rest on this same associative, and essentially mimetic, ability. He returns to the question of how the political art is taught (324d).

Then, he says:

Starting when they are little children and continuing as long as they live, they teach and correct them. As soon as a child understands what is said to him, the nurse, mother, tutor, and the father himself fight for him to be as good as he possibly can, seizing on every action and word to teach him and show him that this is just, that is unjust, this is noble, that is ugly, this is pious, that is impious, he should do this, he should not do that (325c-d).

Here education and correction begin "as soon as a child understands." In order for this to be a good thing, all of those who teach the child and those whom the child emulates must understand what is just and unjust, pious and impious. Protagoras has just said, however, that "everyone ought to claim to be just, whether they are or not, and that it is madness not to pretend justice" (323c).<sup>80</sup> We do not need to push the idea that everyone is pretending to be just when they are not. They are not lying to the child, but to themselves. They think they know what they do not and pass this error on to their children. If neither the father, the teacher, the nurse nor the mother truly know what virtue is, they cannot present a clear conception of virtue to the child.<sup>81</sup> The problem is made worse because of the multiplicity of influences. The child is not only imitating a

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<sup>79</sup> If McCoy is right we are also able to "consider others' well-being" only through violence (1998, 26).

<sup>80</sup> Protagoras does not assume, like Socrates, that to know the good is to do it.

<sup>81</sup> This is roughly the argument of the *Republic*. If women help raise and educate children and are uneducated themselves they will instill a great number of detrimental opinions in the children, "and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable" (378d5-6). The mothers believe "such bad stories about the gods wandering at night in the shapes of strangers from foreign lands" and only thus do they "terrify their children with them" and "make them more cowardly" (381d7-e3). Because the mother herself believes the tales, she is possessed of a "true falsehood" (382a5) and will thus have no idea as to what to pass on to her children as true or to best enable them to see the truth.

single skewed conception of virtue, but many.<sup>82</sup> The mother and the nurse would not, in Athens, have been educated, thus they would have a much different conception of virtue from the father or the tutor.<sup>83</sup> In many cases the father and the tutor would not have been extremely concerned with virtue, but rather with honor, wealth, or pleasure.<sup>84</sup>

Protagoras then recounts how the child will be sent to school (325e-326a) and learn music (326a-b) and athletic training (326b-c). He concludes by asking, “When so much care and attention is paid to virtue, Socrates, both in public and private, are you still puzzled about virtue being teachable?” (326e). Protagoras sees only one difficulty remaining for his account, the problem of “why, then, do so many sons of good fathers never amount to anything?” (326e). In order to answer this objection, Protagoras pulls out Socrates’ analogy with a flute-player.

Suppose, for instance, there could be no city unless we were all flute-players, each to the best of his ability, and everybody were teaching everybody else this art in public and private and reprimanding the poor players and doing all this unstintingly, just as now no one begrudges or conceals his expertise in what is just and lawful...For it is to our collective advantage that we each possess justice and virtue, and so we gladly tell and teach each other what is lawful and just. Well if we all had the same eagerness and generosity in teaching each other flute-playing, do you think, Socrates that the sons of good flute-players would more likely be good flute-players than the sons of poor flute players (327b-d).

It is precisely because everyone is concerned with virtue that the sons of the experts in the political craft do not appear better than others. Protagoras then makes a second

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<sup>82</sup> Meno famously claims that there are different virtues for men and women, for free people and slaves, for children and the elderly (*Meno* 71e-72a). If this is anything like what the members of a household also think, all of these conceptions of virtue will be jumbled up in the child whom they educate from birth.

<sup>83</sup> This is not to say that a wet-nurse would have had as much influence on the child as the tutor.

<sup>84</sup> The education of women is not a concern only in the *Republic*. Cf. *Protagoras*, where Socrates says “Crete and Sparta are places where there are not only men but women also who take pride in their education” (324d). The historical veracity of this claim is uncertain, but it shows Socrates’ concern. Cf. Also *Statesman*, “For most people, in the way they handle these things, do not bind themselves together correctly with respect to the procreation of children” (310b).

analogy saying, “You might as well look for a teacher of Greek; you wouldn’t find a single one of those either” (328a).

The *Alcibiades I* also addresses this very problem. There, Alcibiades says “I learned how to speak Greek from them [‘people in general’]; I couldn’t tell you who my teacher was” (111a). Socrates explains our understanding of language according to agreement and usage. If we ask what ‘stone’ means, people will give us the same answer, and also for wood. “I suppose that this is pretty much what you mean by speaking Greek” (111c). Of course, when we ask what virtue, or justice is no one is able to tell us. This is the problem in the *Protagoras*. We are not really taught what words like virtue mean. Perhaps such meanings cannot be transmitted at all. Thus it seems that no one knows “what is lawful and just” (327c). Yet, due to the nature of child-birth and rearing, each becomes a sort of expert to his or her offspring, teaching virtue of which he or she knows nothing.

This analogy with teaching Greek brings out another element of discord. A family may teach the child its first words, but once that child makes its way into the city it comes into contact with polis influences.<sup>85</sup> One may require the use of formal grammar and proper diction within the home, but once the child begins to experience influences outside the home, he or she will most likely pick up expressions, grammatical habits and words that the parents do not like. Ever since Protagoras’ initial definition of his craft (318e-319a), we have seen a division between economic and political affairs. The point—whether regarding virtue, language, or flute-playing—is that no matter how strictly one controls the home environment, one cannot control the polis-environment.

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<sup>85</sup> See Jonathan Lear 1992, 190-192.

Often, the attempt to provide certain conditions at home will actually create conditions in the polis that work against one's actual aim.<sup>86</sup> If everyone is a teacher of the flute, then no one in particular is responsible for a bad flautist. Xenophon uses this same strategy to defend Socrates

What master of the flute or master of cithara or other teacher who has made his students competent is blamed if they appear worse after they have gone to others? And what father, if his son is moderate when he spends time with one person, but later becomes wicked when he spends time with another? (*Memorabilia* I.2.27).

Protagoras and the other sophists seem to exploit this claim that everyone teaches virtue. No teacher can really be blamed for the students' failures. Ultimately, the student him or her self must be blamed. Yet, there is something else here. If what we have seen is true and neither the parents nor the city know what justice is, then the youth will not be able to *become* bad, or be corrupted, for he or she will never have become good.

If virtue cannot be taught then Protagorean progress is implausible. Decline is far more likely. The youth may "haphazardly" find some good teaching, but they may not have to criteria to distinguish it from everything else they come across by chance. One of the points that this part of the dialogue struggles to make is that without knowledge both virtue and vice are no more than a matter of chance. This saves Socrates from historical determinism. But, if we do not know virtue and we cannot become truly good, then it is only by chance that we are not truly bad. This is the context within which I will read Socrates' interpretation of the Simonides poem. The youth cannot be corrupted when

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<sup>86</sup> Cf. Lear "So, for example, the democratic polis is shaped not only by the degenerate son of the oligarchy, but also by the rebellious poor (556c-557a). However, the rebellious poor also had their psyches shaped via internalizations of previous externalizations of oligarchic rulers. And both they and the democratic man—the metaphorical and literal sons of the oligarchy—help to shape the democratic polis via externalization of the structures of their psyches" (1992, 207 n. 122).

they were never made good in the first place.<sup>87</sup> Though many commentators have refused to take his reading seriously, I will show that it is because he is so serious about it that Socrates is “perverse.”<sup>88</sup> He does not care about Simonides’ poem, but about our souls.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> People, of course, may become worse if they were never good, but this is just a degree of corruption. One is already corrupt and does not become corrupted.

<sup>88</sup> Cf. C.C.W. Taylor 1976, 142.

<sup>89</sup> In the refutation that follows Socrates tells us twice about the importance of the discussion for ‘our’ lives. “Don’t do that to me! It’s not this ‘if you want’ or ‘if you agree’ business I want to test. It’s you and me I want to put on the line” (331c). Socrates and Protagoras are no longer on the line, however. Their lives and the world they inhabited have already passed. But, our lives are still open and on the line. A few moments later, just as they begin to discuss the “majority” position, Socrates claims “I am interested in testing the argument, although it may happen that the questioner, myself, and my respondent wind up being tested” (333c-d).

## Chapter 4

### The Unity and Difficulty of Virtue

This chapter is divided into two parts. The first treats the arguments for the unity of the virtues (329d-333c and 358c-360e). In this part I show that, though it may be difficult to say precisely how knowledge unifies the virtues, we can clearly see the conceit of wisdom as the ignorance that unifies the vices. Thus the first difficulty to virtue is the overcoming of ignorance.

In the second part, I deal with Socrates' interpretation of Simonides' poem. I show that—despite the interruption from 334d-339a—Socrates continues to press the same concerns that motivated the initial discussion of unity of the virtues. Here, Socrates shows that the passage of time makes the overcoming of ignorance (or the conceit of wisdom) so difficult. If virtue is wisdom and humans are not wise, humans are not truly virtuous. Rather, we must continually “become” wise and good. Whatever the wisdom that unites the virtues, the “human wisdom” of the *Apology* is a prerequisite.

#### Unity of the Virtues

At *Protagoras* 329d Socrates asks “Is virtue a single thing, with justice and temperance and piety its parts, or are the things I have just listed all names for a single entity?” Though Protagoras claims that the answer is easy, the remainder of the dialogue and a great deal of critical commentary show that, quite to the contrary, this is one of the

more difficult problems concerning virtue. Protagoras says that “Virtue is a single entity, and the things you are asking about are its parts” (329d). Socrates again responds with a question, asking whether the individual virtues were parts “as in the parts of a face: mouth, nose, eyes, and ears? Or parts as in the parts of gold, where there is no difference except for size, between the parts and the whole” (329d-e). Protagoras answers that they are like the parts of a face and that each has its own power and function (330a-b) but he acknowledges that wisdom is the greatest part (329e).

Socrates then engages him in an argument to show that “justice is the same kind of thing as piety, and piety as justice” (331b). He shows that it would be absurd to say that piety is pious and unjust and so “piety is the sort of thing that is just, and ... justice the sort of thing that is pious” (331a). Then he uses an elenctic argument from opposites to show that temperance and wisdom are the same thing. He arrives at this by getting Protagoras to agree that “folly”(ἄφροσύνην) is the opposite of both temperance and wisdom. Protagoras also agrees that each thing may only have one opposite and thus Socrates concludes that wisdom and temperance must be one (332a-333b). Later courage is also identified with wisdom (σοφία) and ignorance (ἄμαθία) with cowardice (360c-d). Thus Socrates has treated each of the virtues in an attempt “to show that everything is knowledge—justice, temperance, courage” (361b). Yet Socrates also claims that virtue is not teachable (320a-e and 362b). In this chapter, I show that virtue cannot be taught, but must continue to become taught—that is, one must be ever diligent against the ignorance that unifies all vice, which, I argue, is thinking that one knows what one does not.

A great deal has been written on the unity of the virtues as presented in the *Protagoras*. Gregory Vlastos has provided one of the most influential and compelling

treatments of the unity of the virtues. Much of Vlastos' discussion relies on what have become known as "Pauline predications." "Pauline predications" are statements whose "predicate term is asserted not of their abstract subject, but of the concrete instances of that abstract" (1973, 252). Thus "justice is pious"<sup>90</sup> need not cause us trouble. "It is the sort of sentence which could be used, absurdly, to predicate 'is pious' of the universal Justice. But it could also be used, impeccably, to predicate 'is pious' of the instances of the universal" (1973, 252-253). That is, a just person will also be pious, etc. According to Vlastos, "all five virtues are interpredicable" (1973, 237) if the predications are made of instances rather than universals. That is, the just person will also be a temperate person who will also be a wise person and vice versa. I think that Vlastos is correct and takes us a long way towards understanding this difficult passage, but his view still does not tell us what virtue is, and more specifically, in what way it is knowledge or of what this knowledge consists.

Terry Penner offers a similar argument, but Penner's argument does a better job at explaining in what way the virtues are interpredicable in their instantiation. Penner's interpretation of this tricky passage rests on his general reading of Socrates' "what is X?" questions. He claims that Socrates "did not want to know what the meaning of the word 'bravery' was, nor what the essence of bravery was, nor what the universal bravery was" (Penner 1992, 164). Rather, Penner argues that Socrates is asking "the general's question, 'What is bravery?'—that is, 'What is it that makes brave men brave?'" (1992, 164). According to Penner, Socrates, like the general, "asks this question not out of interest in mapping our concepts, but out of a desire to learn something substantial about the human

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<sup>90</sup> Nor should "justice is just" for according to Vlastos Pauline predications eliminate the problem of self-predication

psyche. He wants to know what psychological state it is, the imparting of which to his men will make them brave” (1992 164). Penner accepts the face-value answer that this psychological state is “the knowledge (science) of good and evil” (1992, 162). He does not say how this “knowledge (science) of good and evil” would work.<sup>91</sup>

Charles Kahn points out two difficulties with Penner’s approach. He asks, “(1) how if at all, the various virtues differ from one another, and (2) how the knowledge of good and evil can have the required motive-force so as to guarantee virtuous action” (1996, 222). I will focus here primarily on the first of these. In order for it to be meaningful to say that virtue is knowledge, we must inquire into the ways in which the individual virtues are similar and different.<sup>92</sup>

Kahn argues that Plato “has deliberately left the thesis of unity indeterminate and open for further discussion” (1996, 222).<sup>93</sup> Kahn cites the Stoic interpretation of this point to show precisely “how much room Plato has left for unity among the virtues” (223). Kahn points out that:

Ariston of Chios held that courage, temperance, and the rest were strictly identical as far as their intrinsic nature was concerned; they were distinguished from one another only by their external relation to circumstance and application. Thus courage is wisdom applied to circumstances of danger, temperance is wisdom in circumstances of desire and pleasure and so forth (1996, 222).

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<sup>91</sup> Brickhouse and Smith say “even if one were to somehow know that wisdom is defined as the knowledge of good and evil, one would not by that knowledge alone be able to steer one’s way through vexing issues” (1994).

<sup>92</sup> Vlastos successfully shows that Socrates cannot mean that “(i) the five virtues are the same virtue and (ii) that their names are synonyms” (1972, 227). He offers a helpful discussion from the *Phaedo* about the way in which the number “three” is also appropriately called “odd.” Both are properly names of the same number, but that does not mean that “three” and “odd” mean the same thing (1973, 239; *Phaedo* 103e).

<sup>93</sup> Friedlander thinks that “this is a conscious deception on the part of Socrates—or an exercise in logic for the reader...It is left to the reader to discover the mistake in this logical exercise and to think for himself about how unity is to be conceived” (1964, 20).

Brickhouse and Smith provide an example that supports Ariston's position. They deny that the relation between the individual virtues and wisdom could be understood on a "discipline/subdiscipline" model (1994, 69). Instead, like Ariston, they see the relationship as one "between a general discipline and the specialized applications of that discipline to different areas" (1994, 70). The example they give is triangulation. "Navigators in coastal waters use triangulation to fix their position by taking bearings from ...objects along the coastline. Surveyors also use triangulation is measuring land and setting boundaries" (1994, 70). They point out that surveyors and navigators are using the same skill but their "use of the skill, however produces different *erga*" (1994, 70).<sup>94</sup> Thus, by analogy, each of the virtues would be like navigating or surveying—they would use the wisdom that is akin to triangulation in different contexts.<sup>95</sup>

The analogy is useful to see in what way the same knowledge may be a part of a variety of widely different practices. Their analogy, however, seems to agree with Protagoras' claim that "you will find many people who are extremely unjust, impious, intemperate, and ignorant, and yet exceptionally courageous" (349d). We could easily find a surveyor who did not know navigation, and a navigator who does not know surveying, but we could find neither a navigator nor a surveyor who lacked the knowledge of triangulation. So, triangulation is necessary, but not sufficient to be a good navigator and a good surveyor. Thus, the example falls short, for if Vlastos is right, this wisdom would be such as to make all of the virtues interpredicable, so that in this analogy, triangulation would necessarily make a navigator also a good surveyor and vice

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<sup>94</sup> This is not a discipline/subdiscipline model because navigation and surveying are not subdisciplines of the same discipline, but rather different fields that use the same skill for different results (1994, 70).

<sup>95</sup> The analogy seems to make Plato into an intellectualist who sees no place for character in virtue. Triangulation is as easily performed by a scoundrel as not. I think that Plato is an intellectualist, but one who, as the Republic shows, realizes the intense interaction between the soul and the intellect.

versa. This is clearly not the case. Nevertheless, the fact that triangulation is a necessary prerequisite for both areas of expertise points us in the right direction.

Socrates asks Protagoras how one could know what to fear and what not to fear if one does not have knowledge. People who are “lacking knowledge in all these occupations yet confident in each of them” (350a-b), are, according to Socrates “not courageous but mad (μαινόμενοι)” (350c). That is to say that if one is confident about things of which one knows nothing, then one is insane, rather than courageous or manly. If we ask of what this insanity consists we see that it is the conceit of wisdom, or thinking that one knows what one does not know. In this context, we can see what is particularly dangerous about this. Whether or not we can say here that the virtues are interpredicable, Socrates shows that the vices are all dependent on ignorance. Thus, knowing that one does not know is the first step towards virtue.

If the knowledge that unifies the virtues is a knowledge of good and evil, we can say: if one lacks the knowledge of good and evil (the necessary and sufficient condition for all virtue) then one will not know that one does not have wisdom or the other virtues. The lack of knowledge of good and bad is the conceit of wisdom. If one does not know what is good, then one often goes towards the bad, thinking that it is good (cf. 358c-d). Not only will one go towards the bad thinking that it is good, but one will not even know that one does not have the virtues. This is a convincing description of the states of the souls of the μαινόμενοι described in the *Protagoras*. Thus the true difficulty is going to be the same that we see in the *Apology*, the problem of thinking that one has this knowledge when one does not. But, here we can see more explicitly the effect this lack of knowledge has on virtue.

As the *Apology* also shows, it is a considerable accomplishment to come to know that one knows nothing of any consequence. I claim that the *Protagoras* shows that the knowledge of good and bad that unifies the virtues in each human instantiation of those universal virtues (Vlastos) is not something that one possesses—or a state that one attains—once and for all. It is, as Penner argues, a state of the soul, but a state that must be thought of as a process due to the passage of time and the unexpected events that befall one in the course of a lifetime. More than just the haphazard event—or the haphazard nature of events in general—the fear of death in particular makes virtue and knowledge difficult to maintain.<sup>96</sup> We fear death because we think it is bad, and the conceit of wisdom slips in (*Apology* 29a-b). If the virtues are unified in wisdom then the vices are unified in “folly” (ἄφροσύνην). At 332a-333d Socrates argues that wisdom and self-control must be the same thing because they have a single opposite, folly, for “there is only one opposite for each thing” (333b) and so, if “folly” is a thing, it can have only one opposite. Therefore, wisdom and temperance must be one.<sup>97</sup> In what follows similar arguments are made to show that virtue is wisdom and ignorance is vice. In the case of courage, “the wisdom about what is and what is not to be feared is courage and the opposite is ignorance (ἄμαθία)” (360d).

Thus, in the *Protagoras*, as in the *Apology*, we may not have the knowledge that makes all of the virtues possible, but we know that ignorance makes the vices possible. It is not just ignorance, but the double order ignorance of the *Apology*. In the *Protagoras*

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<sup>96</sup> Crito seems to forget everything he “learned” from years of association with Socrates at the approach of his friend’s death. In the dialogue that shares his name, Crito is ready to throw a life based on arguments aside out of such a fear (46a). It is against this fear that Socrates conjures the auloi of the Corybants (54b).

<sup>97</sup> Friedlander sees this entire section as a “grave fallacy” (1964, 19). Worse “the inference that Socrates derives from this artificially constructed nonsense is made worthless” (1964, 19).

Socrates makes this clear when he says that “ignorance (ἀμαθίαν) is to have a false (ψευδῆ) belief and to be deceived (ἐψεῦσθαι) about matters of great importance’ (358c). This is not simple ignorance. For I can be ignorant of something without having a false opinion about it. If I am ignorant of the good in a given situation, but am aware of that ignorance, I will probably fair all right. But, if I think that I know what the good is, then I commit a “mistaken act done without knowledge” (357e)

When Socrates says in the *Apology*, “to fear death, gentleman, is no other than to think one is wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not know” (29a), he is offering a description of the state of mind in which the conceit of wisdom slips in. I am afraid because I think I know that something is terrible when I do not. This state of cowardice, by its nature, also means that I will lack each of the other virtues for the same reason. The introduction of hedonism shows that ignorance prohibits self-control. I will think that the wrong things are pleasant and I will want to eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow I will surely die. The speech of the Laws in the *Crito* shows that without knowledge I cannot have justice, because I will fear the wrong things and I will escape from jail or commit other unjust acts (50a *ad finem*). If I do not have knowledge, I will also lack piety. I will “abandon” the post at which I was put by the god. In the *Apology* Socrates says that had he abandoned his post that it “would have been a dreadful thing, and then I might truly and justly been brought here for not believing that there are gods, disobeying the oracle, fearing death, and thinking I was wise when I was not” (29a).

Death is the extreme limit that continually threatens our “human wisdom” that knows that it does not know (*Apology* 20d). We slip into the fear of death, as if it were natural. We slip into ignorance unawares and we think we know what we do not and thus

we assume we have virtues that we do not have. Virtue is difficult because we have to keep becoming virtuous in a world that is constantly changing and in which foresight is quite unpredictable. Humans cannot have true wisdom or true virtue because we live in a world of change and becoming. Socrates continued to ask questions until he died, because he had to keep from thinking that he knew what he did not know.<sup>98</sup> Socrates' constant investigations are guards against the passage of time and the tendency to get lost in the moment—as did Epimetheus— and as such suffer from “the loss of knowledge” (*Protagoras* 345b).

Brickhouse and Smith offer a similar interpretation of the elenchus. For them it ensures that “one will never act upon a carelessly accepted conception of justice” (1994, 129). They go on to point out that the elenchus neither provides wisdom “nor can the most scrupulously careful employment of the elenchus provide an absolute guarantee that a false moral conception could never escape one’s notice. Such errors would be a good deal less likely to occur” (1994, 128). But, this is the case only if one continually practices it. Thus the elenchus seems to be a kind of diligence against unexamined beliefs upon which one may act, either under pressure or at the spur of the moment. It is both a prophylactic incantation and a kind of training whereby one may fight the loss of knowledge that occurs under duress. In other words, I interpret the elenchus as a ceaseless attempt to keep from forgetting oneself.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Socrates is also interested in helping others to see their lack of wisdom, but it is important to note here the extent to which he asks questions to work on his own soul.

<sup>99</sup> Carpenter and Polansky argue that “Socrates has no single method of refutation or cross-examination. He uses a variety of approaches based upon the needs of the particular interlocutor and conversational setting” (2002, 90). If I am correct and Socrates uses the elenchus to combat the effects of time and change then such a plurality of methods would be necessary.

Only with death do the difficulties of becoming virtuous cease. We continually have to navigate the labyrinth and fight the minotauric fear of death, until the moment we die. At the end of the *Phaedo*, Socrates does not say that he and *Crito* owe a cock to Aesclepius for the reason that many suggest, that life was an illness.<sup>100</sup> Rather, he is saying that the illness is the fear of death against which his struggle had finally ended. The battle against thinking that you know what you do not has ended. This is because the soul is separated from the body and the change that accompanies physical things may cease.

The discussion of courage at the end of the dialogue shows that “cowardice is ignorance of what is to be feared” (360c). Part of the power of Plato’s dialogues comes from the paradigmatic role played by Socrates. It is easy to say that one does not fear death, but it is a far different matter to maintain one’s convictions in the face of it. Virtue is difficult because of becoming, because of temporal perspective and constant change. The elenchus fights against forgetting oneself. In order to see the virtues as one, the first step, it seems, is to see one’s life as a whole.

In the next section, I show that Socrates continues to explain the difficulty and apparent disunity of virtue due to the nature of time and death. My reading of Socrates’ exegesis builds upon the argument just offered for the unity of the virtues.<sup>101</sup> Like the preceding analysis, I show that Socrates’ point in his exegesis of the poem is in agreement with other so-called “early” dialogues and especially the *Apology*.

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<sup>100</sup> Nehemas attributes this view to Nietzsche which he rightly points out “has by now become almost canonical” (1998, 158). Cf. Grube’s note explaining that “Socrates apparently means that death is a cure for the ills of life” (in Cooper, 1996, 100 n. 19)

<sup>101</sup> Few scholars see the connection between the two sections. Neither Nussbaum 1986, Kahn 1996, Penner 1992, nor Vlastos 1973 mention the interpretation of the poem at all. Of the scholars who write about Socrates’ interpretation of the poem, Robert Bartlett is one of the few commentators to see Socrates’ discussion of the poem as continuation of the discussion of the unity of the virtues (2004, 76).

### **Being or Becoming Virtuous?**

The discussion of the poem begins as a compromise, but neither Socrates nor Protagoras do much to compromise. Protagoras wants to turn the conversation into an eristic display, but Socrates steadfastly continues to work through the themes that flustered Protagoras at 333e. Socrates wants to discuss the unity of virtue.

Protagoras introduces a poem where “Simonides says to Scopas, the son of Creon in Thessaly<sup>102</sup>:

For a man to become good truly is hard,  
In hands and feet and mind foursquare,  
Blamelessly built... (339a-b).

Protagoras asks Socrates if the poem is well made and Socrates answers that is certainly is. “And do you think it’s well made if the poet contradicts himself?” (339b-c). When Socrates answers in the negative Protagoras quotes another passage from the same poem.

Nor is Pittacus’ proverb in tune  
however wise a man he was  
hard it is to be good, he said (339c).

Protagoras explains his position.

How can anyone who says both these things be consistent. First, he asserts himself that it is hard for a man truly to become good, and then a little further along in his poem he forgets and criticizes Pittacus for saying the same thing as he did, that it is hard for a man to be good, and refuses to accept from him the same thing that he himself said. And yet, when he criticizes him for saying the same thing as himself, he obviously criticizes himself as well, so either the earlier or the later must not be right (339c-d).

Protagoras’ claims amount to a sort of anti-elenchus and Plato might be offering a parody of the general confusion of elenchus and eristic. Protagoras wants to change the subject

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<sup>102</sup> If Froma Zeitlin is correct and Thebes allows Athens to “play the Other” in tragedy, Thessaly may serve the same function in Plato. Cf. “Thebes: Theater of Self and Society in Athenian Drama” (Winkler and Zeitlin 1992, 130-167).

and show how clever he is while also furthering his own cause by pointing out the contradiction in the poem. The eristic quality of Protagoras' speech is made even more explicit when Socrates says: "At first I felt as if I had been hit by a good boxer. Everything went black and I was reeling from Protagoras' oratory and the others' clamor" (349e). It is important that Socrates is able to "keep his head" and not forget himself here as his interlocutors so often do. This will be of significance in his interpretation of the poem, almost as if he is offering his interpretation here, under attack "as if it were it were an incantation" (*Phaedo* 114d).

Socrates begins with something of an attack on Simonides.

[T]he characteristic style of ancient philosophy was laconic brevity. It was in this context that the saying of Pittacus—It is hard to be good—was privately circulated with approval among the sages. Then Simonides, ambitious for philosophical fame, saw that if he could score a takedown against this saying, as if it were a famous wrestler, and get the better of it, he would himself become famous in his own lifetime (343b-c).

Simonides wants to improve his reputation and so attempts to bring down the older Pittacus, ranked among the sages. Socrates could be saying the same thing about Protagoras' treatment of Simonides. But, while Socrates "rehabilitates" Simonides with his interpretation, the claim still holds for Protagoras. Socrates has just compared Protagoras to a pugilist (349e) and here he compares Simonides to a wrestler. Patrick Coby finds nine points of similarity between Simonides and Protagoras (1987, 111). He says, "Protagoras has so much in common with Simonides that it may be warranted in the upcoming poem analysis...to treat Simonides as a surrogate for Protagoras" (111).

While there many similarities between the two figures, these are played up at the beginning of this section. In the end, as Brickhouse and Smith argue "invariably what

Simonides ends up meaning is suspiciously Socratic in tone and content” (1984, 83). The “Socratic” meaning of the poem is, Brickhouse and Smith maintain, due to Socrates’ method of interpretation. Brickhouse and Smith write that, “Socrates attributes only those beliefs he supposes all of us to hold. The result is that the only views Socrates is prepared to attribute to Simonides are views he would attribute to anyone at all” (1984, 83). This means, of course, that Protagoras cannot but, in some way, agree with Socrates.

Protagoras was supposed to adapt to Socrates’ short memory and stick to short answers. Instead, he moves to the interpretation of a poem. In return, Socrates begins his interpretation—which Taylor calls “generally perverse” (Taylor 1976, 142 ad loc)—by turning the poem into a dialogue.

We have to approach this maxim of Pittacus by imagining him speaking and Simonides replying, something like this: Pittacus: ‘Gentlemen, it is hard to be good (ῥω ἄνθρωποι, χαλεπὸν ἐσθλὸν ἔμμεναι).<sup>103</sup> Simonides: ‘What you say is not true, Pittacus, for it is not being but becoming good (οὐ γὰρ εἶναι ἀλλὰ γενέσθαι μὲν ἐστὶν ἄνδρα ἀγαθὸν), in hands and feet and mind foursquare, blamelessly built, that is hard truly (χαλεπὸν ἀλεθέως) (343e-344a).<sup>104</sup>

Socrates’ interpretation of the poem may well be perverse, but it renders a clear philosophical point that counters the perversity of Protagoras’ lack of concern with virtue. Socrates is highlighting the effects of the passage of time on virtue. When we read the poem with this in mind, it answers the initial question of why virtue cannot be taught. His interpretation of the poem allows us to see that and why virtue (even if it is

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<sup>103</sup> The use of the epic infinitive ἔμμεναι of εἰμί sum brings to mind the διαμένειν that comes later at 344b9.

<sup>104</sup> The translation of Lombardo and Bell works nicely with this interpretation, because they set off the speakers, as some of the dialogues themselves do. But the Greek does not exactly warrant this. The dialogic nature of the interpretation, is however, clear.

knowledge) cannot be taught. At 320b-c, when Socrates says, “I just don’t think that virtue can be taught,” the Greek reads: “διδασκτόν ἐστὶν ἢ ἀρετή,” virtue *is* not taught, or *is* not teachable. The construction uses the same verb ‘to be’ for which Simonides (according to Socrates) criticizes Pittacus. Virtue is not taught (for then one knows, or is virtuous) and this belongs only to the gods. Virtue becomes taught, which is to say that it is equivalent to the continual process of learning. This interpretation explains why Socrates continues to practice the elenchus and calls it “service to the god” in the *Apology* (30a). As we saw in the previous section, Socrates uses the elenchus continually to become virtuous. Virtue is a struggle, not an attained state. Socrates may have been referring to this when he jokingly tried to substitute “bad” for “difficult.” Even if they do not admit it, people fail in virtue because they flee difficulty. If they flee difficulty, then they think it is bad or fearful (cf. 358d).

Socrates’ interpretation focuses on the difficulty of virtue, but this is overlooked by his interlocutors, intent as they are upon verbal *agon*. He says,

For a little later, as if he were developing his argument, he says that to become a god man is truly difficult, but possible, for a time at least (οἶόν τε μέντοι ἐπὶ γε χρόνον); but having become one (γενόμενον), to remain (διαμένειν) in that state (τῇ ἔξει) and be a good man, as you say, Pittacus, is impossible beyond human power (ἀδύνατον καὶ οὐκ ἀνθρώπειον), but only a god could have that gift (344b6-c3).

The distinction is one between being and becoming.<sup>105</sup> Only a god can be good but a human can perhaps become good “for a time at least.” It is not possible, however, for a mortal to remain in that state, because of time. ‘Remaining’ (διαμένειν) is here

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<sup>105</sup> Taylor says, The verb in the opening line...is in fact the past infinitive, which could have the sense either ‘to have become’ or ‘to become on one occasion’ (as opposed to acquiring a lasting disposition), while there is some evidence in early Greek of a distinction between becoming F in the sense of manifesting F-ness for a limited time and being F permanently (e.g. Pind. *Pyth.* x21-4) (Taylor 1976, 143).

similar to the epic form of being (ἔμμεναι) used in the poem. The difficulty of being good, for a human being in a world of change is that time renders being into remaining, which is ultimately a kind of becoming rather than of being.

If virtue is indeed knowledge, this claim is remarkably similar to those describing the difference between human and divine wisdom. “What has caused my reputation is none other than a certain kind of wisdom. What kind of wisdom? Human wisdom, perhaps. It may be that I really possess this, while those whom I mentioned just now are wise with a wisdom more than human” (20d-e). Human wisdom is, of course, simply “that I do not think I know what I do not know” (21d). He shows later that “To fear death gentlemen, is no other than to think oneself wise when one is not, to think one knows what one does not” (29a). If we see death as misfortune, we fear it and it leads us astray.<sup>106</sup> Thus fear of death takes away one’s knowledge.

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates cites the poem again in order to make a related point.

But that man inevitably is bad  
whom incapacitating misfortune throws down (344c).

This is a surprising claim, for it seems that even the good man will inevitably be made bad by misfortune. Robert Bartlett takes a somewhat extreme but not entirely inaccurate reading of this. He says: “All human excellence is doomed to decline as a result of time, toil and illness, for example (345b2-4), and it is precisely those who have gained the most knowledge and so act or fare best who have the most to lose—and will lose it eventually” (2004, 78). I think that Bartlett interprets this too strongly as saying that it is impossible to “possess” virtue (2004, 79). I argue that according to Simonides it is difficult but

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<sup>106</sup> Cf. *Crito* 46e-47a.

possible to become wise, but since it is a becoming wise it is always subject to change and thus one may (but will not necessarily) also become worse. It is precisely because the predicates of virtue in the *Protagoras* are Pauline, that one may not be, but only become, virtuous. It is a human being who is striving for universal virtue and the human is partly physical and temporal and subject to change. A particular instantiation of a universal is not ever that universal itself. The person will not necessarily lose virtue, however, as Bartlett suggests. Socrates says only that if certain circumstances occur, one will always be made bad, not that one will always be made bad, for luck may have it that the circumstances never occur in some lives.

C.C.W. Taylor asks instead what it means that he will become bad.

The poet might be saying that misfortune makes a man poor, hungry, weak in body, lacking in reputation etc., i.e. kakos (inferior) according to the traditional success conception of arête, or (alternately or additionally) that the man in that situation has no choice but to act in shameful ways (Taylor 1976, 145).

Taylor glosses over Socrates' reading as "an interpretation...in terms of his own thesis that goodness consists in knowledge is clearly anachronistic and whimsical" (Taylor 1976, 146). Perhaps it is both anachronistic and whimsical as an interpretation of Simonides, but as a determined effort to keep the discussion on the subject of virtue and its transmission, the interpretation is serious and does a lot of work. Socrates, does use the lines to introduce "his own thesis that goodness consists in knowledge" but that is not all he does. He is also still commenting on the difficulty of virtue. He says,

the good man too could sometimes become bad, either through old age or toil or disease or some misfortune—for doing badly is nothing other than being deprived of knowledge—but the bad man could never become bad—for he is bad all the time—but if he is to become bad he must first become good (345b-c).

Socrates' life (as depicted by Plato) is proof that we do not have to, but that due to the passage of time we cannot assume that we "are" virtuous. If virtue is knowledge and we think we are knowledgeable, then we think that we know something that we do not. We become knowledgeable by continuous questioning. This is becoming good, or gaining some degree of knowledge—if only the knowledge that I don't know. It keeps us from acting viciously and thus contributes to the state of being called virtue so that one will better be able to handle unexpected and adverse situations, should they arise. Thus, Socrates says that events such as old age and toil can only take away the knowledge (or goodness) of one who has knowledge.

Whom does incapacitating (ἀμήχανος) misfortune (συμφορά) overthrow (καθαιρεί)? Clearly not the ordinary passenger who is always susceptible (δῆλον ὅτι οὐ τὸν ιδιώτην· ὁ μὲν γὰρ ιδιώτης αἰεὶ καθήρηται) (344c).

Misfortune or more literally "events" (συμφορά) cannot overthrow someone who has no knowledge to be overthrown. If we imagine an ordinary person has to take control of a ship or a plane, a problem does not really throw him down. He is down from the start. Otherwise, we would have something like the joke about the man who breaks his hand and says "Doc, will I ever play the piano?" The punch line is that the man has never played the piano and has no knowledge of the piano to have suffered in the injury. If we have not thought about virtue and the state of our souls we do not lose knowledge when we are overcome by the fear of death, for we have never thought about what should be feared and what should not.

We might say the same thing in other, more temporal terms. If one lives caught up in the multiplicity of moments, then no particular moment (no matter how particularly eventful, or unfortunate) can be named as the cause of misfortune. Lack of knowledge is

the real misfortune. Socrates seems to call something a misfortune only if it takes away knowledge. If one never has knowledge, that is the misfortune.

Socrates continues along this line of reasoning. He says:

You can't knock down someone already supine, you can only knock down someone standing up and render him supine (ὥσπερ οὖν τὸν κείμενον τις ἂν καταβάλοι, ἀλλὰ τὸν μὲν ἐστῶτά καταλάβοι ἂν τις ὥστε κείμενον ποιῆσαι). In the same way, incapacitating misfortune would overthrow only someone who is capable, not the chronically incapable (τὸν δὲ κείμενον οὐ, οὐτῶ καὶ τὸν ὄντα ποτὲ ἀμήχανος ἂν συμφορὰ καθέλοι, τὸν δὲ ἀεὶ ὄντα οὐ). A hurricane striking a pilot would incapacitate him, a bad season will do it to a farmer, and the same thing applies to a doctor. For the good is susceptible to becoming bad...but the bad is not susceptible to becoming; it must always be (αὐτὰρ ἀνὴρ ἀγαθὸς τοτὲ μὲν κακός, ἄλλοτε δ' ἐσθλός· τῷ δὲ κακῷ οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ γενέσθαι, ἀλλ' ἀεὶ εἶναι ἀνάγκη. ὥστε τὸν μὲν εὐμήχανον καὶ σοφὸν καὶ ἀγαθὸν ἐπειδὴν ἀμήχανος συμφορὰ καθέλη, οὐκ ἔστι μὴ οὐ κακὸν ἔμμενα) (344c-e).

Socrates is saying that the one who doesn't know cannot be overtaken by events, because being overtaken means losing knowledge. Thus events (συμφορὰ) may overtake a good man but not a bad one. If the bad one does well, it is a form of luck or accident and so he may as well have done poorly.

All of Socrates' examples are 'natural' phenomena that overtake the human. A storm hits the ship and no amount of skill or knowledge can save it. The farmer cannot make it rain, no matter how expert in agriculture. Certain diseases or injuries simply cannot be cured, no matter how expert the doctor. In such circumstances, a good person who is εὐμήχανον καὶ σοφὸν καὶ ἀγαθόν will lose his or her knowledge (which is only to say that the knowledge becomes useless) and become ἀμήχανος.

In order to illustrate this, Socrates shows the different ways that a good man and a "scoundrel" deal with adversity (346a-b). Just as knowing how to deal with storms is an

integral part of being a good pilot (even if some storms will overcome even the best pilot), knowing how to handle adversity is part it seems of being a virtuous person. In order to prepare for events we must not trust our virtue to luck. If one trusts luck one may well turn out like Critias or Alcibiades who “are almost happy to see their parents’ or country’s trouble and viciously point it out and denounce it so that their own dereliction of duty toward them will not be called into question” (346a-b).

The scoundrel, like Meletus, thinks that he has knowledge that he does not have and loudly criticizes others. The knowledgeable person, to the contrary, realizes how difficult knowledge is and he or she never

thinks that any human being willingly (ἐκόντα) makes a mistake (ἐξαμαρτάνειν) or willingly (ἐκόντα) does anything wrong (αἰσχρά) or bad (κακά). They know very well that anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily (ἄκοντες)” (345d-e).<sup>107</sup>

Thus, those who have become good “are angry because their parents or country wronged them, they calm themselves down and reconcile themselves to it, and force themselves to love and praise their own people (346b). It is not difficult to see the contrast here between Socrates, who was wronged by his city, but who died loving it and upholding its laws, and Alcibiades, who at least partially blamed the city for his misfortune. The point is that most people think they know things that they do not and if they do not have the disastrous fortunes of Alcibiades it is either because of a lack of ambition and talent, or a surplus of luck.

In this chapter I have shown that while we may not be able to say precisely what wisdom or virtue is, or how they are unified, we can see clearly that the conceit of

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<sup>107</sup> Cf. *Crito* 49a-b and *Apology* 25d-26e for two different but related claims.

wisdom is the ignorance or folly that unites the vices, since “anyone who does anything wrong or bad does so involuntarily (ἄκοντες)” (345e). In addition I have shown that Socrates’ interpretation of the poem is a continuation of the discussion of the unity of the virtues. I have shown that one must become and not be virtuous, precisely because virtue is a kind of knowledge that is never fully attained, but is instead a constant struggle. One cannot ‘be’ virtuous without succumbing to the conceit of wisdom that thinks it knows what it does not. Becoming virtuous, I argue, is the “human wisdom” of the *Apology*, a wisdom that constantly guards against this conceit by means of the elenchus. In the next chapter I will discuss Socrates’ solution to this problem in his discussion of pleasure, akrasia and measurement.

## Chapter 5

### Pleasure, Akrasia and Measure

In the last chapter, I showed that Socrates' discussion of the Simonides poem suggests that the wisdom that unites the virtues is the "human wisdom" of the *Apology* (20d) so that virtue could not be taught because it was an unceasing process of becoming virtuous. In this chapter, I show that Socrates continues the discussion by telling us precisely what kind of wisdom we should attempt in order to overcome this same becoming and the temporal distortions that it presents. In thinking of one's life as a whole, one must think about it rationally. When one does so one will be able to assess pleasures and pains correctly, seeing that only the unchanging objects of contemplation are truly pleasant. Thus time—and now how to overcome it and become good—remain central themes of the dialogue.

In recent years, the section of the *Protagoras* falling between 351b-358d has been discussed more than any other part of the dialogue.<sup>108</sup> In this chapter I address the problems of hedonism, akrasia and measurement. In each of these the element of time is central to the argument. By focusing on this common aspect, I am able to show that Socrates may in fact offer the 'hedonistic' argument on an *ad hominem* basis, but that he also takes it quite seriously. So in the first stage, Socrates forces Protagoras to acknowledge temporal perspective. Protagorean relativism is consistently presented in Plato as declaring the truth of perspective (cf. *Theaetetus* 152a and *Sophist* 236b). The

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<sup>108</sup> Gregory Vlastos claims that "more was to be contributed to this topic by English speaking scholars in the following nine years [after his 1956 Introduction to the *Protagoras*] than had appeared in the previous forty" (1995, 43).

immediate pleasure—the present—is the de facto perspective and so it is favored by relativism because pleasures appear larger in the present due to the power of appearance. Thus, Protagoras' claim to make Hippocrates better and better each day cannot be true, for Protagoras sees the good merely as the pleasant present. In order to make Hippocrates better each day, Protagoras would have to have a view of the whole that he does not have.

Socrates then shows that the way pleasure appears is *not* the way that pleasure is. Only one perspective on pleasure is correct, precisely not the one that appears, but the one where perspective is eliminated by radically redefining pleasure not as something to be assessed from moment to moment, but rather, over the course of an entire life. This is the elimination of perspective altogether. Socrates shows that if one looks at pleasure over the course of a lifetime everyone will see the same things as pleasant. Socrates accomplishes this with the discussion of akrasia. He shows that akrasia is an error of appearance and that it can be corrected with argument. He does not hold a truly hedonist position that pleasure is the good, but rather he defines pleasure in such a way that only the good would be truly pleasant. In the course of this argument Socrates has gotten Protagoras to accept arguments that destroy relativism and hedonism. Socrates has in addition shown that Protagoras is not an elite like he thinks. Rather, the hedonism of the many is based upon the same favoring of the present. Thus, Protagorean relativism becomes equated with the base position of the many. The *ad hominem* attack is precisely to call it an *ad populum* attack.

## Pleasure

Socrates' avowal of hedonism in the *Protagoras* has caused a great deal of controversy in the scholarly community. In this chapter, I evaluate Socrates' discussion of pleasure and his avowal of hedonism. I show that most scholarly discussions of the hedonism of the *Protagoras* are misguided, because they do not see that Socrates compels Protagoras to accept a redefinition of pleasure that refutes relativism as well as the belief in *akrasia*.

Many scholars have been reluctant to take Socrates' claims seriously. Charles Kahn expresses surprise that he, Zeyl (1980) and O'Brien (1967,138) are "honorable exceptions" to what he claims (without citation) is the dominant tendency not to take sufficient notice of the "*ad populum*" argument which suggests that "Socrates is here arguing tongue in cheek" (Kahn 1996, 240). This position is not the minority position that Kahn makes it out to be. In fact various forms of this argument are perhaps the most common. There are some minor differences between an *ad hominem* and an *ad populum* interpretation of this passage. The point, however, is that the *ad hominem* is the *ad populum*. That means that Socrates reduces Protagoras' position to that of the many. Though careful not to offend the democracy, Protagoras has said that "the masses, needless to say, see nothing" (317b). Thus, if Socrates can show that Protagoras' position is in many respects the same as (or at least inherent in) the position of the masses, then Protagoras would have to admit that he too sees nothing. Socrates, will in effect show this, when he discusses the power of appearance.

Guthrie offers a typical outline of three possible explanations of Socrates' professed hedonism. The first option is that "Socrates advocates a vulgar hedonism such as he fiercely combats in the *Gorgias*" (1965, 231). A variation of this interpretation relies on a developmentalist supposition which holds that the doctrine "represents the genuine Socratic and Platonic position at the time the dialogue was written" (1965, 231), but that Plato came to reject the position later. This is the position held by Grote and Hackforth.

The second possible position holds that the

episode, like the whole dialogue, is written *ad hominem*, in an attack on Protagoras and more generally on Sophistic standards of morality, which are entirely conventional: Socrates does not himself believe in the premise on which he bases the proof of his own view that courage, and virtue generally, is knowledge (1965, 232).

Guthrie rejects both of these positions, though the option he accepts is a modification of the second position. He believes that Socrates is arguing from the sophists' position, or *ad hominem* "not (as in the previous explanation) to attack them openly but actually to show them at their best" (1965 233).

None of these positions are sufficient for the same reason: none of them ask what Socrates' definition of pleasure is. Guthrie's own position seems particularly misguided. As for the sophists, Plato may be trying "to show them at their best" (1965, 233), but the point, for Plato, is that their best is not very good. The entire dialogue is constructed around the question of progress that Protagoras proposes to Hippocrates. The only reason that Guthrie could possibly say that Plato wants to portray the sophists in the best possible light is because of the subtle way that he shows them in the worst possible light. Not only are the sophists ignorant, they are so ignorant of their own ignorance that they

do not recognize that Socrates has destroyed the positions of Protagoras. The commentators who want to avoid making Socrates a hedonist at the expense of having him express opinions he does not hold, are also too squeamish to present him in an eristic light. They want an *ad hominem* argument that has no teeth. This is not the way Plato presents Socrates as seeing it. Socrates says “It’s you and me I want to put on the line” (331c) and he effectively destroys Protagoras’ position.

Thus, Socrates does offer a strong *ad hominem* argument that relies on positions held by Protagoras, but this does not mean that he does not take those claims quite seriously.<sup>109</sup> I agree that he is seriously committed to hedonism, but a radically redefined hedonism. Scholars, such as Terrence Irwin and Martha Nussbaum and Brickhouse and Smith take Socrates seriously when he espouses the identity of the good and the pleasant. Such scholars reject the *ad hominem* interpretation and argue, in different ways, that Socrates uses pleasure to create a standard, or a unit of measurement to make incommensurable ends, commensurate. While such scholars may not be entirely correct in rejecting the *ad hominem* approach, the idea of pleasure as a standard of measurement is important both for the discussion of akrasia and of measurement and the power of appearance.<sup>110</sup> I show that in order to make it such a standard, however, Socrates must

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<sup>109</sup> Cf. Irwin who says that the “first argument rests on the fact that Socrates seeks to show that the many implicitly accept hedonism. This is a poor reason for supposing that he does not accept it himself” (1995, 86).

<sup>110</sup> Like Guthrie, Irwin begins by offering three different versions of the *ad hominem* interpretation. He will reject all three however. “This ‘ad hominem’ interpretation of hedonism rests on three main arguments. (1) Socrates tries to show how the many are committed to hedonism; he does not agree that it is true, but only that they cannot avoid it. And so we cannot infer that he accepts hedonism. (2) The truth of hedonism is unnecessary for Socrates’ rejection of incontinence and his belief in the unity of the virtues, and Socrates and Plato must have realized this. (3) None of the other Socratic dialogues affirms hedonism; indeed, it is incompatible with the ethical doctrine of the other dialogues and Socrates and Plato must have realized this” (Irwin 1995, 86). Irwin is correct here. Even if he is arguing for Protagoras or the many, it is no reason to assume that he does not accept the position. It is not much of an argument that he does, either. Irwin continues his assault on the *ad hominem* position, saying: “We would have a better argument for an

radically redefines pleasure. If he did not it could not serve as any kind of standard whatsoever. This has not been noticed by scholars who bring anachronistic (or at least mistaken) interpretations of pleasure into the discussion.<sup>111</sup> Thus he is committed to hedonism, but only as he defines it in the text when he says “if he completed his life, having lived pleasantly, does he not seem to you to have lived well” (351b).

Terrence Irwin comes close to this position when he says that we need “to see whether hedonism ought to seem plausible in the light of the Socratic dialogues, we ought to see how this account of happiness fits with Socratic eudaimonism” (1995, 87).

He has claimed that:

Socrates does not offer hedonism as an alternative to eudaimonism, but as an account of the good that eudaimonism takes to be our ultimate end. Let us say, then that he affirms epistemological hedonism, taking judgments about pleasure to be epistemologically prior to judgments about goodness (83).

It seems that Irwin is making two points. First, he is saying that hedonism is a kind of eudaimonism. He is also saying that pleasure is the criterion for goodness. According to this hedonism, we identify happiness with the “predominance of pleasure over pain in our *life as a whole*” (Irwin 1995, 87; emphasis mine).<sup>112</sup> Irwin is correct that the hedonism endorsed by Socrates is one in which only overall pleasure in the course of

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ad hominem interpretation if we found that Socrates is careful to confine the hedonist claim to the many, and to dissociate himself from it; but this is not at all what we find. In fact, Socrates himself proposes hedonism, against the initial opposition of Protagoras and the many, as the first step of his argument for the unity of the virtues” (351b3-c6).

<sup>111</sup> Cf. Nussbaum’s comparison of “the role of hedonism in this dialogue with the way it figures in later fourth-century thought” (1986, 110). She finds that “Eudoxos and Epicurus both argue for the intrinsic attractiveness of pleasure as the end or good...The *Protagoras* shows no trace of these concerns; nor, indeed, do any texts of the fifth and early fourth centuries” (1986, 110).

<sup>112</sup> This ‘life as a whole’ criterion for pleasure (thus identifying pleasure and happiness) should be distinguished from Vlastos’ (1969) claim that the objects of choice must be “good or bad on the whole or all things considered, since they are generally (invariably, in the examples in this passage) mixed bags of goods and evils” (in Vlastos 1995, 45). I agree with Vlastos as well. It is, however, the elimination of the temporal perspective that allows us to decide whether “mixed bags” are good or bad.

a life counts as pleasure. Momentary pleasure that produces more pain later will be disqualified by this criterion.<sup>113</sup> Disqualifying momentary pleasures is the first step in transforming pleasure into a standard. Martha Nussbaum says that what we

find prominently expressed, as we have already seen in the *Antigone*, is the concern to find a standard or measure that will render values commensurable, therefore subject to precise scientific control. The need for measurement motivates the search for an acceptable measure (1986, 110).<sup>114</sup>

We must understand that Socrates' "concern" to find a standard of measurement is an attempt to destroy Protagorean relativism.<sup>115</sup> If the relativist prejudice for the 'nearer' position is removed, only the good things that truly contribute to happiness will be called pleasant.<sup>116</sup> But pleasure may only be a standard if we count only as pleasure those things that provide more pleasure than pain in the course of a life as a whole. This will mean that only "non-transitory" pleasures will count as pleasure.

Plato expresses this same "hedonistic" idea elsewhere, most notably in the *Republic* where Socrates says that "of the three pleasures, the most pleasant is the part of the soul with which we learn, and the one in whom that part rules has the most pleasant life" (582e-583a). Socrates goes on to show that "a king lives seven hundred and twenty-nine times more pleasantly than a tyrant and that a tyrant is the same number of times

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<sup>113</sup> According to Vlastos, even the many realize that "they have been calling actions 'pleasant' and 'painful' only if they are immediately such" (1995, 49).

<sup>114</sup> She points to Aristophanes *Frogs*. "Weight, as Aristophanes saw, has singleness, externality, and omnipresence; but it is short on intuitive appeal in ethical appeal. Pleasure is a far more attractive placeholder. It is one of the few things we value that turns up in about everything" (110).

<sup>115</sup> Brickhouse and Smith point out that pleasure—which they seem, like Irwin, to associate with happiness—is used by Socrates to render incommensurables commensurate, but their difficulty with his position seems to stem from overlooking the crucial move which makes it pleasure, taken over the course of an entire life (1994, 97).

<sup>116</sup> It is odd that the "metaphysics of presence" which amounts to little more than a prejudice, that Jacques Derrida detects as originating with Plato is instead attacked by Socratic ethics as a sophistic position. Cf. Derrida 1974 and 1981.

more wretched” (587e). Though it is presented in a comical light here, this is the same sort of “calculus” proposed in the *Protagoras*. It is precisely in this way that we are to take the hedonism of the *Protagoras*. As Vlastos puts it:

We are supposed to (a) itemize the good we would gain and the evils we would suffer both now and in the future by a given action, (b) assign numbers to the values in each of the two categories, and (c) pronounce the action ‘good’ or ‘evil’ depending on which of the two aggregates is the larger (1995, 46).

In the first stage (a), when we itemize the goods and evils that we suffer now and in the future, we are eliminating time as a factor. It is not explicit in Vlastos’ summary, but essential to the argument, that I must assign the numbers in step (b) solely on the basis of pleasure or pain, without taking the “now” or “in the future” into account.

In the *Republic*, Plato offers a rather long argument (580d-588a) that classifies and arranges pleasure in the same way and allows Socrates to calculate—in fashion quite similar to that described above— by precisely how much the king’s life is more pleasant than the tyrant’s. In the *Protagoras*, before Plato allows anyone to offer an argument that redefines pleasure in a way that makes only the good pleasant, Plato provides us with a cast of historical characters, whose fates we know and whose lives we can weigh or measure in the same way that Socrates calculated the pleasure of the lives of kings and tyrants in the *Republic*. Plato places these fifth century characters in the dialogue precisely because we can see their lives in a way that we may not be able see our own.

Like the *Republic*, the *Protagoras* invites us to evaluate the lives of these characters in terms of pleasure alone. It would seem that Callias finds pleasure “in food, drink, sex and all the things associated with them, but...also...the money-loving part” (*Republic* 580d-e). Alcibiades and Critias on the other hand are more “dedicated to the

pursuit of control, victory and high repute” (*Republic* 581a).<sup>117</sup> But for a “philosopher, what do you suppose he thinks the other pleasures are worth compared to that of knowing where the truth lies and always being in some such pleasant condition while learning. Won’t he think they’re far behind?” (581d-e). In the *Republic* Socrates goes on to argue that only the philosopher is qualified to judge because he has “of necessity tasted the other pleasures” (582a-b) and because we judge with arguments the “philosopher’s instrument” (582d). Thus, we see that Socrates’ life must have, of necessity, been more pleasant than that of any of his interlocutors, but Plato provides us with dramatic representations of those interlocutors so that we can evaluate for ourselves.

It is essential to a proper understanding of the role of pleasure in the *Protagoras* to understand that Socrates is using pleasure in the same way. Socrates induces Protagoras and the many to accept the philosopher’s definition of pleasure though they, like most commentators, may be unaware of this fact. Protagoras accepts a definition of pleasure that is incompatible with relativism. He accepts that if someone “completed his life, having lived pleasantly” he also “lived well” (351b). That is he accepts that pleasure is the good over the course of a life. Socrates almost immediately asks if “while knowledge is present in a man, what rules him is not knowledge, but rather anything else” (352b). This leads to the denial of *akrasia*, to which I return in the next section, but it is important to point out here that the entire argument will have the effect of showing that Protagoras does not have knowledge. If pleasure is the good and he is incapable of evaluating or defining pleasure, then he does not know the good. If he believes that one

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<sup>117</sup> Cf. *Memorabilia* I. 3.

can be overcome by pleasure, he does not have a true understanding of pleasure, and therefore has not experienced the pleasure of wisdom and certainly cannot teach it.

When the topic is first introduced Socrates asks if “some people live well and others badly?” (351b1). Socrates then asks “Now, if he *completed his life*, having lived pleasantly (Τί δ’ εἰ ἡδέως βιούς τὸν βίον τελευτήσιεν), does he not seem to you to have lived well? (οὐκ εὔ ἄν σοι δοκεῖ οὕτως βεβιωκέναι;)” (351b4; emphasis mine).

Protagoras underestimates Socrates’ claims. He says that one who has lived pleasantly if he is pleased by praiseworthy things (Εἶπερ τοῖς καλοῖς γ’, ἔφη, ζῶν ἡδόμενος) (351c). He assumes that shameful things can be pleasant, but this shows only that Protagoras is missing Socrates’ point entirely. Socrates is attempting to remove the relativity involved in accounting for pleasure, as his retort suggests, but Protagoras does not understand this conception of pleasure. Socrates prods Protagoras further. He is explicit about telling Protagoras what he means. He claims that pleasant things are good insofar as they are pleasant, leaving their other consequences out (351c5).

Vlastos divides this statement into two propositions. He thinks that the hedonism expressed here is equivalent to the conjunction of

(A) All pleasure is good and all pain is evil

With

(B) All good is pleasure and all evil is pain (1995, 48).

Vlastos understands (B) as a stronger position that Socrates need not hold. He asks then, why Socrates did not take the time to distance himself from this position and answers that “this would open up another big issue, sidetracking him from his immediate goal, which is to make good to the ‘multitude’ his great claim about ‘the power of knowledge’” (1995, 50). Vlastos is mistaken in this. The acceptance of both of these positions is part

of Socrates “great claim” about the power of knowledge. Socrates is arguing from the positions of the many and of Protagoras, but he is doing so in order to convince them that knowledge is the only true pleasure. Socrates is confident that if the temporal distortions are removed—and they are since time is not inherent in pleasure—the philosophical life will necessarily be the most pleasant. Protagoras picks up on the importance of the whole life in his reluctance to answer, but he will still miss the point.<sup>118</sup>

I don’t know, Socrates, if I should answer as simply as you put the question—that everything pleasant is good and everything painful is bad. It seems to me to be safer to respond not merely with my present answer in mind (ἀλλὰ μοι δοκεῖ οὐ μόνον πρὸς τὴν νῦν ἀπόκρισιν) but from the point of view of my life overall (ἀλλὰ καὶ πρὸς πάντα τὸν ἄλλον βίον τὸν ἐμὸν) (351d).

Protagoras says that not everything pleasant is good because he means something different by pleasure than does Socrates. He has the more common subjectivist, or relativist, view of pleasure. He has already said that “the good is such a multifaceted and variable thing” (334b). He must also think that pleasure is multifaceted. His inability to understand the Socratic conception of pleasure becomes clear when Protagoras concludes with the common sense claim that “that on the one hand, there are pleasurable things which are not good, and on the other hand, there are painful things which are not bad but some which are, and a third class which is neutral, neither good or bad” (351d).

Despite his claim, Protagoras fails to look at a human life over all, but even his attempt to do so undermines his relativism. Socrates’ response has to force the point. “You call pleasant things those which partake (μετέχοντα) of pleasure or produce (ποιοῦντα) pleasure?” (351e). ποιοῦντα is the crucial word here. When we equalize

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<sup>118</sup> Walsh interprets this as saying that “even if men pursue pleasure alone, they are still governed by reason” (1971, 261).

the effects of time (as Socrates will momentarily suggest) the future pain an immediately pleasurable action will produce is weighed together with it. Socrates has almost succeeded in his redefinition of pleasure.<sup>119</sup>

Plato shows us that it is through arguments that Socrates is able to take his entire life into account when he assesses pleasure and pain and in doing so destroys the ordinary notions of pleasure and pain. He is not lost in the present like Epimetheus, but he says instead that “I take promethean forethought over my life as a whole” (361d). It is on the grounds of an “entire life” that Socrates offers an account of his radical redefinition of pleasure. We must be sure we understand what Socrates means here. Certainly one is not able to predict the future in order to see one’s “life as a whole.” Indeed, even if one could accurately predict the future, such predictions would be worthless.

And if there had been any honors, praises, or prizes among them for the one who... best remembered which usually came earlier, and which later, and which simultaneously, and who could best divine the future, do you think our man would desire these rewards and envy among prisoners (*Republic* 516c-d).

The answer, of course is a resounding ‘No’ and Socrates could not mean this by having “promethean forethought.” Gregory Vlastos says that “his only explicit requirement is that we aggregate them rationally and thereby measure the value of those actions between which we choose” (1995, 46). This may not seem like calculating pleasures at all, but this seems to be part of Socrates’ point: when viewed in a rational way the things that are ordinarily viewed as pleasant are no longer so. If we can only evaluate pleasures rationally, then, as the *Republic* also claims, only rationality will be truly pleasurable for “what is best for each thing is its own” (586d-e). Thus, by looking at a life as a whole,

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<sup>119</sup> Vlastos says that even the many recognize that they “have been calling actions ‘pleasant’ and ‘painful’ only if they are immediately such” (1995, 48).

Socrates means looking at it rationally and using argument to judge pleasures.<sup>120</sup> To look at a life rationally is to look at it non-temporally and non-materially, thus only atemporal and incorporeal things will produce true pleasure.<sup>121</sup>

Thus to look at one's life with promethean forethought is to look at it rationally. When one looks rationally at one's life as a whole, only the good is pleasant and thus it offers us an "objective" standard of the pleasant. Perhaps to think about life as a whole is to think about its ends, about which we must think about rationally unless we want evil. Aristotle sets up two options and though he disagrees with Plato here, his comments shed light on the discussion at hand. Aristotle claims that the end is either laid down by nature or that it appears, for some other reason, to each person (114b15-20). These positions could easily be those of Socrates and Protagoras while they both "trace all the other things back to their ends in doing whatever actions they do" (114b15-17). Aristotle points out that both are responsible for their mistakes (neither Plato nor Socrates would disagree), but the point of the *Protagoras* is that if one holds a relative and changing view of the ends of a life, then one will think that base things are pleasant and make errors. Rationality, by focusing on eternal or unchanging things, corrects the skewed perspective that time produces. Thus, it destroys relativism which privileges the individual perspective and thus the present moment. Plato consistently presents Protagorean relativism as a favoring of an individual perspective.

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<sup>120</sup> Seekers of honor also seem to think of their lives as a whole, and so their lives may be better than those of pleasure lovers, but they are incapable of judging the life of wisdom lovers. In addition, as the presence of Alcibiades and Critias shows, one may also become worse as a result of this. Callias, by most standards, had a better—and certainly a longer—life than the others. Cf. *Symposium* 208c-209c.

<sup>121</sup> This does not mean that a stroll or a meal is not pleasant in some sense, and the good person certainly enjoys these. But such things pale in comparison with rational contemplation of forms. Cf. *Symposium* where Alcibiades says that Socrates "was the one man who could really enjoy a feast" (220a).

In the *Theaetetus*, Theaetetus claims that knowledge is perception (151e3-4) and Socrates equates this position with the Protagorean claim that “Man is the measure of all things, of the things which are that they are of things which are not that they are not” (πάντων χρημάτων μέτρον ἄνθρωπον εἶναι, τῶν μὲν ὄντων ὡς ἔστι, τῶν δὲ μὴ ὄντων ὡς οὐκ ἔστιν) (152a). We already see here the term μέτρον, that will appear as the correction of the power of appearance in the *Protagoras*. If Protagoras were indeed known for this position, there is a sort of perverse irony in Socrates’ insistence upon it as an objective standard. If we look at our lives rationally, as a whole, perspective is entirely eliminated.

The *Theaetetus* makes it clear what Protagoras means by his so called “homo mensura” doctrine when Socrates says “that as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, and as it appears to you, so it is for you” (ὡς οἷα μὲν ἕκαστα ἐμοὶ φαίνεται τοιαῦτα μὲν ἔστιν ἐμοί, οἷα δὲ σοί, τοιαῦτα δὲ αὖ σοί) (152a). Socrates concludes, “apparently, that things are for the individual such as he perceives them” (152c1-3).

Later Socrates brings out the temporal discontinuity that results from relativism’s inherent link to the present (as that perspective from which things always appear).<sup>122</sup> He asks “do you even feel sure that anything appears to another human being like it appears to you? Wouldn’t you be much more disposed to hold that it doesn’t appear the same even to yourself because you never remain like yourself” (154a6-8). The temporal discontinuity of relativism keeps one from agreeing with oneself. This is also the case for a Protagorean assessment of pleasure. If one has a belief that something is pleasurable and, as Vlastos says, that belief is not grounded in knowledge then, according to Socrates,

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<sup>122</sup> Socrates uses an argument from the future in order to help refute Protagoras’ relativism (178b-c).

it would not have the “requisite stability and could shift, at the very next moment, to the contrary belief” (Vlastos 1995, 45, n. 9).

We have seen that Irwin, Nussbaum and Brickhouse and Smith all treat pleasure as some form of measurement. For Irwin, it is a means to assess happiness and for Nussbaum and Brickhouse and Smith a way to make various incommensurable ends in life commensurate. They have not focused sufficiently on the removal of “subjectivism”<sup>123</sup> from pleasure that this requires. If we accept Socrates’ account and look at one’s life as a whole, relativism is removed from any explanation of pleasure.

When Socrates asks Protagoras whether he thinks that knowledge is something powerful or not (352b-c), he is asking two questions. Socrates is asking whether or not knowledge can be overcome by pleasure or some other criteria for action. When one asks if knowledge is stronger than pleasure, one is also asking whether or not knowledge can know pleasure. If we accept the *Republic*’s discussion of pleasure, we see that the rational part of the soul is the one that has true pleasure. This is because it is not physical and is not subject to time. Because the rational is not subject to time it is capable of looking at a life as a whole, which is to say in a non-perspectival—or objective—fashion. It is also capable of evaluating the other pleasures that know nothing of reason.

Thus, we have seen that Socrates takes hedonism seriously, but also argues for it in an *ad hominem* way that is intended to destroy Protagoras’ relativism by redefining pleasure in such a way that knowledge is true pleasure. This brings us to the discussion of *akrasia*, which continues to investigate the same problems.

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<sup>123</sup> As the *Theaetetus* puts it, “Whether you apply the term ‘being’ to a thing or the term ‘becoming,’ you must always use the words ‘for somebody’ or ‘of something’ or ‘relatively to something (τινὶ εἶναι ἢ τινὸς ἢ πρὸς τι ῥητέον αὐτῷ)” (160b-c)

## Akrasia

The denial of akrasia<sup>124</sup>—or weakness of the will—is one of the most contentious claims in Platonic literature. Aristotle begins the attack on this position, claiming that “this argument, then, contradicts things that appear manifestly” (*Nicomachean Ethics* 1145b27). He thinks that the “claim that ‘no one is willingly bad or unwillingly blessed’ would seem to be partly true but partly false. For while certainly no one is unwillingly blessed, vice is voluntary” (1145b20). Though some scholars, such as Vlastos and Santas, wish to argue that this argument can be “‘freed’ from its hedonistic premises” (21; cited in Vlastos 1995, 57), I will claim, quite to the contrary, that since we now understand Socrates’ definition of pleasure there is no reason to separate the argument from its “hedonistic premises” with which it is mutually explanatory.

The same scholars also think that the conclusions from the argument against akrasia should be limited to pleasure. The question is whether knowledge or something else “sometimes desire, sometimes pleasure, sometimes pain, at other times love, often fear” (352b) rule the human being. Socrates explicitly argues only against the claim that knowledge can be overcome by pleasure, not the others. Gerasimos Santas agrees with Vlastos 1965 that Socrates’ “argument, then, even if entirely successful, can refute only part of the opinion of the many; they still might be right about people being overcome by fear, love and so forth” (Santas 1971, 269).<sup>125</sup> Again this seems like an unnecessary limitation. I have shown that knowledge looks at unchanging, atemporal principles and

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<sup>124</sup> I follow Vlastos in treating akrasia as an English word (1995, n. 16, 47). Other authors, such as Irwin, use the English incontinence. It is important that the reader remember that both words stand for the one Greek term, one by means of transliteration, the other as translation.

<sup>125</sup> Walsh sees Euripides’ *Hippolytus* and *Medea* as making precisely these claims, that we are overcome by desire and by rage (1971, 250-257).

ends in order to determine what is pleasant and what is painful. We have seen that it is the consistency of knowledge and its objects that it is the only true pleasure. The things commonly considered more pleasant than knowledge only because of the power of the present. The wise person—to the extent that there is such a one— enjoys everything, but only because he or she enjoys wisdom most of all.

When Socrates raises the question he presents two options, either knowledge rules a person, or a plurality of other psychic phenomena rule that person. It is the shifting nature of being ruled by “sometimes (τοτὲ μὲν) desires, sometimes (τοτὲ δὲ) pleasure, sometimes (τοτὲ δὲ) pain, at other times (ἐνίοτε δέ) love, often (πολλάκις δέ) fear” (352b-c). Socrates’ wording is overwhelmed by markers of temporal discontinuity, so that it is not difficult to see that it is the inconstancy that is the target here. If one has the correct conception of pleasure, one is not overcome by pleasure, but constantly chooses on the basis of it. If one has a mistaken view of pleasure, one is living haphazardly and is overwhelmed by any old thing. In this section, I offer a careful reading of *akrasia* to show that Socrates does not need to refute any of the other things that may “overcome” someone. This comes as a result of my larger point. I show that Socrates argues that in the phenomenon of so-called *akrasia* one is overcome not by pleasure, but by the present. If this is so, then one is not overcome by fear or desire, either, but by the present. As Irwin puts it,

Socrates explains the error; since *short-term pleasures and pains seem greater than they really are*, we make mistaken judgments about pleasure and pain, and so we choose the result that will actually be less pleasant because we believe it will be more pleasant (356c4-e4) (Irwin 1995, 85; emphasis mine).

Socrates says that people say that they are “overcome by pleasure, because of which they fail to do the best thing when they know what it is” (353a). Akrasia is to be unwilling or unable to do what is best, even if one knows what is best.<sup>126</sup>

Since, however, Socrates has not made this explicit, the many’ ask what is it to be “overcome by pleasure” (353c). This question is central. In the discussion of the Simonides poem we saw that only those with knowledge can be overcome by events and that the “chronically incapable” cannot (344d). Here the discussion is of being overcome by pleasure, but if we are justified in noticing the similarity<sup>127</sup> between the discussion of being overtaken by events (cf. Chapter 4 above), then we may say that someone without knowledge cannot be overcome by pleasure or pain or anything else, for this person is already overcome. If I knew that only good things overall are pleasant then I would know what is really pleasant and I would choose only it, because it is also good. Since I do not have any idea what true pleasure is, I am not overcome by anything, it is just chance.

Socrates says:

Do you hold, gentlemen, that this happens to you in circumstances like these—you are often overcome by pleasant things like food or drink or sex, and you do these things all the while knowing they are ruinous. They would say yes. Then I would ask them again: ‘In what sense do you call these things ruinous? Is it that each of them is pleasant in itself and produces *immediate* (παραχρημα παρέχει) pleasure, or is it that they *bring about* (ποιεῖ) diseases and poverty and many other things of the sort ? (353d).

Lombardo and Bell imply, but do not translate one of the most important phrases here ὕστερον χρόνον so that it should read “they bring about diseases and poverty and many

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<sup>126</sup> For various ways of laying out the argument see Vlastos 1995, 51; Santas 1971, 272; and Irwin 1995, 83-85.

<sup>127</sup> There are no relevant differences between the two. If one has no knowledge, then one cannot be overtaken by events, whether good or bad.

other things of that sort at a later time.” Socrates is explaining how what is called ‘akrasia’ or being overcome by pleasure actually occurs.

We call immediately pleasant things bad, not because they are pleasant, but because they produce pain at a later time.<sup>128</sup> Thus, we call the same thing pleasant at one time and painful at another. This shows the contradictory nature of appearance and makes clear why the art of measurement is necessary. We look only at the present time the things that are παραχρῆμα παρέχει and ignore the future (and what we can learn from the past). According to the Protagorean dictum “as each thing appears to me, so it is for me, as it appears to you, so it is for you” (*Theaetetus* 152a). Everything appears from the present and so it is true as it appears in the present and so I act, and though I think that pleasure is my criterion for action, it is, in fact simple presence that determines my decision. Socrates continues,

Or even if it doesn’t bring about these things *later* ( εἰς τὸν ὕστερον ), but gives only enjoyment, would it still be a bad thing, just because it gives enjoyment in whatever way (353c-d; emphasis mine).

Things that give only pleasure are not called bad. Things are called bad because they are eventually painful.<sup>129</sup> Those who are absorbed in the present do not see this until after they have made the decision and the once future pain has become present and the once present pleasure has become past. If one can look at one’s life as a whole, before making a decision, then one can avoid errors such as those attributed to akrasia.

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<sup>128</sup> Cf. Protagoras’ relativism.

<sup>129</sup> If a homicidal maniac is able to get away with murder and feels nothing but pleasure in his contemplation of his atrocities, he is already in such a vile state that his ignorance, as always, is its own punishment. Cf. Chapter 11 on the tyrant in the *Republic*. Nevertheless, without some serious consideration of an afterlife, such as that presented in the Myth of Er, such extreme cases add a considerable difficulty to such a discussion of pleasure.

In order to reinforce this point, Socrates takes the opposite situation next and asks about things such as exercise and medical treatment. These examples are often overlooked, as a simple corollary to the examples which have preceded it.<sup>130</sup> In reality, this is the decisive point. Socrates shows that people say that some things are good but painful. He asks,

Would you call these things [exercise, medical treatment, etc.] good for the reason that they bring about intense pain and suffering, or because they *ultimately* (ὑστερον χρόνον) bring about health and good condition of bodies and preservation of cities and power over others and wealth (354b).

In reality Socrates shows that there is a large realm of action in which most people already take their whole lives into account, rather than the present. Whenever we decide to take such a course of action as going to the doctor, we must think about our lives as a whole, or no one would ever go to the doctor. In reality, however, if I am getting cauterized, I am—in a sense—overcome by pleasure, but by a future pleasure.<sup>131</sup> I realize that the cauterization will hurt, but will ultimately make me better and give me more pleasure than pain.

Thus, on the one hand, when I choose a distant pleasure over an immediate pain (which I do in very quotidian situations) I am thinking of pleasure qua pleasant. When, on the other hand, I choose some immediate pleasure, it is not the pleasure, but the immediacy that overcomes me. I am choosing pleasure qua present. That is in the cases of medical treatment and physical training, on the one hand, I make a decision truly based

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<sup>130</sup> Vlastos (1969) asks “Now why should Socrates pitch his examples so low in the debate? The most likely explanation is that he wants to meet his adversaries on their own level “ (in Vlastos 1995, 47). This is another form of the ‘ad hominem’ or ‘ad populum’ interpretation. I will show to the contrary that these are the most common types of examples of undergoing unpleasant things for the sake of an over-all pleasure. These “lowly” examples will provide us with our most important models.

<sup>131</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s discussion of the boxer at *Nicomachean Ethics* 1117b.

on pleasure, a calculated decision. When I choose “ruinous things,” thinking that they are pleasant, I am choosing not on the basis of pleasure, but on the basis of presence, a temporal relativism that amounts to the prejudice for the present.

Socrates shows that we are capable of determining pleasure in terms of our entire lives. He asks, “are these things good for any other reason than that they result in (ἀποτελευτᾶ) pleasures and the relief and avoidance of pains?” (354b). Being overcome by pleasure really means being overcome by the presence of the pleasure, where presence, not pleasure, is the deciding factor, otherwise we would not choose the ultimately less, but immediately more pleasant course of action. When we measure, the pleasure remains, to be counted only in terms of pleasure and pain. It is the temporal element that is eliminated. Thus, it must be the temporal element—the presence of the pleasure—that determines the action.

Most commentators have focused on Socrates’ substitution of the ‘good’ for the ‘pleasant’ as decisive in the argument. On this I do not wish to disagree, but rather to remind the reader that the ‘substitution’ amounts to a removal of the temporal and the material. A removal of the temporal perspective automatically converts the pleasant into the good.<sup>132</sup> Most commentators, however, have tended to overlook the temporal element which has already been so prominent and which will become even more important in what follows. Brickhouse and Smith for instance, complain that “nothing prevents the possibility of akrasia so long as we can apprehend all costs and benefits correctly, but allow some other motivation—as, for example, our drive for pleasure qua pleasure to

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<sup>132</sup> This works only on the assumption, seemingly shared by Socrates and Plato, that the cosmos is just and good.

motivate action” (1994, 96).<sup>133</sup> This is Socrates’ point. If a drive for pleasure qua pleasure motivates our actions, then we will choose the good because all things that are truly pleasant are good. It is when a drive for pleasure qua present motivates action that we miscalculate. People do not know what pleasure really is, but they are unaware of this ignorance and think that they do know and

therefore, those who have no experience of reason or virtue, but are always occupied with feasts and the like...and wander in this way throughout their lives, never reaching beyond this to what is truly higher up...and so they are not filled with that which really is and never taste any stable or pure pleasure” (*Republic* 586a).

In the *Protagoras*, Socrates shows us how to achieve this stable and pure pleasure. In order to see it the temporal distance (difference) must be eliminated.

Socrates does precisely this when he has the “hubris questioner” say:

What you’re saying is ridiculous—someone does what is bad, knowing that it is bad, when it is not necessary to do it (οὐ δέον αὐτὸν πράττειν), having been overcome (ἡττώμενος) by the good (ὑπὸ τῶν ἀγαθῶν)” (355d).<sup>134</sup>

There is no difference allowed for temporal distance. The equation of the good and the pleasant eliminates time as a factor in decisions. Vlastos acknowledges this point when he says that the only “correct substitution...would be ‘because of the goods of the moment’” (1995, 53). By the next page, however, “goods of the moment” has been replaced by “this particular good” (1995, 54). While it is this particular good that I want, it is the presence, not the particularity that I am choosing, because if I saw the particularity of the good appropriately, it would not be good at all. It is the temporal element that causes me to think that I want something particular about this good. Thus the

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. Sullivan 1961 and Vlastos 1969 n. 24.

<sup>134</sup> It sounds slightly less absurd if we translate it more literally “as by the good things.”

leveling of the temporal element is what is necessary to make the argument that I was overcome by pleasure into an absurdity.

Socrates shows clearly in his next statements that other criteria must be stripped away.

‘So,’ he will say, ‘within yourself does the good outweigh the bad or not?’ We will clearly say in reply that it does not; for if it did the person whom we say is overcome by pleasure would not have made any mistake. ‘In virtue of what’ he might say, ‘does the good outweigh the bad or the bad the good?’ Only in that one is greater and one is smaller, or more and less (355d-e).

When Socrates says that they shall not be able to come up with another answer, he allows the hubristic questioner to say “‘So clearly then’ he will say, ‘by ‘being overcome’ you mean getting more bad things for the sake of fewer good things” (355e). Socrates has reduced common hedonism to absurdity. He does so by taking hedonism seriously in a way that Protagoras and the other sophists did not.

The immediate objection to Socrates’ statement shows the true criterion in what Protagoras means by hedonism. “But Socrates, the immediate pleasure (παραχῆμα ἡδύ) is very much different from the pleasant and painful at a later time (εἰς τὸν ὕστερον χρόνον καὶ ἡδέος καὶ λυπεροῦ)” (356a-b). This is the crucial line. It is the decisive point in the dialogue, where Socrates makes explicit the theme that has so far dominated the discussion. Socrates replies “They are not different in any other way than by pleasure and pain, for there is no other way that they could differ” (356b). The problem is distance rather than difference. Socrates is as clear as possible in his statement of what really happens in putative cases of akrasia.<sup>135</sup> The many suppose that

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<sup>135</sup> Cf. Santas says that “the pleasure being near in time and the pain remote in the future does indeed make a difference in the explanation, it is not an irrelevant feature; but the only difference this feature can make

there is a difference between “immediate pleasure” and “pleasure and pain at a later time.” If this error is eliminated, the mistakes erroneously attributed to akrasia will be eliminated. Socrates will show us how to do this in his discussion on measurement.

Before moving on to that discussion, however, we should test the “overcome by the present” interpretation of akrasia on an example, or what Brickhouse and Smith call “a test case.” They imagine the situation where a patient is told by his doctor that “he must not eat sweets or he will make himself very sick. He accepts the physician’s authority, and what is more, wants very much not to be ill” (1994, 93). Unfortunately, he also has “a sweet tooth and we now find him eyeing a piece of candy” (1994, 93). They offer three situations in which the man acts out of ignorance in ways that cannot be conceived of as akratic. But they offer a fourth instance, which eliminates the three misapprehensions involved in the previous examples (misapprehensions which prevent the error from being attributed to akrasia).

He might be aware (a) that it is a piece of candy, (b) that this piece of candy is precisely the sort of thing the physician prohibited him from eating, and (c) that it will harm him if he eats it, but might eat it anyhow because of his representing to himself another—conflicting—aspect of the situation, which he takes in this case to override the rule eating the candy (Brickhouse and Smith 1994, 94).

Brickhouse and Smith show that the putative akratic would “miscalculate the harm the act would bring by overvaluing the pleasure at hand because it is closer and hence greater in appearance than it is in reality” (1994, 94). They go on to say that “one could represent the pleasure one will get from eating the candy as having greater value than the value one would obtain from abstaining” (1994, 94). While all of this is possible and to

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is a difference in pain and pleasure” (1971, 287). He goes on to say that the person who makes a mistake here “was acting in accordance with, indeed on the basis of, his hedonistic principle, even though he made a mistaken application of it” (1971, 287).

some extent correct, Brickhouse and Smith left out the most important element in Socrates' account, that of time. If they had been sensitive to the temporal element of the decision they would have seen that the pleasure is more important than the pain because of the systematic privileging of the present of the other modes of temporality. In order to see this, they would have had to be more specific about the doctor's statements. For instance, the man would be much less likely to eat the candy if it would immediately make him ill, than he would if it would produce illness in the future.

Consider the smoker. Anyone who smokes does so knowing that he or she *may* get sick in the future. Though the smoker may be told repeatedly that he or she *will eventually* become sick, if he or she smokes long enough, the smoker him or her self sees the illness as a remote possibility, because he or she can always quit tomorrow, or next Spring and still be fine. The "if he or she smokes long enough" is the crucial part of the equation in the mind of the smoker, for not all smokers get lung cancer, or other diseases, though the odds are increased. But probability concerns the future and the smoker knows that he or she may be hit by a bus, or become a victim of a violent crime, or die by some other means long before lung cancer sets in, if it does at all. Thus, the knowledge that the smoker has about the dangers of smoking is overcome by the remoteness of the possible negative outcome and the immediacy of the pleasure, which is to say, by the "power of appearance" (356d).

Since, the illness seems so distant and it takes many cigarettes to cause cancer, the smoker is able to deceive him or her self by representing only the present and allowing it to be the decisive, but unacknowledged, point in the decision to smoke. To see that it is the presence of the pleasure that is chosen one need only look at an actually sick smoker.

A smoker with the flu, for instance, will be far less likely to smoke while ill because it produces more immediate results.<sup>136</sup> What we call akrasia turns out to be the result of an Epimethean absorption in the present. It is not being overcome by the pleasant but by the presence of the pleasure. Otherwise, no one would choose less pleasure over more.

### **Measure**

Socrates attempts to combat the prevalent idea that “immediate pleasure is very much different from the pleasant and painful at a later time” with an analogy. It is an analogy that is intended to eliminate the role that temporal difference plays in our decision-making processes. “You put the pleasures together and the pains together (συνθεις τὰ ἡδέα καὶ συνθεις τὰ λυπηρά), both the near (ἐγγύς) and the remote (πόρρω), on the balance scale and then say which of the two is more” (356b). The analogy allows him to counter-act against what Walsh calls a “systematic temporal illusion.” He says, “There is a systematic temporal illusion in the case of pleasures comparable to illusions of spatial perspective: imminent pleasures appear greater in anticipation than do those in the remote future” (Walsh 1971, 259).<sup>137</sup>

Socrates begins with the analogy of “weighing” in order to eliminate this temporal perspective, but he must explain what he is talking about with a visual analogy. “Do

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<sup>136</sup> This seems to be the reasoning behind certain treatments for severe alcoholism, where the alcoholic takes a pill each morning that will cause an immediately negative reaction to alcohol.

<sup>137</sup> Cf. Gerasimos Santas “This feature of the case, the pleasure being near in time and the pain remote in the future, does indeed make a difference in the explanation, it is not an irrelevant feature; but the only difference this feature can make is a difference in pain or pleasure or rather in the quantities of pleasure or pain. It is not, however, a difference in the actual quantities of pleasure and pain involved in the case (we are not to suppose that the further the pain is in the future the smaller it will be!), but in the estimated or believed (by the agent) qualities of pleasure and pain...just as in the case of size and variation of distance, so here also—because the pleasure is near the agent in time and the pain far, he misestimates the quantities and supposes that the pleasure outweighs the pain (in Vlastos 1971.)

things of the same size appear to you larger when you see them near at hand and smaller when seen from a distance or not?” (356c-d). He continues to argue that this is also the case with thickness and with sounds. Things appear thicker and louder the closer they are.

If then our well-being depended upon this, doing and choosing large things, avoiding and not doing small ones, what would be our salvation in life (σωτηρία ἐφάνη τοῦ βίου)? Would it be the art of measurement (ἡ μετρητικὴ τέχνη) or the power of appearance (τοῦ φαινομένου δύναμις)? While the power of appearance often makes us wander all over the place in confusion, often changing our minds about the same things and regretting our actions and choices with respect to things large and small, the art of measurement in contrast, would make appearances (τὸ φάντασμα) lose their power by showing us the truth, would give us peace of mind firmly rooted in the truth and save our life (ἔσως ἂν τὸν βίον) (356d-e).

The art of measurement very literally saves our lives from the present because it is a reasoning about human ends and atemporal standards or models. It can do this because it is a rational art, which is not subject to time or motion. The “power of appearance” is precisely that which makes us think we know things that we do not, because appearance does not just appear, but it is perceived and believed,<sup>138</sup> so that “things are for the individual such as he perceives them” (152c1-3). Socrates allows the many to as much at the end of the argument. “So this is what ‘being overcome by pleasure’ is—ignorance in the highest degree” (357e). If people take their own perspectives to be true, they will always be swayed by the present and make decisions in which the temporal perspective becomes the deciding factor. It is because the art of measurement corrects the perspective upon which the conceit of wisdom is based, primarily by recognizing that it has been a criteria and thus accounting for it. This is the “human wisdom” of the *Apology* (20d) that knows that it does not know. “Human wisdom” is the rejection of the relativism that says

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<sup>138</sup> “δόξη μετ’ αἰσθήσεως” (*Timaeus* 52a7). Cf. *de Anima* (428a19-28).

“as it appears...so it is” (*Theaetetus* 152a).<sup>139</sup> We see now that this art of measurement is able to “make appearances lose their power” (356e). It does not say it destroys appearances or eliminates them, but rather takes away the kicker, the belief that comes with the appearance and says that it is as it appears. This is what saves our life and unites the virtues. Once the temporal illusions have been corrected and we calculate about human ends can we achieve human excellence. This entire discussion occurs as part of the larger argument about the unity and the transmission of virtue.

If we recall the Great Speech, it was precisely a means of “salvation” which Epimetheus forgot to provide to human beings (321d).<sup>140</sup> Now, Socrates is presenting us with something, which may indeed save our lives.<sup>141</sup> It is the ability to correct the “systematic temporal illusion” to which humans are subject, both in the fear of death and in the over-estimation of immediate pleasures (which is, in fact, the mistake of taking something painful as pleasant and thinking that one knows something one does not).

We have seen that a myopic nearness to pleasures causes us to make incorrect assessments of value. The implication of the argument is that when we say that we are overcome by pleasure, what we mean is that we are basing our judgments upon the power of appearance; we are overcome by the present in the same way as when events overtake us (345b, Cf. Chapter 4 above). If we had true knowledge, it would not be of changing things at all. As embodied creatures, we may at best have a worthless human wisdom that tells us that we do not know (*Apology* 20d). Then we may attempt to account for our

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<sup>139</sup> The *Theaetetus* makes it clear that this is a claim to know how things are. Cf. 151eff.

<sup>140</sup> In Protagoras’ account Prometheus saves the species by stealing “wisdom in the practical arts and fire” (321d). This is not sufficient and so Zeus instructs Hermes to give *δίκη* and *αἰδώς* to all of humanity (322c). This, however, does not seem to be sufficient to keep us from forgetting ourselves.

<sup>141</sup> This is the point of Nussbaum’s Socratic (and hyperbolic) continuation of Protagoras’ myth (1986 117-119).

lack of knowledge, by asking questions. It seems to be through argument that we are able to weigh pleasures against pains (CF. *Republic* 582d). The art of measurement is, as Nussbaum and Brickhouse and Smith suggest, the result of finding a standard of measurement that allows incommensurables to become commensurable. Other scholars want to claim that he is arguing from the position of either Protagoras or the many. Socrates is arguing *from* the shared positions of Protagoras and the many, but he is arguing *towards* his own position, by getting them to accept pleasure as he slyly presents it.

Neither of the prominent scholarly interpretations of the *Protagoras* offers sufficient attention to the temporal element in Socrates' argument. It is only by eliminating the temporal perspective, which is the medium of relativism, that pleasure can be made in to any kind of standard whatsoever. Further, by means of this same elimination Socrates moves the many and Protagoras from their own hedonistic positions towards his own modified "hedonistic" position. In doing so, Socrates is able to refute both Protagorean and "common" relativism, which are united in the privileging of the present as the field or arena for all appearance. Both think they know what they do not know and the refutation of the *Protagoras* shows that the great sophist holds the same contradictory beliefs as the many. Thus Socrates might dissuade Hippocrates from entrusting his soul to Protagoras (313a). Far from attempting to present Protagoras in his best light, Socrates forces Protagoras into demolishing his own position. Protagoras espoused progress and the future (cf. Chapter 3 above), but Socrates has shown that a progressive relativism creates a plurality that ends in confusion and inconstancy and remains trapped in the present perspective. Yet, Protagoras, like Euthyphro, is so lost in

the Epimethean present that he is not aware he has been refuted, though Socrates is quite pointed in his criticism. He says:

A mistaken act, done without knowledge you must know is one done from ignorance. So this is what 'being overcome by pleasure' is—ignorance in the highest degree, and it is that which Protagoras and Prodicus and Hippias claim to cure. But you, thinking it is something other than ignorance, do not go to sophists yourselves, nor do you send your children to them (357e).

This passage is the height of Socratic irony. Protagoras has shown that he did not know this either and shared the position of the many. This raises the question of why the many should send their children to him.

We have seen that Socrates equates the pleasant and the good and the painful and the bad, by redefining the terms with reference to their overall effects on a life as a whole (351a-354d). This allows us to account for what is generally called *akrasia*. Because, as Socrates' argument shows, presence and not pleasure is the real criterion for a decision, it is a case of being overcome by the present in my assessment of pleasure (352b-356c). Finally, the art of measurement is an elimination of temporal preference as a criterion for choosing a course of action in order that a life may be as pleasant and good as possible (355a-358e). In each of these stages time plays a central role on human conduct in respect to virtue and vice. It is only by means of the elimination of relativism, which has been equated with the conceit of wisdom in making decisions based on the illusions created by temporal presence that one can begin to be virtuous by thinking about the eternal and unchanging ends of human life.

## Chapter 6

### Time and the Soul in the *Alcibiades I*

Of modern commentators on the *Alcibiades*, Paul Friedlander is perhaps the most influential. Unfortunately, this is because those who have been influenced by the other major figure—Schleiermacher<sup>142</sup>—do not consider the *Alcibiades* to be authentic, and as a result, do not write much on the dialogue. Though Friedlander is unable to prove conclusively that the dialogue was authentically penned by Plato—in this regard we could abide by the most extreme criteria and say that the only dialogues of whose authenticity we can be absolutely assured are those mentioned directly by Aristotle<sup>143</sup>—he conclusively shows that the dialogue, whoever its author, repays close study.<sup>144</sup> Since, I am investigating the way that Plato’s fourth century audience would have read the historical figures of Alcibiades and Critias, the question of authenticity does not greatly affect my project. That Plutarch and so many others have taken this dialogue as authentic and necessary to the presentation of Platonism certainly reflects the importance—if not the authenticity— of this dialogue.<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>142</sup> “And therefore, let us once and for all undertake to say, that this little work, which, with those who are accustomed to admire in the gross, has been ever a subject of especial commendation, appears to us to be but very insignificant and poor, and that to such a degree that we cannot ascribe it to Plato” (1973, 329).

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Scott 2000, 206.

<sup>144</sup> For his discussion of the authenticity of the dialogue, see Friedlander 1964 ii, 231-232. Cf. Pangle 1987, 15 and Scott 2000, 205-207

<sup>145</sup> Since Schleiermacher’s objections rest on matters of “quality” this is all Friedlander really needs to show. Cf. Scott 2000 for a discussion of the stylometric arguments (205-206, n.1).

Friedlander's chapter on the *Alcibiades* has restored the tradition behind the dialogue and offers an insightful reading of the dialogue (1964 ii, 231-232). He is more sensitive to the temporal play of the dialogue than most commentators. He says that "the dialogue begins with a tension between the past and present; it ends with a tension between present and future" (1964 ii., 233). He claims that the "course of the conversation moves between these two tensions" (1964 ii., 233). Friedlander also recognizes the "future" that the reader supplies. He does not clearly delineate the way that it affects the dialogue when its final lines refer to a future that comes after the end of the dialogue but long before the composition of the dialogue, so that the reader actively provides the future of the characters by means of an intertextual incorporation of the historical (whether written or oral) tradition.

Though Friedlander sees the relation at the beginning as between the past and the present and at the end between present and future, in reality the temporal tension in the dialogue is far more complex. In general, Friedlander points out the temporal tension in the dialogue, but he does not explore it in depth. In this chapter, I offer a detailed reading of the use of time as both a literary device and a philosophical theme in the *Alcibiades*.

In the first part of this chapter, I show how Socrates diagnoses what he sees as Alcibiades' problem and the threat it poses to his promise. Socrates spends much of the dialogue trying to point out the temporally fragmented nature of Alcibiades' life. Alcibiades, he shows, is "wedded to stupidity" (118b) because of a forgetfulness that accompanies time. He has ambition that forgets both the present and the past for the sake of the future.

I located and parsed in the *Protagoras* a temporal relativism that systematically privileged the present. The *Alcibiades* both confirms and deepens this analysis. For Alcibiades is still subject to a temporal relativism that privileges his present perspective, only that present is the experience of ambition that consumes the true presence of that present. In phenomenological language that ambition is a present phenomenon that intends towards the future.<sup>146</sup> This futural intention presses Alcibiades and makes him incapable of “biding his time” as Socrates claims to have done at the beginning of the dialogue. My analysis shows precisely how Socrates’ argument works and how he diagnoses Alcibiades’ soul in temporal terms.

In the second part, I show Socrates’ solution to this problem and his prescription for Alcibiades. Though the atemporal nature of the soul is generally acknowledged this notion is not often brought to bear on readings of the *Alcibiades*.<sup>147</sup> I argue that one of the reasons that Socrates separates the soul from the body and what belongs to the body is to enable Alcibiades to see his life as a whole, either atemporally (a stronger case) or at least synchronically. Time belongs to movement and movement belongs to body and not to the soul.<sup>148</sup> Socrates is not telling Alcibiades to “forget about” time, for forgetting is the young man’s problem. Rather, Socrates wants Alcibiades to put his soul first so that time will not be so pressing and he will not be caught up in the rush of events. That is, he is pushing him to recognize the divine self-motion of the soul instead of the distracting

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<sup>146</sup> Cf. Husserl 1991, 11, 159.

<sup>147</sup> Vernant cites the Pythagorean and Orphic conception of the soul as one “linked to spiritual exercises designed to escape from time” (Cited in Scott 2000, 120 n. 23).

<sup>148</sup> Cf. Aristotle’s definition of time as the “number of motion with respect to before and after” (*Physics* 219b1). This account largely agrees with Plato’s discussion of time in the *Timaeus* where time is a “moving image of eternity” (37d). This moving image of eternity is a number and this “number, of course, is what we now call time (37d). It is because the cosmos is becoming rather being that it is a *moving* image of eternity.

movement of events.<sup>149</sup> In the discussion of “self knowledge,” Socrates tries to get Alcibiades to see the active part of his soul actively. That is to think rationally about the soul and with the soul.

In the third and shortest part, I show the way that the author of the dialogue plays upon the reader’s knowledge of the historical tradition in order to show another temporal effect and allow us to see Alcibiades’ life as a whole in a way that we can’t see our own.

### **Diagnosis: Ignorance and Ambition**

The dialogue opens abruptly. In contrast to dialogues like the *Symposium*, there is no frame-tale, nothing to set up the dialogue. We simply find Socrates saying, “I was the first (πρῶτος) man to fall in love with you, son of Clinias, and now that the others have stopped pursuing you I suppose you’re wondering why I’m the only one who hasn’t given up (ἀπαλλάττομαι)” (103a). Socrates is setting an example for Alcibiades with these opening remarks. He is pointing out his constancy which is here contrasted with the fickleness of the other suitors, but will come into an even sharper contrast with Alcibiades’ own “wavering” (16e-118a). Socrates continues to try to set an example, pointing out his ability to bide time and wait for the appropriate moment to speak. This passage sets up an interesting contrast to the picture of a garrulous Socrates who says that “I never cease to rouse each and every one of you, to persuade and reproach you all day long and everywhere I find myself in your company” (*Apology* 31b). He finds himself in Alcibiades’ company, but does not speak. Nevertheless, he must have still “roused”—if not aroused—him. When Socrates supposes that Alcibiades was wondering, “why, when

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<sup>149</sup> Cf. *Phaedrus* 245c, 245e; *Timaeus* 88eff.; and *Laws* 895b.

the others pestered you with conversation, I never spoke to you all these years” (103a), Alcibiades agrees. Not only does Alcibiades agree that he had been wondering about it, but that he had reached a decision. He says:

Yes, Socrates, perhaps you don't realize you've taken the words out of my mouth. I had already decided (ἐν νῶϊ εἶχον) to come and ask you that very question: what could you have in mind? What do you hope (ἐλπίδα) to achieve by bothering me, always making so sure you're there (ἐπιμέλεστατα παρών) wherever I am. Yes, I really do wonder (θαυμάζω) what you might be up to and I'd be very glad to find out (104c-d).

Alcibiades' wording shows that Socrates has roused him and started to awaken him already, without speaking. Socrates' most important lesson to Alcibiades may have been taught before he said a word. Socrates had almost succeeded in inducing Alcibiades to ask questions. He makes him hold things in mind (ἐν νῶϊ εἶχον) and marvel (θαυμάζω). The question that he wants to ask Socrates is what he hopes (ἐλπίδα) to achieve by his actions. Socrates spends the rest of the dialogue trying to get Alcibiades to ask himself this same question.

Socrates is setting an example the proper relationship to time. We will read the example differently than Alcibiades receives it, however. Alcibiades' previous comments make it clear that he does not yet know the talkative man who spends his days conversing in the *agora*. He does not see the significance of Socrates' observation and so Socrates explains how he has restrained himself. He says that he is held back by a divine and not a human cause.<sup>150</sup> “But now,” he continues “it no longer prevents me, so here I am. I'm confident it won't prevent me in the future either” (103b). Socrates says to Alcibiades that he has been “observing you all this time” (103b). Socrates'

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<sup>150</sup> Though it is beyond the scope of the present argument, I would like to suggest that the “divine cause” or the god who holds Socrates back is precisely the rational part of his soul (133c).

observation of Alcibiades must somehow coincide with his “listening” to the god. In fact, as this chapter shows, Socrates is looking at the rational part of Alcibiades and seeing his own reason reflected and that is how he listens to the god (132e-133c). At precisely this juncture, near the end of the dialogue, Socrates asks Alcibiades to “remember when I first spoke to you” (131e). He reminds Alcibiades that he was just about to ask why Socrates had not given up on him (131e). Thus, at the very least, it is because he has been observing Alcibiades that Socrates was able to understand the divine command against speaking to the young man. Socrates is already showing the appropriate sort of ambition, one full of watching and waiting and preparing. This is precisely what the Alcibiades of this dialogue and of the historical tradition lacked.<sup>151</sup>

Socrates says that “if I saw you were content with the advantages I just mentioned and thought that this was the condition in which you should live out the rest of your life, I would have given up on you a long time ago (εἰ μὲν σε ἐώρων ἂ νυνδὴ διηθλον ἀγαπῶντα καὶ οἰόμενον δεῖν ἐν τούτοις καταβιῶναι, πάλαι ἂν ἀπηλλάγμην τοῦ ἔρωτος)” (104e-105a). Socrates here brings out the past in which he has been watching Alcibiades, the future of Alcibiades’ ambitions, and his present state. Alcibiades’ present is consumed by ambition—not preparation—for the future. Alcibiades hopes, but does not plan. In what will be obvious contrast to Socrates, he lacks constancy. Socrates points out “how constantly I’ve been thinking about you ( ὥ καὶ γνώση ὅτι προσέχων γέ σοι τὸν νοῦν διατετέλεκα)” (105a). διατετέλεκα is the most pertinent word here, and one that again points us in the direction that Socrates would have us look. It is the perfect form of ‘διατελέω,’ which means “to continue

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<sup>151</sup> It reappears throughout the dialogue (103b-104a, 104d, 124c. cf. 105a-b, 110a 118b-c, 123d-e).

doing” (Liddell and Scott 1897, *ad loc*). It has the sense of carrying through to completion and the perfect tense gives it a “present resonance,” it is a bringing of the past in to the future.<sup>152</sup> This will be precisely what Alcibiades shows that he is incapable of doing.

When Socrates lists the qualities that make Alcibiades feel superior, he says that he starts with this body and ends with his soul. The soul—a topic that occupies much of the dialogue—is conspicuously absent from the actual list presented at 104a-b. The catalogue is a catalogue of aspects of Alcibiades’ self-conception.

Socrates begins with an immediate assessment of both Alcibiades’ body and his “mind,” when he says in “the first place, you fancy (οἶεῖ) yourself the tallest and best looking man around” (104a). At first glance, this seems to be a comment solely about Alcibiades’ body. Indeed, Socrates, the suitor, follows that comment by saying “and it’s quite plain to see you’re not wrong (ψεύδῃ)” (104a). Even this is a comment upon Alcibiades’ soul or rational capacity. He is implying that indeed Alcibiades is tall and handsome,<sup>153</sup> but he does so by way of commenting on his supposition. Indeed, the entire list is designed to show the ways in which Alcibiades “felt” himself “so superior” (130b-104a). Nevertheless, it is repeated that his physical beauty is at the point of fading. At the very beginning of the dialogue, Socrates says that “the others have stopped pursuing you” (103a) and much later, after he has in fact discussed the soul, Socrates explains why the others have left saying, “I’m the one who will stay with you, now that your body has lost

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<sup>152</sup> Cf. Smyth 1920, 1945-1951.

<sup>153</sup> Nails says that he is also “an ancient equivalent of a record-breaking sports superstar” (2002, 13). Alcibiades himself mentions his Olympic victories first in his speech at Thucydides VI. 18).

its bloom and everyone else has gone away” (131d).<sup>154</sup> Thus, Socrates knows that the god won’t prevent him from speaking to Alcibiades any more, partly because of his physical condition. When he thought himself so superior because of beauty, Alcibiades would not have received Socrates’ message. Now that his physical present is not as bright, his soul has become consumed with hope for the future. Socrates recognizes this and knows that it is time to speak.

The fact that Alcibiades’ physical beauty is fading explains two interlocking difficulties present at the beginning of the dialogue. It explains why Alcibiades is turning towards the future. This, in turn, explains why the god has kept Socrates from talking to Alcibiades until this point. Each of the qualities listed at the beginning of the dialogue, show not only why Alcibiades thinks himself superior, but also why the Athenians will listen to him.

Next, Socrates discusses the lineage and connections, another extremely important aspect in democratic politics (I will discuss this later in the chapter). Finally, he mentions Alcibiades’ wealth. All of these not only give him a self-conception of superiority, they are also the things that will make the people think he is superior. Socrates is simultaneously describing Alcibiades’ self-conception and the way that the public will think of him. As the dialogue progresses, what this says about Alcibiades’ soul will become clear. But we can see it in outline now. Alcibiades sees himself reflected not in the best part of the soul of another, but in the praise of the many.

Alcibiades sees himself reflected in the opinions of the many, just as the city would increasingly identify its fate with that of Alcibiades. We can see one of the most

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<sup>154</sup> The dramatic date of this dialogue must be before both interlocutors left for Potidaea in 432. It is interesting that in Thucydides’ account of Alcibiades’ speech in 415, in the seventeenth year of the war Alcibiades is able to comment on his own youth and refer to himself as “still in flower” (VI. 17).

dangerous elements of Alcibiades' ambition: he does not know and does not know that he does not know—and he is one of the more talented people in the city. Looks, birth and wealth are not of interest to Socrates in themselves (*Symposium* 216d-e). Socrates “hunts” Alcibiades (*Protagoras* 309a) because what Alcibiades has will enable him to go about getting what he wants, but he only wants more and not what is “better” (107d-108b). He suspects that Alcibiades wants to present himself to the Athenians and thereby become the most influential man in Greece (105b). Socrates divines that Alcibiades' ambition is limitless.

In order to show the extent of Alcibiades' ambitions, and his lack of preparation to fulfill them, Socrates devises a thought experiment in order to get Alcibiades to focus on the question of his life.<sup>155</sup> Socrates asks Alcibiades to “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?’ (πότερον βούλει ζῆν ἔχων ἅ νῦν ἔχεις, ἢ αὐτίκα τεθνάνει εἰ μή σοι ἐξέσται μείζω κτήσασθαι)” (105a). Socrates correctly assumes that Alcibiades would choose to die. Socrates will show that what Alcibiades really wants is a pleonexic “more.” Socrates presumes to explain to Alcibiades his true ambition. The phrase that Hutchinson translates as “ambition” is ἐλπίδι ζῆς. An ambition is a “living in hope.” Hope concerns the future and allows the future to press upon the present. This is, of course, not a bad thing, as all teleology is a determination of the present by the future, but Socrates wants to show that Alcibiades does not think of his life as a whole, and ignores the true future by privileging the feeling

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<sup>155</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche used a similar thought experiment to introduce the “eternal return” in the *Gay Science* (1974, 341). Nietzsche uses the experiment as a vehicle for much the same ends as Socrates does here. It is worth noting that the aphorism in which Nietzsche introduces this demon occurs immediately after a discussion with Socrates and primarily concerns repetition.

of hope or ambition in the present. Alcibiades lives in hope, but has not taken sufficient stock of his life.

Socrates continues, showing the truly global scope of Alcibiades' ambition, asking:

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 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 (105b-c).

This pleonexic desire makes Alcibiades' looks, lineage and money so dangerous because people will listen to him.<sup>156</sup> Thus Socrates begins to show that Alcibiades has no plan to achieve these goals and that were he to be able to achieve them, he would do nothing but harm. Indeed, he will spread this ambition, as he did in the speech where he successfully gets the Athenians to go to Sicily. He says

*We cannot fix the exact point at which our empire shall stop; we have reached a position in which we must not be content with retaining what we have but must scheme to extend it for, if we cease to rule others, we shall be in danger of being ruled ourselves*" (Thucydides 6. 18; emphasis mine).<sup>157</sup>

Socrates has already made it clear that Alcibiades intends to present himself before the Athenians in a few days (ἔσεσθαι μάλα ὀλίγων ἡμερῶν) (105b). Socrates again contrasts this with his own strategy of confronting Alcibiades, over whom he wants to wield influence.<sup>158</sup> "When you were younger, before you were full of such ambitions, I think the god didn't let me talk to you because the conversation would have been

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<sup>156</sup> It is precisely his wealth and lineage that causes the generals at Potidaea to honor Alcibiades rather than Socrates, according to the account of *Symposium* (220a-c).

<sup>157</sup> Cf. Forde for a detailed study of "Thucydides' understanding of Alcibiades, and of Alcibiades' place in Thucydides' writing and of his relation to the deepest of Thucydidean themes" (1989, 1).

<sup>158</sup> Since there is no record of Alcibiades advising the Athenians prior to Potidaea, we must presume that Socrates was at least partially successful in his bid to get Alcibiades to practice patience.

pointless. But now he's told me to, because now you will listen to me" (105e-106a).

Socrates has waited until it was the *right time* to advise Alcibiades, but as what comes next shows, Alcibiades has no intention of waiting and being prepared before he goes to advise the Athenians.

From the beginning of the dialogue Socrates has focused on Alcibiades' hopes. In the next section of the dialogue, beginning at 106c, Socrates tries to bring Alcibiades' future hopes in line with his past training and his present knowledge. He tries to get Alcibiades to imagine the situation in which he will present himself to the Athenians.

You plan, as I say, to come forward and advise the Athenians some time soon (ἐντός οὐ πολλοῦ χρόνου). Suppose I stopped you as you were about to take (εἰ οὖν μέλλοντός σου ἰέναι) the podium and asked, 'Alcibiades, what are the Athenians proposing to discuss. You're getting up to advise them because it's something you know better than they do, aren't you?' (106c).

Alcibiades reluctantly agrees that he will offer advice regarding something he knows better than others. Socrates then gets him to agree that one is only a good advisor about things that one knows and that one only knows things that "you've learned from others or found out for yourself" (106d). Socrates then gets Alcibiades to agree that he would not want to figure out things that he thought he already knew (106d). "So there was a time when you didn't think you knew what you now understand (ἄ ἄρα νῦν τυγχάνεις ἐπιστάμενος, ἦν χρόνος ὅτε οὐχ ἠγοῦ εἰδέναι)" (106e). This statement is crucial for the argument that follows, and once again it stresses the importance of time. Socrates is subtly pointing out (and will proceed to argue) that, like most people, but to a greater degree, Alcibiades has always thought that he has known better than everyone else and so he hasn't bothered to learn. This is also part of his ignorance; he is so exceptionally ignorant of his own ignorance that not only does he think that he knows but other people

also think that he knows better than they do and he knows they will listen to him because he is tall, handsome, well-born, well-connected and wealthy (104b).

Thus, when Socrates says that there must have been a time when Alcibiades did not know the important things that he now knows, he is trying to get Alcibiades to remember. In the previous chapters, I argued that the *Protagoras* discusses the tendency to lose oneself in the present and fail to see one's life as a whole. In the *Alcibiades*, we find that the eponymous character is full of ambition, or hope ἐλπίς which is an expectation of either good or bad. Alcibiades does not see his true self, because he forgets his true past and true present station in the world and thinks himself grand in the eyes of the many.

When Alcibiades fails to remember and says that there “must have been” (106e) a time when he didn't know, Socrates remembers for Alcibiades. He says:

But I've got a pretty good idea what you've learned. Tell me if I've missed (λέληθεν) anything as far as I remember (κατὰ μνήμην), you learned writing and lyre-playing and wrestling, but you didn't want to learn aulos playing.<sup>159</sup> These are the subjects that you understand—unless perhaps you've been learning something while I wasn't looking (λέληθας); but I don't think you've been out of my sight, whenever you left the house, day or night (106e).

In these lines, Socrates is providing a model of constancy in his obsessive pursuit of Alcibiades. He is also providing a model of conversation and the way that the soul may see itself reflected in another by asking questions (133a-d). Twice in this short speech he acknowledges that he may be unaware with the words λέληθεν and λέληθας. In doing

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<sup>159</sup> Plutarch says, “At school, he usually paid due heed to his teachers, but he refused to play the flute [aulos], holding it to be an illiberal and ignoble thing...let a man go to blowing on a flute, and even his own kinsmen could scarcely recognize him...the flute closed and barricaded the mouth, robbing its master of both voice and speech” (II. 4-5). This anecdote shows his early influence, “for word made its way to them [his age group] that Alcibiades loathed the art of flute playing and scoffed at its disciples...Wherefore the flute was dropped entirely from the programme of a liberal education and was altogether despised” (II. 5). Cf. Ellis 1989, 18.

so, he is asking Alcibiades to remind him, to correct his forgetfulness. It proves very difficult to get Alcibiades to do this, and though Socrates has thus far watched in silence, he speaks up now to keep Alcibiades from mistakenly advising the city.

Alcibiades does not correct Socrates and acknowledges that Socrates has made a fair assessment of his studies and Socrates pointedly asks him if he will advise the Athenians “when they are discussing how to draw the letters of the alphabet correctly” (107a).

Socrates begins to offer examples of specific fields of knowledge (cf. *Protagoras*) citing building, divining, and health, in which cases the city should consult a builder, a diviner and a doctor, not Alcibiades (107a-c). Alcibiades agrees and Socrates asks him “what will they be considering when you stand up to advise them, assuming you are right to do so?” (107c). Alcibiades says “they’ll be discussing their business” and Socrates asks “what kind of ‘their own business’ do you think they’ll be discussing?” (107d).

Alcibiades replies that it is war, “or peace, or anything else which is the business of the city” (307d). Again the author of the dialogue is able to use these words to bring to mind Thucydides’ discussion of Alcibiades’ advice to the city regarding “who they should go to war with and how” (307d; Cf. Thucydides 6. 13-18). In order to know who to go to war with and how, Socrates argues, one must understand what is better (107d-109b). Socrates shows that “better” means “more just” (109c) and not more advantageous, as Alcibiades would have it. When Alcibiades agrees that it does, Socrates shows an ironic astonishment, but flatly asks Alcibiades “Don’t you realize that this is something you don’t understand” (109d). Socrates has worked the discussion so that he may repeat himself and ask again, “when this was, when you didn’t think you knew about

justice or injustice” (110a). Now, however, we know the object of the knowledge in which Alcibiades would surpass his compatriots. He has also agreed that he would try to discover what justice was only if he didn’t think he knew. So Socrates’ question is more pointed. He wants Alcibiades to tell him when he didn’t know, since this is the prerequisite for investigating (109e). In other words, Socrates is pushing Alcibiades to remember his past, to recall not knowing. If he cannot recall not-knowing and recognizes that he has not learned, then Alcibiades will be retrieving something in his present state of affairs that has been lost. Socrates is showing Alcibiades the present resonance of past actions and states of soul. I did not learn and therefore I do not know.<sup>160</sup>

The discussion that follows shows us something profound about the human experience of time. Alcibiades’ bewilderment shows on the one hand that in retrospect it always seems as if we didn’t know in the past, but in the present we think that we do.<sup>161</sup> On the other hand, Alcibiades will also demonstrate how difficult it is for him to show that he was ever wrong.

Socrates asks “was it last year that you were looking into it and didn’t think you knew? Or did you think you knew (ἐζήτεις τε καὶ ζῶου εἰδέναι)?” (110a). The “τε καὶ” shows precisely how closely Socrates considers seeking (ἐζήτεις) and not thinking one knows (ζῶου εἰδέναι). When Alcibiades acknowledges that he thought he knew what justice was last year, Socrates asks “didn’t you think the same thing three years ago and four years ago, and five?” (110a). Again Alcibiades agrees and Socrates points out that

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<sup>160</sup> οἶδα or “I know” is in fact a perfect with present sense of the hypothetical \* εἶδω, “I see.” Thus, literally, the logic of the perfect is “I have seen (and therefore I do know).” Cf. Liddell and Scott 1897, *ad loc.*

<sup>161</sup> This is the sort of gap between being and knowing that constitutes the stages of consciousness in Hegel. Cf. Žižek 1993, 145 for a discussion of this movement in erotic terms appropriate to Alcibiades.

before that Alcibiades had been but a boy and Socrates had observed Alcibiades, as a boy, acting as if he knew what justice was. This exchange brings out Alcibiades' character.

Alcibiades is so proud that when Socrates has him recall the past, he is unable to admit that he did not know what justice was, even as a child. Socrates describes the way that Alcibiades acted while playing games. Socrates says that he often observed Alcibiades playing games as a boy and when he would accuse a playmate of cheating and being unfair "you'd say so to one of your playmates, very loudly and confidently—not at all like someone who was at a loss about justice and injustice" (110b).

Alcibiades responds in such a way that we can comically see that when he does remember his experiences, he does so in such a way that he still thinks that he knew what he did not know. "But I did know, by Zeus! I saw clearly they were cheating me" (110c). Socrates makes the obvious conclusion that "even as a child you thought you understood justice and injustice" (110c). To which Alcibiades again emphatically says "Yes, and I did understand" (110c). This exchange shows that when Alcibiades recalls the past, he forgets his present agreements, just as when he thinks of the future, he forgets his past lack of preparation. We see that Alcibiades is subject to an extreme temporal relativism that privileges his present state of mind. Gary Alan Scott recognizes this, stating that for "an interlocutor to equate his character with any particular, transitory viewpoint and assume this is the immutable 'real' self augers against further learning and growth" (Scott 2000, 103). Alcibiades seems to see any particular viewpoint as his "real self" at an unconscious level. He, like most Socratic interlocutors, is unaware of this contradiction and this is what Socrates will diagnose later as wavering. It is enough for

Socrates to conclude that “you won’t find such a time” (110c) as you learned about justice because there was never such time as you knew you did not know.

Alcibiades’ next set of answers not only shows how Alcibiades sees himself in the reflection of “the many”, but it also demonstrates the cleverness for which Socrates was attracted to him. Alcibiades says that he “learned it [what justice is] the same way as other people” (110d). When Socrates asks from whom he learned it, Alcibiades answers that he learned it from “people in general” (Παρά τῶν πολλῶν) (110e). Socrates points out that the “many” are not good teachers because they cannot even teach “what moves to make or not make in knucklebones. And yet that’s a trivial matter, I suppose, compared with justice” (110e). But Alcibiades responds brilliantly saying that “I learned Greek from them; I couldn’t tell you who my teacher was but I give the credit to the very people you say are no good at teaching” (111a).<sup>162</sup> This forces Socrates to change his course. For it seems that the “many” were successful teachers of language. So, Socrates asks what makes them good teachers of this and enters into an interesting discussion of language acquisition.

Socrates begins by asking, “Don’t you see that somebody who is going to teach anything must first know it himself” (111a). Alcibiades agrees. Thus, “the many” can teach Greek, because they know Greek (though they could not teach Hebrew, or Sanskrit). Socrates then asks “if people disagree about something, would you say they know it?” (111b).<sup>163</sup> Alcibiades agrees that they would not and thus would not be able to teach it. The “many” do not disagree about “what wood or stone is” (111b). Socrates continues: “If you ask them, don’t they give the same answers? Don’t they reach for the

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. *Protagoras* 328a.

<sup>163</sup> Cf. *Euthyphro* 8e.

same things when they want to get some wood or some stone...this is pretty much what you mean by understanding Greek, isn't it" (111b-c).

Socrates is pointing out the difficulty of notions like justice and injustice. There is no ostensible object to which we may point, like wood or stone.<sup>164</sup> And no one disagrees or fights over disagreements about the definition of stone or rock. Socrates acknowledges then that the many are good teachers of names. Then he asks: "Now if we wanted to know not just what men or horses are like, but which of them could and couldn't run, would people in general be able to teach this as well?" (111d). Socrates goes through another series of examples in order to show that in areas where there are experts, it is these that teach and not the "many." Indeed, when there is an expert in a clearly defined field of expertise, there is very rarely disagreement about the objects of this field (112a). "But I know you have seen this sort of dispute over questions of justice and injustice" (112b). Socrates points out that entire cities disagree about justice and injustice and that this is what causes wars, such as that in which Alcibiades' father perished (112c). But people do fight over the meaning (or perhaps the referent) of justice and yet everyone thinks they know what these mean and no one takes the time to study the issues. Socrates concludes that since there are such disagreements, the many clearly do not know what justice is and if they do not know what justice is, then neither does Alcibiades. Socrates says "given that your opinion wavers (πλανῶ) so much, and given that you obviously neither found it out yourself nor learned it from anyone else, how

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<sup>164</sup> Cf. Wittgenstein "Augustine does not speak of there being any difference between kinds of word. If you describe the learning of language in this way, you are, I believe, thinking primarily of nouns like 'table,' 'chair,' 'bread,' and of people's names, and only secondarily of the names of certain actions and properties" (1953, 2). Of course, Wittgenstein sees himself as an "anti-Socratic" insofar as he wants to show that words have uses rather than meanings (1953, 46, 518), but his observation on the present point is relevant to the discussion in the *Alcibiades*.

likely is it that you know about justice and injustice” (112d). Socrates introduces the topic of wavering or wandering, with the word *πλανῶ*.

### **Wavering**

The elenctic discussion (from 114d-116e) is ostensibly designed to show that the just is advantageous and good.<sup>165</sup> But Socrates really wants Alcibiades to see that he is ignorant of his own ignorance. Socrates seems to have designed his questions in order to show Alcibiades the experience of wavering that characterizes him. Alcibiades has always wavered, but has never noticed it because of the passage of time (as we saw above). Time creates such a “systematic illusion” (Walsh 1971, 269) that Alcibiades has never noticed his own inconstancy. Alcibiades, and Socratic interlocutors in general, tend to forget earlier parts of a discussion in order to meet the demands of the present.

By the end of the discussion on justice and advantage Alcibiades has reached the point of recognizing this. “I swear by the gods, Socrates, I have no idea what I mean—I must be in some absolutely bizarre condition (*ἀτεχνῶς ἔοικα ἀτόπως ἔχοντι*)! When you ask me questions, first I think one thing (*ἕτερον*), and then I think something else (*ἄλλα*)” (116e). Alcibiades is without art (*ἀτεχνῶς*) and ground (*ἀτόπως*), but he has never noticed it before. Thus the seeming surprise in Socrates’ response. “And are you unaware (*ἀγνοεῖς*), my dear fellow, of what this feeling (*τὸ πάθημα*) is?” (116e). Of course, the feeling is one of ignorance. This shows that Alcibiades is ignorant of his ignorance. He is unaware of the feeling of wavering until it is pointed out and even then he slips quickly back into it. Socrates will first show that Alcibiades is ignorant and then

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<sup>165</sup> Alcibiades, of course, wants to argue that the good is what is advantageous, rather than what is just. This shows his temporal relativism. What is advantageous is what is immediately expedient.

that he is ignorant of his ignorance. Even when he has recognized it, the nature of time propels him into immediate forgetfulness.

Socrates asks Alcibiades whether he would always give the same answer if someone were to ask him whether he had “two eyes or three eyes, or two hands or four hands” (116e) and Alcibiades replies that his answers would be consistent. Socrates asks if Alcibiades would always give the same answer because he has knowledge and Alcibiades answers yes. Socrates says, “So if you gave conflicting (τάναντία) answers about something, without meaning to (ἄκων), then it would be obvious that you didn’t know it?” (117a). Alcibiades agrees, but Socrates continues, “you tell me that you’re wavering (πλανᾶσθαι) about what is just and what is unjust, admirable and contemptible, good and bad, advantageous and disadvantageous. Isn’t it obvious the reason you waver (πλανᾷ) about them is that you don’t know them?” (117a). Again, Alcibiades agrees, but Socrates can’t let it rest there. He must set out to show that Alcibiades does not waver simply because he is ignorant about them, but because he is ignorant of his ignorance. Indeed, Socrates will show that it is part of his wavering, that he quickly forgets his own ignorance.

Socrates asks if someone’s “soul will necessarily waver about” something it does not know (117b). When Alcibiades provides an affirmative answer Socrates destroys it by asking Alcibiades “Do you know any way of flying up to the stars?” (117b). Alcibiades, of course, admits that he does not. But then Socrates is able to show him that though he does not know a way to fly to the stars, he does not waver about it. He tells Alcibiades that this is because “you don’t understand it and you don’t think you understand it” (117b). Alcibiades is baffled by this statement and—perhaps with

incredulity—asks Socrates what he means by it. Socrates asks Alcibiades “Do you waver about what you realize you don’t understand?” (117c). Socrates follows this question with an example that is less outlandish than that of flying to the stars.<sup>166</sup> He presumes that Alcibiades does not know how “to prepare a fine meal” (117c). Then he asks Alcibiades: “So do you have your own opinions about how to prepare it, and waver about it; or do you leave it to someone who knows how?” (117c). Alcibiades confirms that he has no opinion about how to prepare a fine meal.<sup>167</sup> He knows that he does not know how to cook and so he leaves it to those who do. Likewise, when he is sailing in a ship he does not wonder “whether to bring the steering oar in or out, and wavering” because he doesn’t know, but instead decides to “leave it to the skipper and take it easy” (117d).

When Alcibiades has agreed to this Socrates explains the phenomenon of “wavering.” He concludes, “So you don’t waver about what you don’t know, if in fact you know you don’t know (οὐκ ἄρα περὶ ἃ μὴ οἶσθα πλανᾷ, ἄνπερ εἰδῆς ὅτι οὐκ οἶσθα)” (117d). This is a very clear statement of the “human wisdom” of the *Apology* (20d). It is one of the best descriptions of Socrates’ own goals in Socratic literature. In fact, in his next lines Socrates claims that “the errors in our conduct (τα ἁμαρτήματα ἐν τῇ πράξει) are caused by this kind of ignorance (διὰ ταύτην τὴν ἄγνοιάν), of thinking that we know when we don’t know (τὴν τοῦ μὴ εἰδότα οἶσθαι εἰδέναι;)” (117d). This is a decisive statement of Socratic intellectualism. He clearly says that errors’ τα ἁμαρτήματα’ in action τῇ πράξει are a result of ignorance τὴν ἄγνοιάν,

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<sup>166</sup> I would like to suggest that Socrates uses this first example 117b to shock Alcibiades, but Plato may have chosen such an example to show how few things there are about which people have no opinion.

<sup>167</sup> This seems dubious, perhaps not in Alcibiades’ case, but in general. The gourmand has many ideas about how food should be cooked, without actually knowing how to cook and a fan of comedy may know how he or she thinks comedy should be done, without actually writing comedy.

which is appositionally explained with another set of cognitive terms εἰδότα οἶσθαι εἰδέναι. Alcibiades has shown himself a bright young man, but he does not understand what Socrates means.

Socrates provides eight steps to help bolster the argument to explain it to Alcibiades. First, (1) Socrates gets Alcibiades to agree that “we don’t set out to do something unless we think we know what we’re doing” (117d). Next, (2) Alcibiades agrees that “when people don’t think they know how to do something they hand it over to somebody else” (117e). Then, (3) Socrates gets Alcibiades to agree that “the sort of people who don’t think they know how to do things make no mistakes in life, because they leave those things to other people” (117e). Next, (4) Socrates convinces Alcibiades to agree that the people who make mistakes are neither those who know, nor those who don’t know but rather “those who don’t know but think they do know” (117e-118a). Then, (5) Alcibiades agrees that “ignorance causes bad things” and that “this is the most disgraceful sort of stupidity” (118a). Next, (6) Socrates shows Alcibiades that the ignorance is “most harmful and contemptible when it is ignorance of the most important things” (118a). Then, (7) he shows that nothing is more important than “the just and the admirable” (118a). Finally, (8) Socrates blatantly concludes that since Alcibiades has been wavering, it shows that he is “not only ignorant of the most important things” but also that he thinks he knows what he doesn’t know (118b) and is thus “wedded to stupidity....stupidity to the highest degree” (118b). The unstated but unavoidable conclusion is that he will make mistakes.<sup>168</sup>

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<sup>168</sup> Of these (3) may cause trouble. Can Socrates really hold that those who know that they do not know can make no mistakes in life? For instance, one may say that though Alcibiades leaves the steering of the ship to the skipper, the skipper dies of an illness and Alcibiades is forced to take control of the ship. Socrates

On the basis of the argument above Socrates is able to say to Alcibiades that “This [thinking you know what you don’t] is why you are rushing into politics before you’ve gotten an education (πρὸς τὰ πολιτικά πρὶν παιδευθῆναι)” (118b). If we recall what a fourth century reader knew about Alcibiades, Plato has brilliantly explained the psychological state that caused bad things and brought about his ruin. Socrates will steer the conversation back to this diagnosis, but first Socrates tries to impress upon Alcibiades—if somewhat facetiously— what kind of education he should get before he enters politics. The education is one that attempts to account for the effects of time, to unify the past the present and the future in such a way that one can see the soul, the non-corporeal and thus non-temporal true self. Due to the nature of the tenuous state of awareness of one’s ignorance, this education takes a lifetime and thus, like Socrates, Alcibiades never would have entered politics.

In order to steer Alcibiades towards a true education, he must point out to him the deficiencies of his past by forcing him to compare himself with the Spartan Persian rulers instead of his fellow Athenians.

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discusses a similar case in the *Protagoras*. The argument there makes it seem as if it is just chance and that in that case it is circumstance that forces Alcibiades to take control of the rudder. Certainly Socrates is aware that at times one cannot avoid such circumstances, but since that is the case we should not rush into them. Indeed, (3) makes perfect sense if we consider that in his own self-appreciation in the *Apology*, Socrates seemingly never errs. As in the *Protagoras*, a picture is emerging which suggests that “human wisdom” may not be enough for true virtue (which would be divine wisdom), but it is enough to avoid vice. This would allow for an intermediate state between virtue and vice. But, it is important to note, that this intermediate state, this knowing that you do not know, is in constant danger of succumbing to the conceit of wisdom. Socrates’ questioning of Alcibiades has shown that Alcibiades holds many opinions about which he has never thought. One of the accomplishments of this dialogue is that Socrates awakens Alcibiades from the familiar everyday world. He makes Alcibiades feel strange about things that he has always thought he has known, or never thought about at all.

## Education

Socrates tells Alcibiades that he is not alone in his wretched ignorance, but has the company of “most of our city’s politicians” (118c). There may be a few exceptions, Socrates admits, “among them, perhaps, your guardian Pericles” (118c). Socrates uses this as a transitional point to show Alcibiades how little he has actually been educated. Alcibiades takes the bait, and lists those who have helped Pericles learn. Alcibiades says, “he kept company with many experts like Pythocles and Anaxagoras. Even now, despite his advanced age, he consults with Damon for the same purpose” (118c).

Socrates responds by asking Alcibiades: “Have you ever seen any expert who is unable to make others expert in what he knows? The person who taught you how to read and write—he had expertise in his field, and he made you and anybody else he liked expert as well” (118c). Socrates takes Alcibiades’ previous example of learning Greek and makes it more technical. That is, though Alcibiades cannot say who taught him to speak, he can say who taught him to write and to read. Socrates offers several more examples and concludes, “I think we can be pretty sure that someone understands something when he can show that he has made someone else understand it” (118d). Thus, Socrates lays out a criterion for determining expertise. One knows something only if one can cause someone else to know it. This amounts to little more than saying that if someone knows something that he or she will be able to explain it.

Now, Socrates is able to ask “who Pericles has made into an expert?”(118d). As in the *Protagoras* (319e-320b), Socrates begins with Pericles’ sons, of whom Alcibiades says both “turned out to be idiots” (118e). Then Socrates turns to Clinias, the brother of Alcibiades. Alcibiades calls his brother a “madman” (118e), but by doing so has put

himself on the line. Thus Socrates responds, “Well then, since Clinias is mad and Pericles’ sons were idiots, what shall we say is the reason he allowed you to be in the state you’re in?” (118e). Alcibiades answers decisively, exactly as, I suspect, Socrates would have wanted him to. “I suppose it’s because I didn’t really pay attention (Ἐγὼ οἶμαι ἀίτιος οὐ προσέχων τὸν νοῦν)” (118e). Generally the phrase προσέχων τὸν νοῦν means “to pay attention,” but if we read it more literally we can see, perhaps, something of what is meant by not paying attention. He does not hold his mind forward, he lets it slip away and the point of this statement is that not paying attention, is the state that he’s in, the state that Pericles should be able to correct, were he an expert. Here Alcibiades admits to the same forgetfulness that characterizes him in both the *Protagoras* and the *Symposium*. In addition, however, Alcibiades is showing loyalty to Pericles by placing the blame on Pericles’ sons, Clinias and himself and indeed, each person is responsible for his or her own actions. Nevertheless, Alcibiades has condemned Pericles by showing that he has been able to turn out no better than idiots, a madman and Alcibiades. Socrates senses this and asks Alcibiades to name anyone that Pericles has made more of an expert (119a).

When Alcibiades is unable to name anyone, Socrates turns to the main point and asks Alcibiades “what do you propose for yourself (τί οὖν διανοιῆ περὶ σαυτοῦ)? Do you intend to remain in your present condition (ὡς νῦν ἔχεις), or practice some self-cultivation (ἐπιμέλειάν τινα ποιῆσθαι;)” (119a). Socrates presents Alcibiades to himself as a problem, and more specifically as a cognitive problem when he asks what he thinks about himself τί οὖν διανοιῆ περὶ σαυτοῦ. Then he completes his thought, by asking what he thinks to do about himself, whether to remain as he is or to care about

himself.<sup>169</sup> Alcibiades has already told Socrates that he would rather “die on the spot” than not “be permitted to gain anything greater” (105a-b). Now, Socrates is playing on this. Socrates has already stated—from the very beginning of the dialogue—that Alcibiades will not be able to gain what he wants without the help of his older lover, but now he will set to demonstrating this at great length. This means that Alcibiades’ ambition may force him to care about his soul, and thus, in many ways, ultimately abandon that ambition. Alcibiades seems to do as Socrates planned for he suggests that they discuss it together (119b). But when Socrates enquires further Alcibiades will show that he has very little interest in self-cultivation, even though Socrates has already shown him that he suffers from the greatest ignorance and that his famous guardian has taught him nothing, because he too knows nothing. So it is questionable whether Alcibiades is truly ambitious.<sup>170</sup>

Rather than seeing the need to take the care of his self seriously, Alcibiades uses the demonstration of the ignorance of Pericles and other Athenian politicians as a free license to remain as he is, forgetting his claim at 105a-b. He says that,

if they were educated, then anyone who wanted to compete with them would have to get some knowledge and go into training like an athlete. But, as it is, since they entered politics as amateurs, 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 (ἐγὼ γὰρ εὖ οἶδ’ ὅτι τούτων τῆ γε φύσει πάνυ πολὺ περιέσομαι) (119b-c).

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<sup>169</sup> Michel Foucault claims that “The quite natural starting point for a study focused on the care of the self is the *Alcibiades*” (1997, 95). Foucault notes three ways in which the “care of the self” in the *Alcibiades* is transformed throughout later Greek literature. He sees the care of the self as the focal point where “politics, pedagogy, and self-knowledge” come together (1997,85). He makes the important point that “the practice of the self is conceived as a permanent battle” (1997, 97). Cf. Nehemas 1998 for a detailed discussion of Foucault’s discussion of this dialogue.

<sup>170</sup> One may claim that this may be true only if one supposes that Alcibiades ‘takes Socrates’ plan seriously. The point is that he is unable to take the point seriously, because he does not take himself seriously.

This claim is an expression of Alcibiades' arrogance, but it is more than that. It shows that his self truly is a problem to him, something that he does not know. His ambition causes him to judge himself in terms of those who surround him, rather than in terms of the truth. Socrates sets about ridiculing this reflected conception of his self. He says to Alcibiades: "I'm furious (ἀγανακτῶ) with you and with my infatuation (ἔρωτος) for you" (119c). When Alcibiades asks for an explanation, Socrates says he is angry because "you stoop to compete with these people" (119c). When Alcibiades asks who "else have I got to compete with" (119c), Socrates shows that not only is Alcibiades not ambitious, but he only "thinks he holds himself in high-esteem (οἰόμενον μεγαλόφρονα εἶναι)" (119d). If he will not care for his self for its own sake, he certainly does not hold it in high regard. So, Socrates forces him to compare himself with another class of people altogether.

This argument shows the imitative nature of human beings and our tendency to compare ourselves with them and judge ourselves by them. This tendency has many pitfalls for Plato. Pleonexia (as it is expressed at 105b-c and *Republic* I) is one problem associated with this. I always want more than the others. The point here is the converse danger. When it comes to my internal qualities, I only want "enough" to have more than my fellows. Socrates recognizes this in Alcibiades and so shows Alcibiades just how high that bar can be set. He has already shown that Alcibiades' education has been haphazard, as has that of his fellow Athenians. Now he will contrast that with the very well planned education of the Kings of Persia and Sparta, educations that take their entire

life into consideration from the very first day. They lead planned, rather than haphazard, lives.<sup>171</sup>

Socrates begins by reminding Alcibiades that Athens is sometimes at war with Persia and Sparta and so these are his true competition.<sup>172</sup> Socrates' irony flares up into sarcasm when he says,

no sir, you've got to keep an eye on Midias the cockfighter and such people...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 (120a-c).

Socrates is showing an almost unprecedented fierceness in the force he is using against Alcibiades here. He is playing on Alcibiades' measuring of himself by others when he compares him to "Midias the cockfighter" and he mocks his "preparation." Alcibiades, again, professes to be swayed, but immediately hedges his bet and says "But I still don't think the Spartan generals or the Persian king are any different than anybody else" (120c). Socrates responds to this by telling Alcibiades the true reason for his comparison. He asks, "when do you think you'd cultivate yourself: if you feared them and thought they were formidable or if you didn't" (120c). Alcibiades answers that he would cultivate himself if he thought them formidable and Socrates asks whether Alcibiades thinks that "cultivating yourself will do you any harm" (120d). This is the true reason that he wants Alcibiades to consider the Spartans and the Persians as his competition. In order to do so, he needs to make the basis of the comparison stronger.

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<sup>171</sup> Forde 1987 points out the prominence of the word "kosmos" in this section, stressing the order of the Persian kingdom (230).

<sup>172</sup> The reader knows that Alcibiades will become intimately familiar with both the Persians (VIII. 45-VIII.47) and the Spartans (Thucydides 6. 88-8. 26).

He asks Alcibiades whether “natural talents will be greatest among noble families, or in other families” (120e). Here he is appealing to Alcibiades’ sense of high birth. Next he asks if those “who are well born will turn out perfectly virtuous, if they’re well brought up” (120e). Here Socrates appeals to education. In the next section (120e-124c), Socrates will show how inferior Alcibiades is to the Persian King and the Spartan generals. He adds another criterion, that of wealth, but he has already noted that this is least important to Alcibiades. The effect of this entire speech is to show the ordered nature of the educations of the Spartans and the Persians, compared with the haphazard nature of Athenian education. Their educations are ordered because they take the entire life into account, from the day they are born, both in terms of ambition and separation. The effect of this is to show Alcibiades that he does not know himself. This means that Alcibiades is unaware that his past is inadequate to the ambitions that he has for the future.

Socrates begins by showing Alcibiades that what he thinks of as a high birth is only relatively high, to the extent that he would be laughed at by both Spartans and Persians (120e-121b). Socrates continues to point out the haphazard nature of Athenian birth (implying that either he or Alcibiades could in reality be illegitimate). Everyone knows that the Spartan and Persian kings are legitimate and everyone celebrates their birthday but “when we are born, Alcibiades, ‘even the neighbors hardly notice it’” (121d). Thus Socrates has hinted at the importance of some sort of regulated birth program (one of which is developed in the *Republic*<sup>173</sup>) but he moves on then to show the orderly and well-planned nature of the education received by the rulers of Sparta and

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<sup>173</sup> Cf. Friedlander 1964 ii, 236.

Persia. When the child is raised it is “not by some nanny of no account, but by the most highly respected eunuchs in the royal household” (121d).

Then, when “he is twice seven years, the boy is entrusted to people called the ‘royal tutors.’ These are four Persians of mature age who have been selected as the best: the wisest, the justest, and most self-controlled, and the bravest” (121e-122a). That is, there is a tutor for each of the cardinal virtues, so that, rather than naively supposing as the Athenians do (Cf. *Protagoras* 322d), that everyone teaches virtue, the Persians find those who are the best in each of the virtues (virtue may not be teachable, but one has a far better chance if one picks the best rather than letting anyone try to teach it). Socrates says that the “rest of the upbringing and education of your competitors...would be a long story” (122b), while glossing over what now seems to be Alcibiades’ meager education. “But for you, Alcibiades, Pericles chose from among his household Zopyrus the Thracian, a tutor so old he was perfectly useless” (122b). Socrates concludes that “your birth, your upbringing, your education—or that of any other Athenian—is of no concern to anybody, to tell the truth—nobody, that is, except perhaps some man who may happen to be in love with you” (122b).

Socrates concludes his humiliation of Alcibiades by showing that “even our enemies’ wives have a better appreciation than we do what it would take to challenge them” (124a).<sup>174</sup> His next comment makes it clear that not only does Alcibiades does not know his true competitors, but he does not know himself. “No, my excellent friend, trust in me and the Delphic inscription and ‘know thyself (γνῶθι σαυτόν).’ These are the people we must defeat, not the ones you think, and we have no hope of defeating them

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<sup>174</sup> In a recent dissertation Andre Maurice Archie points out the importance of the role of women in this section of the dialogue (2003, 96-111).

unless we act with both diligence and skill” (124a-b). When Socrates concludes by assuring Alcibiades he will not achieve the fame he so desires unless he does this (124b), Alcibiades asks “what kind of self-cultivation do I need to practice” (124b). For the rest of the dialogue Socrates will first have to show him what his true self is and then how to cultivate it so that “we can become as good as possible” (124b-c).

In order to do this, however, Socrates has to lead Alcibiades through an elenctic discussion (124e-127c) designed to show Alcibiades that he does not know himself at all, much less know what “good,” “friendship,” or “agreement” mean. When Alcibiades realizes this, it seems as if he has finally come to himself, discovered himself again. He exclaims, “I think I must have been in an appalling state (αἴσχιστα) for a long time (πάλαι), without being aware of it (λεληθέναι)” (127d). This is an important remark for Alcibiades. He recognizes he has been unaware of himself (λεληθέναι ἑμαυτόν) for a long time (πάλαι). Alcibiades is saying that he has escaped his own notice, and forgotten himself.<sup>175</sup> In the preceding chapters, I have already shown that Plato portrays Alcibiades as forgetful of himself, shows time as responsible for forgetfulness and finally shows forgetfulness is responsible for vice. Here, Socrates makes similar claims, though as elsewhere in the *Alcibiades*, this passage focuses on Alcibiades’ inability to connect his previous training with his future accomplishments and the glory he hopes they bring him.

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<sup>175</sup> This is the same word used of Epimetheus forgetting humanity in Protagoras’ Great Speech (*Protagoras* 321c).

## The Self and Its Cultivation

Thus far I have focused on the role that time plays in the first part of the *Alcibiades*. I have spelled out the temporal grammar that accounts for his present ambition and his future failure as a result of a lack of training in the past. Alcibiades' wavering, I have shown, is a result of forgetting himself and thinking that he knows what he does not know. This forgetfulness is so strong that even when Socrates reminds him, Alcibiades nearly immediately slips back into ignorance, to the point that he is often surprised to find himself as he is.<sup>176</sup> Now, I show the way Socrates turns the conversation in order to show Alcibiades “how to escape from your present state” (135c). First Socrates discusses self-cultivation, but in order to complete this discussion he must show what the self really is. Though he wants the self-itself, they end up settling on a particular self (130d). This is an important point. I show that in Socrates' separation of the soul from the body and the things that belong to it, he is stripping away time from the rational part of the soul. Socrates urges Alcibiades to use the rational part of his soul to think the rational part of the soul and escape the major pitfall of forgetfulness.

Socrates asks Alcibiades “what does it mean to cultivate oneself (τί ἐστὶν τὸ ἑαυτοῦ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι)?” (127e). Socrates goes on to show Alcibiades that “we often think we are cultivating ourselves when we are not (μὴ πολλάκις λάθωμεν οὐχ ἡμῶν αὐτῶν ἐπιμελούμενοι)” (128a). If we translate this passage more literally we see that he is really saying, “We often escape our notice, not cultivating ourselves.” The wording of this passage helps us to see exactly what the articular infinitive τὸ ἐπιμελεῖσθαι means. It is the opposite of self-forgetfulness, the λάθωμεν. Often—in the thick and fast

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<sup>176</sup> Cf. 106e and my discussion of it above.

rush of moments—one forgets oneself so thoroughly that one does not only not care for oneself, but one is not aware that one is not caring for oneself. As we see later, the care is precisely this: remembering oneself which is construed as knowing oneself.

Socrates is going to have to lead Alcibiades towards himself. If people think they are cultivating themselves when they are not, are they not cultivating something other than themselves? Socrates directs the dialogue in the direction of this question. He asks: “Is he cultivating himself when he cultivates what he has? (ἄρ’ ὅταν τῶν αὐτοῦ ἐπιμελῆται, τότε καὶ αὐτοῦ;)” (128a). Alcibiades answers that when one cultivates the things of the self (τῶν αὐτοῦ) that he is cultivating himself, but by the time he gives his next answer he admits that he doesn’t understand (128a).

Socrates brings Alcibiades through a number of lowly examples in order to get the younger man to admit that “when you’re cultivating what belongs to you, you’re not cultivating yourself” (128d). Most often when we think we are cultivating ourselves we are in reality cultivating what belongs to us by acquiring fame or wealth. Socrates is clear that the skill (τέχνη) they need to cultivate themselves is a skill “that won’t make anything that belongs to us better, but it will make us better” (128e). If my previous supposition was correct, then this skill or τέχνη is a sort of mnemonic technique whereby we can recall ourselves to ourselves and check our memory. We cannot recall ourselves, however, if we do not know what that self is. This is an intricate part of the dialogue, for as Socrates leads the discussion towards the “true self” he is in fact enacting the τέχνη of recall, through rational discussion.

After agreeing that they need some sort of techne to make the self better, Socrates asks “could we ever know what skill makes us better if we didn’t know what we were”

(128e). Alcibiades agrees and Socrates points out how difficult it is to know oneself (129a). Alcibiades again admits to wavering, saying “Sometimes (πολλάκις) I think, Socrates, that anyone can do it, but then sometimes (πολλάκις) I think it’s extremely difficult” (129a).<sup>177</sup> Socrates does not shy away from the difficulty, for “nevertheless, this is the situation we are in” (129a). Socrates will continue to try to hold Alcibiades steadfast. Then Socrates says, “if we know ourselves, then we might be able to know how to cultivate ourselves, but if we don’t know ourselves we’ll never know how (γνόντες μὲν αὐτὸ τάχ’ ἂν γνοιῶμεν τὴν ἐπιμέλειαν ἡμῶν αὐτῶν, ἀγοῦντες δὲ οὐκ ἂν ποτε)” (129a). If we do not know ourselves, then surely we cannot care for that self. Socrates really says “how can we come to know the self itself (αὐτὸ ταῦτό)” (129b), because the knowing of the self itself is the art of caring for it.

Socrates asks whether “the thing being used (ὁ δὲ χρώμενος) and the person using it (ὃ χρῆται)” are different (129c). After asking whether a shoemaker and a lyre-player each use their hands and their eyes as well as their respective instruments in order to accomplish their primary activity, Socrates is able to ask: “Doesn’t a man use his whole body, too?” (129e).<sup>178</sup> When Alcibiades agrees, Socrates reminds him of their previous agreement that “the user is different from the thing being used” (129e). When Alcibiades agrees to this, the conclusion is inevitable “A human<sup>179</sup> is different from his own body” (129e). This leads Socrates to ask “what is a human?” (129e). In antiquity this

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<sup>177</sup> A better translation is “sometimes it seems like everything to me, oh Socrates, and sometimes it seems like a total pain”

<sup>178</sup> In the *de Anima*, Aristotle similarly claims that the body is an organ, or tool of the soul (412a25).

<sup>179</sup> The translations that follow adhere to Hutchinson’s except where he consistently translates “ὁ ἄνθρωπος” as “man” I substitute the preferable “human” or “person.” Though, in English, “man” is often used to mean “humanity” Greek has no such tradition in usage where “ἄνθρωπος” is always gender neutral (except in grammar) and “ἄνθρωπος” is always gender specific. Therefore there is a scholarly—as well as an ethical or political—argument to be made against such usage.

was considered to be the fundamental question of the dialogue (as its subtitle “On the Human” evinces). The question of the nature of humanity must be answered and Socrates gives three possible options for the essence of the person “the body, the soul, or the two of them together, the whole thing” (130a).<sup>180</sup> Socrates says that they have already agreed that the true human rules the body and so the body cannot be the same as the human (130b). Then he eliminates the possibility that the soul and the body together both rule the body, on the grounds that if “one of them doesn’t take part in ruling, then surely no combination of the two of them could rule” (130b). This move leaves only one possibility and Socrates is able to conclude that “if he is something, he’s nothing other than his soul” (130c). Thus, we know that the human is the soul, but we know very little about the soul other than that it *rules the body*.

Socrates makes an immediate distinction. He says: “What we mentioned just now that we should first consider what the self itself (αὐτὸ τὸ αὐτὸ) is. Instead of considering that, we’ve been considering what a particular self (τοῦ αὐτοῦ αὐτὸ ἑκάστων) is” (130d). Socrates then suggests that this may be enough and seemingly says no more about the distinction. But it seems like a real distinction is being made. In fact, it is a distinction we have already seen. It seems as if what we have seen is a “particular” self instead of the “self itself” because all we know about this soul is that it rules the body. This distinction explains Socrates’ redoubled effort to strip away physical things from the self, which has now been defined as the soul. Socrates shows first that “being self-controlled is knowing yourself” rather than having medical, economic or agriculture knowledge (130e-131c). The particular soul that rules the body needs to be self-

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<sup>180</sup> Aristotle’s use of this argument at the end of *Metaphysics vii 3* helps demonstrate the authenticity of the dialogue.

controlled and keep itself in mind, in order that it may know itself and know the self itself.

Thus, Socrates continues to strip away all but the soul itself. He says that “if someone takes care of his body, then isn’t he caring for something that belongs to him, and not for himself?” (131b). From here he shows that “someone who takes care of his wealth (τὰ χρήματα<sup>181</sup>)” cares “neither for himself nor for what belongs to him, but for something even further away” (131b).

In the examples that follow, when Socrates tries to remove the self from the things that belong to the self, he is also de-temporalizing the soul. Time is a measurement of motion and motion is a characteristic of bodies.<sup>182</sup> The self-motion of the soul is motion, but it is an eternal motion (*Phaedrus* 245d)<sup>183</sup> and it “bears the greatest kinship to understanding and the motion of the universe” (*Timaeus* 89a).<sup>184</sup> Thus, Socrates needs to separate the soul from the body so that Alcibiades does not forget the self-motion of his soul in the transitory nature of bodily motion. This further explains what was meant by thinking of one’s life as a whole in the *Protagoras*, but it also raises problems. One of the main points of the Platonic or Socratic “discovery” of the soul, is in fact that it is non-temporal and not subject to change. Socrates dismisses the idea that the true human is the body and the soul, but he is talking to a human who in fact is a body and a soul and who is subject to time. That is in fact why this is so important. It is the souls that have in fact been speaking and not the faces. This explains the lack of dramatic setting—in the spatial

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<sup>181</sup> τὰ χρήματα means “wealth” but the word derives from χράω and means things that are used. Socrates is punning on the series of cognates that occur from 129c-130b.

<sup>182</sup> Aristotle says “Time is the measure of motion and being moved” (*Physics* 220b30-221a5).

<sup>183</sup> This is one reason that the human cannot be, but can only become, virtuous. Cf. Chapter 4 above.

<sup>184</sup> Cf. also *Laws* where soul is defined as “self-generating motion” (896a).

sense of a “set”— for the dialogue. Socrates says “when you and I talk to each other, one soul uses words to address another soul” (130d). He goes on, citing himself and Alcibiades in indirect discourse, “Socrates converses with Alcibiades not by saying words to his face, apparently, but by addressing his words to *Alcibiades*, in other words to his soul” (130e). Socrates addresses words to the soul of Alcibiades, to remind that soul that it exists, that it is not the body, nor truly joined with it, and that is free from time. This helps us understand in one of the ways that Plato may mean that learning is recollection. No matter what we learn, we learn with the soul and thus recollect what we have always known but always forget: the self itself and the freedom from time.

Socrates goes through another list of examples to show that a various experts are only experts at things that *belong* to the true human, the soul, and that none of them know themselves and then he turns the matter personal and says to Alcibiades “I’m the one who will stay with you, now that your body has lost its bloom and everyone else has gone away” (131d). It is as an effect of time that the others have fled. Socrates explains saying, “ I was your only lover—the others were lovers only of what you had. While your possessions are passing their prime, you are just beginning to bloom” (131e-132a). This is where the difference between the self itself and the particular self discussed above becomes more important. The particular self is the temporal, embodied self, whereas the self itself is a non-temporal rationality.

Now that Socrates has succeeded in stripping the body and the things of the body (including motion and time) from the soul, we can make sense of what seems difficult here. For, to claim that Alcibiades’ soul “is just beginning to bloom” (132a) makes it seem as if the soul does change. Not only, however can it bloom, it can also be corrupted,

for Socrates claims that “I shall never forsake you now, never, unless the Athenian people make you corrupt and ugly” (132a). This will turn out to be the very point that Socrates is trying to make and reason that it is so important. It is because of our bodies that our particular souls are subject to time by means of the body that moves and changes in time and they forget themselves and become ruled by the things that belong to the body.

Forgetfulness is tied to the body through time. As Aristotle says in the physics “people forget owing to the lapse of time” (*Physics* 221a30). It seems as if the particular soul—Alcibiades, or Socrates—tries to know what the self itself is. In doing so, the particular soul uses its rational part to contemplate its rational part and is reminded of itself. Socrates leads us to the final section of the dialogue by asking how to do this:

“How can we get the clearest knowledge of our soul?” (132c). The very soul that knows is forgetful of itself, has forgotten itself and doesn’t know itself. It is self-alienated in ignorance, the very state that Socrates diagnoses in Alcibiades (117a-118d). From here Socrates moves to a discussion of how the soul knows itself and also, though less obviously, how it is that the soul does not know itself.

Socrates cites the Delphic oracle for a second time, as an answer to his own question. Socrates first claims that if we knew the best way to know our souls, we would also know ourselves (132c). Then, half way through his short answer he exclaims, “By the gods—that admirable Delphic inscription we just mentioned—didn’t we understand it” (132c). Thus, Socrates has gone from the Delphic inscription “know thyself” (γνῶθι σαυτόν) (124b, 129a) through a discussion that separated the self from the things that belong to the self and has now come back to the inscription “know thyself” to explain what was supposed to explain it. When Socrates asks did they not understand the

inscription, I want to argue that he is directing Alcibiades to look at the grammatical, reflexive structure of the syntax. The one being commanded to know is also the object of knowledge. In asking Alcibiades to reconsider the Delphic oracle, Socrates is asking him to reflect upon himself again. It is also the soul that is reflecting, but the rational part of the soul.

Alcibiades' problem is that he does not like repetition. Earlier Socrates ridiculed Alcibiades' "delicate stomach" which "wouldn't enjoy another taste of the same argument" (114a). Here, he balks at Socrates for "bringing that up again" (132c). If learning is recollection,<sup>185</sup> it is a kind of repetition and learning is precisely what Alcibiades has rejected, preferring to lean on his "natural talents" (119b-c).<sup>186</sup> He forgets himself and does not want to learn to recollect. When Alcibiades fails to read into the reflexive nature of the command, Socrates explains it to him as "what I suspect the oracle means and what advice it's giving us" (132d). Then he admits that sight may be the only example. Socrates makes expert use, however, of this analogy in order to get Alcibiades to see the reflexive nature of knowledge and thought.

Socrates says, "You think about it too. If the inscription took our eyes to be men and advised them, 'See thyself,' how would we understand such advice. Shouldn't the eye be looking at something in which it could see itself" (132d). There is a great deal to

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<sup>185</sup> Cf. *Meno* "And in not finding knowledge within oneself recollection" (85d). The point in the Alcibiades is that in order to find in other knowledge in oneself, one must first recollect one's self. Cf. *Phaedo* 73b-76c.

<sup>186</sup> Kierkegaard is very astute on this issue. He sees repetition and recollection as opposed, but inextricably related. He says: "Repetition and recollection are the same movement, only in opposite directions; for what is recollected has been, is repeated backwards, whereas repetition properly so called is recollected forwards" (Kierkegaard 1941, 33). It is possible to discern enough similarities between *Repetition* and the Alcibiades, to think that Kierkegaard had the dialogue in mind when writing it. For instance, the young man with whom Kierkegaard begins the dialogue is described as "in that seductive age when maturity of spirit announces itself" (1941, 36). Though it is beyond the scope of this chapter, a further comparison of these two works would be well worth while.

unpack in this passage.<sup>187</sup> Socrates' analogy with sight, shifts it to an active voice, which is the most important part, since if we know what knows then we know what is known.

A comparison with Aristotle's similar analogy may help us see what is going on here. Aristotle asks us to "suppose that the eye were an animal—sight would have been its soul, for sight is the substance of the eye which corresponds to the account, the eye being merely the matter of seeing" (*De Anima* 412b17-26).<sup>188</sup> Thus, if the oracle says "See thyself (ἰδέε σαυτόν)", and it is commanding the eye to see its true self, it is commanding the eye to see sight. Thus, knowing oneself would be to know one's knowing or not knowing. If the eye does not see sight, it is seeing "merely the matter of seeing," that is, something that belongs to seeing. The eye of course does not readily see itself, or its seeing. Or rather it is not aware of seeing sight, but as Aristotle says "since it is through sense that we are aware that we are seeing or hearing it must be either by sight that we are aware of seeing or by some sense other than sight" (425b12-15). Since there are only the five senses it must be sight that sees sight. Though this is a difficult issue, it becomes clear that it must be by sight that one is aware of seeing. This means that all sight is, in some sense, a seeing of sight. This will be important for the soul part of our analogy, but it would be lost on Alcibiades and so Socrates provides some more concrete illustrations of his point, in order to guide Alcibiades towards self-reflection.

He says, "I'm sure that you've noticed that when a man looks into an eye his face appears in it, like in a mirror. We call this the 'pupil,' for it's a sort of miniature of the

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<sup>187</sup> The command Socrates uses is σκόπει καὶ σύ, is an imperative, but it emphatically uses the second-person pronoun and emphasizes it further with the use of an intensive καὶ. He is stressing the active role Alcibiades should take.

<sup>188</sup> Aristotle's analogy will be different from Plato's for he argues that "as the pupil, plus the power of sight constitutes the eye, the soul plus the body constitutes the animal" (413a1-4). The *Alcibiades* has already rejected this option.

man who's looking' (1333a). The person looking sees him or her self in the part of the eye of the other that sees, that is in the pupil, but the "little reflection" is too small for the eye to see itself. In fact, this is not Socrates' point. At this point, he is simply establishing that the pupil is reflective. Then he makes the point that the eye can only see itself in something similar (133a). Socrates continues: "So if an eye is to see itself, it must look at an eye, and at that region of it in which the good activity of an eye actually occurs, and this, I presume is seeing" (133b). Thus, if the eye is to see what it truly is it must seek out that which makes an eye an eye, or its essence. For, an eye that does not see is only an eye in name (*de Anima* 412b20). Since Socrates cannot tell Alcibiades to look at sight, he directs him towards the part of the material eye in which sight resides.

Now Socrates is ready to pull out the point of his analogy. He says: "Then if the soul, Alcibiades, is to know itself, it must look at a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom occurs, and at anything else which is similar to it" (133b). In order for the soul to know itself, it must look at reason, which we may now suggest is the "self itself" rather than the "particular self." Socrates makes this point, asking if we can "call anything in the soul more divine than the part in which knowing and thinking take place" (133b-c). Since the soul is alienated from its own essence and has forgotten itself, it must look for another who is wise. In order to look for another who is wise, one must test that wisdom by asking questions. By asking questions, one sees wisdom, or the best part of the soul reflected in others. Socrates says that the rational part of the soul "resembles the divine and someone who looked at it grasped everything

divine—god and intelligence—would have the best grasp on himself as well” (133c).<sup>189</sup> The rational part of the soul contemplates those things which do not change and it does not change itself, except insofar as it is subject to its own self-motion.<sup>190</sup> If someone understands divine things—of which there are god and intelligence—then that person will have control over him or herself, because the person’s intelligence will know itself. How is the person to understand god? Through god’s oracle, just as Socrates does in the *Apology* (20e-21e). The service to the god is trying to awaken people to themselves. The oracle’s command to “know thyself” is a command issued directly to the very self that it wants it to know. Knowing anything is knowing that (rational) self.

It is important to say a few more words on self-knowledge as self-control and on Socrates’ analogy between the eye and the human being and the necessity of another eye. Gary Alan Scott asks “how will the less-capable partner—presumably the one inferior in wisdom—facilitate the self-knowledge of the wiser person? (2000, 1997). He concludes that “with the notion of ‘the Self itself,’ perhaps Socrates means to suggest that human beings are never without recourse for a paradigm of this ruling part of the soul; one can always look to the heavens, to everything divine as a guide” (2000, 97). I think that Scott is correct, but we need to add that it is through questioning and continually testing one’s reason that one begins to uncover the divine. Thus, we can begin to see what Socrates gains from his constant questioning of others. It is a mnemonic device devised to keep him from forgetting the god’s mission and slipping into self-forgetfulness. This explains

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<sup>189</sup> I reject Hutchinson’s emendation of θεάν for θεόν and thus do not use his translation here. There is no good reason to accept the emendation. If we allow θεάν we have a difficult syntax and not much of a point. Socrates would be pushing the active aspect and say if someone understood his or her soul in the same way that an eye understood itself—that is through its activity, it would have control of itself.

<sup>190</sup> It is unclear whether the “self itself” or what we may term “pure rationality” would be subject to any real motion. This is a difficult issue that is ultimately beyond the scope of this chapter.

also Socrates' claim at the beginning of the dialogue that as he spent years watching Alcibiades the god kept him from speaking. Socrates watched Alcibiades in order to see the divine part of himself and god.

### **A Return to Error**

Now Socrates offers an argument to show that if one does not know oneself, then one will make mistakes and “conduct himself badly, both publicly and privately” (134a). He begins by explaining the identity between knowing oneself and self-control, but expressing it in the negative form, so we can see that he is now turning the conversation to diagnose error once again, which is, if we are ignorant part of knowing ourselves. Indeed, an eye would have a very unclear picture of itself, if it could not see that it could not see itself—that is to say, if it looked in a reflection and thought it was seeing itself. Recognizing the divine part of us is using logic or reason to reach the atemporal and unchanging. Nevertheless, part of the human failure, and of Alcibiades' failure, is to fail to recognize one's own limitations and correct them. Socrates says: “So if we didn't know ourselves and weren't self-controlled, would we be able to know which of the things that belong to us were good and which were bad?” (133c). This is remarkably similar to the Socratic intellectualism that we saw in the *Protagoras*. We must first know ourselves to know what belongs to us. If we do not know ourselves, we do not know what belongs to us and do not know what among those things is good and what is not. Because I do not know what is good and what is not, I go after what is not good, thinking that it is good and I am not self-controlled, because I am not self-consistent.

Socrates makes the point clear when he says “I suppose it would seem impossible to you to know that what belongs to Alcibiades belongs to him, without knowing Alcibiades” (133d). This is a quotidian example. If someone asks Jones, “How much money does Smith have?” Jones can’t possibly answer if he does not know (of) Smith. Socrates makes the point of the example clear only with his next statement “And similarly, we couldn’t know that what belongs to us belongs to us, without knowing ourselves’ (133d). If we do not know ourselves, we cannot know what belongs to us, i.e. the body and its properties. Then Socrates shows how the problem compounds itself. If we do not know what belongs to us then we do not know what belongs to our belongings.

Time and change belong to bodies and it is necessary to know the eternal of which time is a “moving image” in order to know time. Then Socrates shows if one doesn’t know one’s own belongs, one won’t know other people’s either (133e). If one doesn’t know other people’s belongings “nor will he know what belongs to the city” (133e). If one does not know what belongs to the city, then one cannot manage a city, nor even a household for such a person will know neither himself “nor indeed will he know what he’s doing” (133e-134a). Now, Socrates shows how it is that mistakes occur, asking, “if he doesn’t know what he’s doing, won’t he make mistakes” (134) and since “he makes mistakes, won’t he conduct himself badly, publicly and privately” (134a). Finally Socrates delivers the final blow and asks: “Since he conducts himself badly, won’t he be a failure?” (134a). This is the last thing Alcibiades wants to be called and Socrates is prodding him, earnestly attempting to get Alcibiades to get control of himself.

Now Socrates goes on to show the disastrous effects of someone as impressive as Alcibiades entering politics before being educated. Socrates knows that the many will

adore Alcibiades and thus he knows that the decision, and the constant work to resist, is up to Alcibiades. Alcibiades agrees that nothing will do a city any good without virtue (134b) and from this Socrates concludes that, “if you are to manage the city’s business properly and well, you must impart virtue to the citizens” (134b-c). We have already seen that Pericles was unable to bestow virtue and that Alcibiades agreed that if one knew something one should be able to impart it. Now Socrates argues towards the same point, from the other end. He has shown that if you want to rule a city, then you must impart virtue. Now he will ask whether it is “possible to impart something you haven’t got” (134c). When Alcibiades agrees to this, he is unable to escape the conclusion that “what you need is justice and self-control” (134c).

Socrates does not let the point rest, but tries to point out the danger Alcibiades faces with a medical and a nautical example (134e-135a). From there it is easy for Socrates to show Alcibiades that he is like a slave and Socrates asks him if he knows how to escape this state (135c-d). Alcibiades says he will follow Socrates. Alcibiades ends with two “speeches” full of the present tense and temporal markers. He says, “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” (135d). Alcibiades claims that their roles have reversed and that from now on he will follow Socrates about.

Socrates responds, “I should like to believe that you will persevere (διατελέσαι)” (135e). This is a form of the word that διατετέλεκα that Socrates uses to describe his steadfast devotion to Alcibiades at 105a.<sup>191</sup> Thus, the dialogue both begins and ends with

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<sup>191</sup> For the reversal of the positions of Socrates and Alcibiades, Cf. Friedlander 1964, 204.

a perseverance or a constancy. In this chapter I have argued that the self-knowledge that Socrates recommends is none other than the constancy to keep oneself in mind and to care for and control oneself. Thus many of the important technical terms of the dialogue actually mean the same thing and each of these is the same as the “human wisdom” that we have seen in both the *Apology* and the *Protagoras*. Self-control is to know oneself and to keep oneself in mind constantly, to keep from slipping into an ignorance of one’s own ignorance, an ignorance of one’s self.

### **The Particular Self and Historical Resonance**

The reader, however, knows that Alcibiades does not follow Socrates all of his life, is not educated before he goes into politics and leads the city on a disastrous course.<sup>192</sup> After this we know that he had a chance to observe both the Spartans and the Persians first hand and that his “wavering” as well as the city’s “wavering” over him became famous. What are we to make of this? What is the author of the dialogue trying to tell us and what sorts of temporal schemata are invoked?

It has often been said that there is no description of the setting of the dialogue, no effort made to show where or how these two came into contact.<sup>193</sup> This is for at least two reasons. As Friedlander points out that the “economy with which this dialogue concentrates upon the two protagonists is also its unique strength” (1964, 232). One could say that Plato employs such a strict economy in order to present the souls of the two, speaking to each other in words (130d). The setting is also unimportant because of

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<sup>192</sup> If Alcibiades has not been recalled, the Sicilian expedition may not have been so immediately disastrous, but it seems that Alcibiades’ pleonexic idea of empire would have ultimately ended poorly. Cf. Thucydides VI. 18 and VI.VI. 53.

<sup>193</sup> As Friedlander puts it “there are no secondary figures in the Alcibiades nor is there any setting full of charm or symbolic meaning” (1964, 232).

Socrates' constancy. Wherever Alcibiades has gone, Socrates is there. What is extremely important is the temporal setting of the dialogue, which structures and defines both the course and the purpose of the dialogue. The particular soul, ruling a body, is subject to time and must somehow come to recognize the self itself, the rational and unchanging, atemporal soul. Plato uses Alcibiades in this dialogue so that he can allow the argument to resonate not only with what is presented in the dialogue, but the awareness—whether it come from oral or written sources—of the historical Alcibiades and his fate after the events depicted in the dialogue, many of which are designed to call to mind in the reader some future event. I have pointed out several instances of this type of allusion in the text of this chapter. In what space I have remaining, I briefly highlight Plato's use of the interlocutor's future.

When Alcibiades finally realizes that he is ignorant, Socrates says, “But don't lose heart. If you were fifty when you realized it, then it would be hard for you to cultivate yourself, but now you're just the right age (ἡλικίαν) to see it” (127e). Previously Socrates has said that Alcibiades is “hardly twenty years old yet” (123d) and that “it was a god who prevented me from talking to you before today” (124c). If Alcibiades is close to twenty here and we recall that he was most likely seventeen in the *Protagoras*, we can clearly see some discontinuity between the dialogues, for in the *Protagoras*, up to three years prior by this reckoning, Alcibiades was already quite familiar with Socrates. Nevertheless, this statement of Alcibiades' age as the appropriate juncture for Socrates to approach him is telling. This hint as to the age of Alcibiades, places the dramatic date of the Alcibiades very shortly before both men leave for Potidea. Nails points out that Alcibiades must have been at least twenty at the beginning of this campaign for by “the

5<sup>th</sup> c. , eighteen- and nineteen year-old Athenian youths were not sent on military campaigns outside Attica.... So Alcibiades III must have been in at least his twentieth year in 432” (2002, 13). This assessment, of course, gives something of a prophetic cast to Socrates’ statements about the Spartans (121a-124c).

The clearest statement of this is Socrates’ prophetic final remarks (and Plato’s use of “historical irony”) comes in the final words of Socrates, words expressing fear, “but I’m afraid—not because I distrust your nature, but because I know how powerful the city is—I’m afraid it will get the best of you and me both” (135e). Thus, when Scott says that in “the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates is shown effecting a beneficial transformation also in Alcibiades’ self-awareness, convincing him that he must take more trouble over himself if he desires to advise the city about its affairs” (2000, 84), we can see that the point is that Socrates does not effect any lasting change in Alcibiades. It appears as if he has, but the nature of Alcibiades’ forgetfulness—as much as the power of the city—will overpower him. Nevertheless, since there is no record of Alcibiades advising the Athenians any time before Potidaea—and not in fact until long after it—Plato is presenting us with a picture of a limited success. The limits of this success show us something important and often overlooked regarding Socratic “human wisdom.” Philosophy cannot rely on a simple “conversion,” or it becomes mere platitudes. Alcibiades’ effusive desire to follow Socrates is forgotten, because he continually forgets that he does not know. One must continually be guard, let one forget oneself so thoroughly that one forgets even that one has forgotten.

In the next chapter, I will look at Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium*, in order to look at his own account of what happened after leaving Socrates at the end of the *Alcibiades*.

## Chapter 7

### History and Forgetting in the Speech of Alcibiades

One of the charges against the *Alcibiades I* is that it lacks a rich dramatic element. The *Symposium* may suffer from the opposite fate: it offers such a rich presentation that commentators are dazzled and befuddled by its beauty. Many commentators tend to over-mythologize the dramatic elements of the dialogue. That is, they do the opposite of those “intellectuals” in the *Phaedrus* who “give a rational account of the form of the Hippocentaurs, and then of the Chimera, and a whole flood of Gorgons and Pegasuses and other monsters” (229d-e). Many modern commentators offer mythological interpretations of rational—or at least psychological—phenomena. They read it like James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, seeking esoteric symbols and “masks of Dionysus” everywhere.<sup>194</sup> While I do not want to deny that there is a mythological level of the dialogue, I will pay close attention to the dual psychological portrait offered by the speech of Alcibiades, taking particular care to lay out the temporal structure of both the account and the souls that are its subject.

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<sup>194</sup> Leo Strauss’s courses on the dialogue apparently influenced—either directly or indirectly—those who tend to read the dialogue this way. Strauss says, for example, “Thus Alcibiades fulfills the prophecy...Now Dionysus, represented by Alcibiades, is the judge and crowns Socrates” (Strauss 2001, 257). Strauss glosses over the fact that he precisely does not judge by giving the fillet to both. He continues saying that “the god, whose raw material is Alcibiades, would seem to be Dionysus” (2001, 257-258). Rosen says, “Dionysus is neither Socrates nor Agathon. If it is permissible to identify him with any character in the dialogue, the only serious candidate would be Alcibiades” (1968, 29). Later, of the seating arrangement Rosen says, “Alcibiades sits halfway between sophistry and philosophy; like Eros, he is ‘in between’ (213b1) the human and the divine” (1968, 288). Anderson, to whose title I alluded above, takes this tendency the farthest. Anderson begins his book by acknowledging his debt to Stanley Rosen’s study (1993, 1). Anderson says that “Sokrates identifies himself as Eros, and he also ‘contains’ or ‘is possessed by’ Dionysus. Thus, while Socrates is the mask through which Dionysus speaks, on another level not Sokrates, but Eros is the mask” (1993, 106).

I argue that Alcibiades' speech offers two very clear psychological and philosophical portraits, one of Socrates and one of himself. Both portraits—the explicit portrait of Socrates and the implicit portrait of Alcibiades—are characterized by some basic rift or division—much like the circle people of Aristophanes.<sup>195</sup> Only when we have excavated Alcibiades' account of himself can we understand his account of Socrates. Socrates' rift—his famous irony—is the difference between his shabby appearance and magnificent reality, between his body and its possessions and his soul, or self. He maintains such an ironic distance and difference because of the difference in Alcibiades (and most other Socratic interlocutors) between himself and himself. Socrates could say to Alcibiades, as he does to Callicles, replacing only the names, “Alcibiades will not agree with you, but will be dissonant with you all your life long’ (cf. *Gorgias* 482b). Alcibiades' account of Socrates not only shows the deep division in Alcibiades, but it adds to my overall analysis by showing how attached to his forgetfulness Alcibiades is. He willfully forgets, because it is difficult and sometimes immediately painful to remember.<sup>196</sup>

### **The Question of Alcibiades and the Dramatic Date of the Dialogue**

Martha Nussbaum argues that the figure of Alcibiades is central to an understanding of the entire dialogue. She offers a reading of the frame-tale, where Apollodorus is asked first by a wealthy businessman Glaucon<sup>197</sup> and again two days later

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<sup>195</sup> Rosen goes much too far when he says “Alcibiades is another instance of the hybristic circle-men, who imitate completeness by a harmony of opposites” (1968, 280). This is another example of the heavy-handed tendency to turn allusion or similarity into symbolic or metaphoric identity.

<sup>196</sup> All things considered, it must be ultimately more pleasant (cf. Chapter 5 above on the *Protagoras*).

<sup>197</sup> On this Glaucon's identity see Nussbaum 1986, 465, n. 14. See also Guthrie 1975, 366 and Bury 1966. Nussbaum supports the idea that this is the same Glaucon of the *Republic*, while Bury argues that this is the

by a nameless friend, about a party attended by both Socrates and Alcibiades. Nussbaum dates the frame-tale at 404,<sup>198</sup>

shortly before the assassination [of Alcibiades] at the height of the frenzy over Alcibiades... Now suppose a rumor circulates, to the effect that there has been a party, attended by Socrates and Alcibiades, where speeches were made about love. A political man (ignorant of the cultural facts that date this story) would immediately wonder whether the spurned leader had finally agreed to return to Athens, drawn perhaps by his famous love for Socrates” (Nussbaum 1986, 170).

Nussbaum persuasively argues that this story explains the seemingly incongruous interest expressed in speeches made about Eros at a drinking party. Nussbaum links this Glaucon with the oligarchs, based partly on the anti-democratic association of his name and his

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Glaucon of *Charmides* 154. Nussbaum sees chronology as the primary deficiency with her own interpretation, but the point of the prologue is its chronological confusion. A larger difficulty is that Plato’s brother would have presumably been close enough to Socrates that he could ask the man himself and that he would have been aware that Agathon had long ago left the city.

<sup>198</sup> Leo Strauss places the dialogue in 407. This allows him to arrive at conclusions quite different from Nussbaum’s. He thinks that, “Alcibiades was in Athens. Alcibiades had returned to Athens in 407. He was such a genius that he compelled the city which he had betrayed to permit him to return and acquit him. That is also the reason why the story is told now. The open hysteria and indignation have now been overcome. The most endangered Alcibiades is now restored. He is the leader of the procession to the shrine at Eleusis of Demeter and Kore, the object of the profanation of the mysteries” (Strauss 2001, 15). There is no way to demonstrate conclusively whether Plato set the dialogue in 407, 404 or some other year. Strauss’s reading makes the dialogue serve as “the true report of what happened in 415 or 416. Not the vulgar, hysterical kind....but we see how things become distorted” (2001, 15). Nussbaum’s account is actually a better explanation of distortion, because it occurs when there was the most uncertainty about Alcibiades within the city. I would like to suggest that the fact that the dialogue can plausibly occur at either dramatic date heightens Plato’s point about the temporal certainty of Alcibiades and demonstrates how haphazard his situation actually was. I suggest that Nussbaum’s account is stronger than Strauss’s because she does not ask “was it not proper to tell this story earlier?” (Strauss 2001, 14), but instead why would the two different people (Glaucon and the associate) be interested in the story. If Strauss is correct, the proper time to relate the story would have been exactly precisely after the event, when Alcibiades offered to defend himself against the charges. Strauss suggests that Socrates’ speech “profanes” the mysteries, but this does not correspond to the situation. Socrates was never implicated, so if any speech revealed the mysteries, it must in fact have been Alcibiades’. Stanley Rosen offers a confused account. He takes Glaucon’s “special interest in beautiful young men” (1968, 15, n. 38) as the reason for his interest and goes on to say that, “Glaucon’s belief that the banquet was a recent one, shows that the prologue takes place after 407, when Alcibiades was back in Athens” (1968, 15, n. 38). First, both the *Protagoras* and the *Alcibiades I* indicate that most suitors no longer thought Alcibiades young and beautiful in the 430s, and he certainly could not have been considered such by 407. Neither Socrates nor Agathon would have been young in 407, either. Glaucon did not know that Agathon had been away from the city for a number of years and so he certainly was not overly interested in his beauty. In addition, Rosen is very vague to say that the prologue takes place “after 407, when Alcibiades was back in Athens,” for, Alcibiades was only briefly in the city after 407. If he were in town at the time, Glaucon surely could have found out whether or not there was a recent banquet from a different source.

“silence about his deeper concerns” (Nussbaum 1986, 170). This suggestion takes on a sinister bent when one considers the role that the oligarchs played in Alcibiades’ assassination. It is in fact this assassination that Nussbaum—more speculatively—thinks has occurred in the two days separating Apollodorus’ two tellings of the tale.

She says that, “the ‘friend,’ apparently, is not laboring under Glaucon’s delusion that the rumored conversation was recent; and yet he wants to hear it any way. One sufficient explanation for his greater clarity, which would also account for his desire to hear the story again, would be the death of Alcibiades in Phrygia” (1986, 170). She acknowledges that

this remains conjectural; but in any case we are surely intended to tie the dialogue closely to the death, to think of Alcibiades as dead, or dying, even while ‘he’ speaks, and to see the oligarch’s fear of a love that would reunite Alcibiades and Athens as one of the fears that lead to the killing (1976, 171).

I have reported Nussbaum’s conjectures at such length, not only because of their inherent interest, but in order to open up the temporal ambiguity that frames this dialogue. It is clear that there was a great uncertainty and inconstancy that surrounded the figure of Alcibiades. There were reports, sightings and theories that left a cloud of uncertainty surrounding him. He was a troublesome epistemic object for the city. What is at stake, for Athens, in the problem of Alcibiades, is the relation between the past and the future, between memory and hope. Athens, like Alcibiades, clings to a forgetfulness full of ambition for the future.<sup>199</sup>

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<sup>199</sup> Nussbaum herself makes a much different case. Her discussion of Alcibiades addresses the problems raised by Vlastos 1981, 1-31, regarding the “Individual as Object of Love in Plato” (as his essay is entitled). She argues that “what they [the accounts of Aristophanes, Diotima and Socrates] is now movingly displayed to us in the person and the story of Alcibiades. We realize, through him, the deep importance unique passion has for ordinary human beings; we see its irreplaceable contribution to understanding” (1986, 197).

In the *Frogs* (produced in 405), when Dionysus judges between Aeschylus and Euripides partly on the basis of their solution to the problem of Alcibiades, the entire problem is presented by Aristophanes as one between the past—both of the poets are dead and in the underworld—and the future. Dionysus—and by extension Aristophanes—is asking how two of the great poets of the past would deal with the present problems that plague the future of Athens, and of drama. Though Aeschylus is chosen in the end (after another question regarding the salvation of the city), both poets answer the question in a way that indicates Alcibiades’ problematic relation to time. The contrast of the two answers, shows how the city is temporally divided by his figure. Those opposed to Alcibiades recall the past, whereas those who support him, like Aeschylus, also recall the past, regretfully, but like him with an eye to the future. The city is divided on the question of Alcibiades, not only in factions, but within the individual citizens themselves. When Euripides asks Dionysus to clarify his question by explaining the city’s current feelings about Alcibiades, the god answers, “It longs for him on the one hand, but hates him, and wants to have him”(1425). This answer is a highly condensed version of Alcibiades’ encomium to Socrates. And, even though Aeschylus wins the contest for recommending that “the lion have his way” and Alcibiades return, we know that he did not return to the city and that a year after the play was produced he was assassinated in Phrygia. Likewise, Alcibiades rejects “recalling” Socrates into the acropolis of his soul.<sup>200</sup>

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<sup>200</sup> Alcibiades played such a prominent role in the city—and particularly the democracy—because in many ways his own confusion embodied the confusion of the city. In many ways, the forgetful Alcibiades is many. In this way he is the perfect representative of the democracy, torn between the past and the future. Nussbaum points out that when Alcibiades appears it is not only crowned in ivy, but also in violets. She refers us to a poem by Pindar that identifies violets with Athens (1986, 193). Thus, it is possible that Alcibiades intentionally chose to try to identify himself with the city.

## Temporal Frames

In the *Protagoras* and the *Alcibiades I*, we see Alcibiades in the 430s, before the outbreak of the Peloponnesian conflict. In the *Protagoras* we have Socrates urging Alcibiades and the other interlocutors to take their entire lives into account, instead of accepting the systematic temporal illusion of temporal relativism. In the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates encourages Alcibiades to care for himself and shows him that his soul is his non-corporeal and therefore non-temporal soul. These are both set some time shortly before both men end up in Potidaea in 432. The *Symposium* shows vividly and dramatically, on several different levels, that Alcibiades ultimately did not take the advice of Socrates and in fact actively strove to forget.<sup>201</sup>

He strove to forget, however, because of the immense effort of remembering, the effort to which Socrates pushed him. In this *Alcibiades* shows us something important about Socrates. If his life is a “constant game” and irony, it does not come easy to Socrates. He must continuously strive against forgetting. Part of the irony may be to make it look easy to others, but the fact that Socrates has continued to ask the same questions and does so up until his death, shows how difficult the struggle is.

Thus, while Alcibiades’ Socrates is an ugly statue that one opens to find shining figures of gods inside (215b-e), Plato shows Alcibiades as the related toy that one opens to find a smaller egg in which is one that is even smaller.<sup>202</sup> As Stanley Rosen puts it the “Symposium may be tentatively described as a series of recollections within a

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<sup>201</sup> This is perhaps the closest thing to “intentionally erring” shown by Plato. If we know that we err because of ignorance and yet are so ignorant that we willfully choose to be ignorant.

<sup>202</sup> Nussbaum suggests this image, but she is not sensitive to its temporal nature, to the way that the different temporal representations are nested one inside the next (1986, 167-168). She does point out the effect of the extended indirect discourse that is the result of this narrative strategy.

recollection” (1968, 2).<sup>203</sup> The *Symposium* is constructed in this way, so that we see Alcibiades most recently and work our way back to the time just after the *Protagoras* and the *Alcibiades I*. In the *Symposium*, we see Alcibiades first, if Nussbaum is right, after he has died (172b). Then, we see him as Athens saw him, just before the assassination (172b-d), when he was the big question for the city. Then, inside of this, when Apollodorus begins his story, we see Alcibiades in 416 when Agathon won his first tragic victory, some time just before the mutilation of the Hermae, the profanation of the mysteries and the Sicilian Expedition. Inside this, the direction again shifts into a “normal” narrative order, proceeding from some time that falls dramatically between the *Alcibiades I* and the beginning of the campaign in Potidaea during the “seduction” of Socrates (217b-219e) and goes to Potidaea, sometime between 432 and 430 and then to Delium in 424.

Between the two battles, we can infer the changes that have occurred. After Socrates saved Alcibiades and his armor at Potidaea, Alcibiades was decorated by generals who “seemed much more concerned with my social position” (220e). This is the last thing we hear about Potidaea and the first thing we hear about the “horrible retreat from Delium” is that Alcibiades is this time on horseback and we can therefore infer that he has fulfilled the promise of his “social position.” We know that he will plug his ears against the enchantments of Socrates and spend his life trying to escape him and we can imagine that the *Symposium* shows Alcibiades’ final rejection of the advice offered in the *Alcibiades I*. He will now advise the Athenians about who to go to war with and when and how. He declares his will to forget in the speech given that night and Socrates does

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<sup>203</sup> Rosen says further that “the *Symposium* is an evocation of the past, not in a historical but in a mythical sense” (1968, 3).

not pursue him when the second party bursts in. Socrates finishes the night talking to Agathon and Aristophanes. After he puts those two to bed, “Socrates went directly to the Lyceum, washed up, spent the rest of the day just as he always did (ὡσπερ ἄλλοτε τὴν ἄλλην ἡμέραν διατρίβειν)” (223d). We can imagine exactly how he spent the day, because Plato has portrayed it so vividly in so many dialogues. We also know that Alcibiades lives one of the most famously disordered lives in the Western tradition.<sup>204</sup>

### **Cinematic Images: Alcibiades reflected in Socrates**

Alcibiades presents two portraits, but they are inextricably interwoven. His portrait of Socrates is only possible because of his own position, but his position is made clear to him by its contrast with Socrates.<sup>205</sup> Socrates differs from his appearance because he knows the difference between appearance and reality and his irony is the manipulation of that difference. Alcibiades differs from himself because he does not know what is appearance and what is not, which is to say that he, perhaps instinctively, holds the Protagorean claim that “most things are for the individual what they appear to him to be” (*Theaetetus* 171e). It is this same relativistic position that Alcibiades occupies—which is in fact not a position at all but a series of positions that each forget and obliterate the others—that makes Socrates’ irony both possible and necessary. Alcibiades recognizes his own difference and distance from himself only in noticing the difference between Socrates’ appearance and his reality.

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<sup>204</sup> Rosen says that Plato’s turn toward the past is thus “a turning away from history, not a total repudiation of man’s temporal existence but as an effort to recollect the origins of existence” (1968, 4). Though Rosen does not do much to clarify what he means by the “origins of existence,” I agree with him that Plato turns away from history in order to present time as it is experienced and the relation of that experience to history.

<sup>205</sup> Cf. Rosen: “Alcibiades is divided against himself; he lacks the coherence of genius and fanaticism. This uncertainty is crystallized in his relations with Socrates” (1968, 290).

Alcibiades arrives at the party just as Socrates finishes his speech (212d). Socrates has described the ascent of the “ladder of love.” During the ascent of Diotima’s speech she describes a movement from the appearance of beauty, to Beauty itself, or the cause of that appearance. Thus one moves from loving one body to loving what is beautiful in all bodies, then to the beauty of souls and the products of souls. Then this lover will go through the beauty of knowledge to the “great sea of beauty” (210a-d). When Diotima describes the “sea of beauty” she says:

First it always is and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes. Second it is not beautiful in this way and ugly in that way and beautiful at one time and ugly at another, nor beautiful in relation to one thing and ugly in relation to another; nor is it beautiful here and ugly there as it would be if it were beautiful for some people and ugly for others (211a).

In this description, everything physical, temporal and changing is eliminated. Perspective and relativism are progressively stripped away. Diotima continues to say that beauty will not appear to him in the guise of a face or hands or anything else that belongs to the body” (211b). In the last chapter, we saw that time belongs to the body and that Alcibiades is overly subject to its vicissitudes due to forgetfulness. Beauty will not appear as a face or hands, for it will not appear at all, but is non-temporal and non-spatial. Diotima continues to describe “Beauty itself,” as “absolute, unmixed, not polluted by human flesh or colors or any other great nonsense of mortality” (211e-212a). If one contemplates this Beauty itself “only then will it become possible for him to give birth not to images of virtue (because he’s in touch with no images), but to true virtue” (212a). By this account true virtue means not being in touch with images and becoming as much like the unchanging, non-temporal, non-physical form of Beauty itself. Virtue is

recognizing the eternal part of oneself. Diotima says that “mortal nature seeks so far as possible to live forever and be immortal” (207d).

We have seen that in both the *Protagoras* and the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates has given advice remarkably similar to this (as he does often). The uniting element in all three dialogues is the necessity to overcome the effects of the body and time—the two of which together constitute mortality. When Alcibiades enters the house of Agathon, heard shouting first from outside and then “half carried into the house by the flute-girl and by some other companions of his” (212d), he does so amidst the applause for this speech in which Socrates recounted the words Diotima told him. Socrates spoke philosophically about “Beauty itself” but Alcibiades’ account of Socrates shows precisely what a person who contemplates Beauty itself looks like to someone who doesn’t. This is an important point. It is worth remembering that the philosophy can only be a love of wisdom precisely because we live in the world of becoming, a world that comes to be and passes away. Thus, philosophy is a means of combating the effects of time. Contemplating Beauty itself makes a beautiful speech for those present at Agathon’s who offer applause, but, despite the power of Socrates/Diotima’s arguments, it is Alcibiades’ description of Socrates that lends real authority and power to the arguments in the eyes of a changing human being. Long before we ever see Beauty, we must see a lover of Beauty.

It is often remarked that the *Alcibiades I* has no dramatic setting. This remark is generally made in comparison—whether acknowledged or implicit—to the rich description of the drunken entrance of Alcibiades in the *Symposium*. After the philosophical speech, Alcibiades bursts in, as unexpected and as uncontrollable as Aristophanes’ hiccups (185c-e). He brings us back into the time and the place. His

entrance reminds us of the occasion because of the garland he wears (212e). Alcibiades' account of Socrates shows what it looks like when a particular soul does its best to model itself on the unchanging. Socrates has a body that changes in time, just like Alcibiades, but something about his soul is presented as steady. He is a human nevertheless and so it is important to remember that his soul is not Beauty itself, rather it tries to imitate beauty itself, as much as it can, in a changing world.<sup>206</sup>

Alcibiades' drunkenness is the first sign of his inconstancy, or his forgetful relation to the transitory nature of time. He sees things in one way—drunkenly—now and in another way—soberly—in the morning. He wants to get everyone else drunk as well, but presents Socrates, almost immediately, as a contrast. After having the slaves fill the entire cooling jar with wine and draining it, Alcibiades orders the slaves to fill it up again for Socrates. “‘Not that the trick will have any effect on him,’ he told the group. ‘Socrates will drink whatever you put in front of him, but no one yet has seen him drunk’” (214a). Later, he says of Socrates in the army that “no one stood up to hunger as well as he did. And yet he was the one man who could really enjoy a feast and though he didn't much want to drink, when he had to he could drink the rest of us under the table. Still, and most amazingly, no one ever saw him drunk” (220a). Though drinking wine was a large part of Greek culture, we should not assume that Plato is simply interested in alcoholic gossip. Plato is able to use these references to Socrates' drinking ability in two regards. First, it further helps to set the stage and to characterize the drunken Alcibiades.

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<sup>206</sup> Rosen argues that “Socrates takes the place of the divine, of beauty in itself, and not of Eros. Socrates is loved but does not love in return” (1968, 286). Rosen's study is flawed by a desire to treat the characters as big symbols, where every thing must correspond to something else. Here, he misses the point altogether. Socrates is not divine, nor is he virtuous or wise. He loves Beauty itself, but he is not either Beauty itself, or Eros. In Alcibiades eyes, it is true, that he is the object of love—in a certain regard, but surely not as the “divine.”

Second, and more importantly, however, it characterizes Socrates' constancy. The first instance lets us know that in this very dialogue, we should not expect to see Socrates differently from how we do in other dialogues, when he is in the agora, or indeed, meeting his death. Despite the fact that claims that "I took great pains with my appearance" (174a) and that he had "just bathed and put on his fancy sandals," (174a), we should expect to see the same Socrates that we always see, even if he downs a water-cooler of wine. He has just turned his speech into a dialogue and he will not become frivolous with the introduction of wine.

When it is suggested that Alcibiades give an encomium to Socrates (in the midst of much domestic banter), Alcibiades promises that "I will only tell the truth (τᾶλαθῆ ἐρῶ)" (214e).<sup>207</sup> This shows us that Alcibiades thinks that his particular perspective is the truth and yet we have already seen how what he considers to be true, is in fact be the result of a lack of vision. When he first entered the party, he declares Agathon the "cleverest and best looking man in town" (212e-213a), and thinks that it is true, until he sees Socrates. As he points out himself, that "at worst, there'll be mistakes in my speech, not lies (ἐκῶν γὰρ εἶναι οὐδὲν ψεύσομαι)" (215a).<sup>208</sup> These mistakes will come from taking his limited perspective to be true.

Socrates, unlike most of his interlocutors, would "certainly like" to hear the truth about himself (214e) and Alcibiades offers him the opportunity to interrupt the speech if anything is inaccurate. Finally Alcibiades says, "But you can't hold it against me

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<sup>207</sup> As Forde points out of Thucydides' portrayal of Alcibiades, "one of the respects in which Alcibiades is a true Athenian is his unabashed frankness of speech, And Alcibiades always speaks frankly about the comprehensive issues" (1989, 71).

<sup>208</sup> It should be noted that there is no word for mistakes. Rather Alcibiades says, "I will not lie willingly." Cf. *Hippias Minor* 365c, ff. For a discussion of willing error, see chapter 4 above.

(θαυμάσης) if I don't get everything in the right order—I'll say things as they come to my mind (ἀναμιμνησκόμενος ἄλλο ἄλλοθεν λέγω). And even a sober and unclouded mind would find it hard to come to terms with your bizarreness" (215a). Nehemas and Woodruff again cloud the real intention of the sentence by filling out Alcibiades' extremely compact diction, that appears, in that respect, almost Aristotelian. There is nothing to correspond to Nehemas's and Woodruff's sentence: "If I don't get them in the right order." More literally and less floridly, Alcibiades says, "don't marvel if<sup>209</sup> I say one thing from another, as I remember them." It is important to notice the role of memory here. Alcibiades is telling the symposiasts that his speech will be governed by memory, rather than logic. He does not hold the whole in his mind, or consider his life in any holistic way. Rather, he moves from moment to moment. Memory, of the sort Alcibiades relies on, is the correlate of forgetting. He could say, I will say something between the time that it was forgotten and is forgotten again. Alcibiades' story is a narrative that relies on forgetfulness as much as it relies on memory. One event must pass before another can take its place. Alcibiades remembers and forgets, moving in a narrative manner from one thing to another, as the locative, or ablative '-θεν' in 'ἄλλο ἄλλοθεν' shows.<sup>210</sup> The construction 'ἄλλο ἄλλοθεν' is not uncommon, but it shows us something else about the way Alcibiades' mnemonic narrative works. He remembers from another to another. Without the '-θεν' the words are identical, but they each mean "other." Thus, it is a

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<sup>209</sup> For θαυμάζω with ἐάν see Smyth 1920, 2247

<sup>210</sup> Smyth 1920, 342.

sameness in difference. It is the constant difference that is the same in the everyday flow of forgetfulness and remembrance.<sup>211</sup>

Alcibiades' speech highlights both his own shifting perspective and Socrates' steadfastness. Commentators focus most often on the subject of the speech, that is to say Socrates. For instance, Schleiermacher says that the "panegyric of Alcibiades, which is manifestly the crest and crown of the dialogue and exhibits Socrates... in that perfect soundness of body and mind, and consequentially of existence generally" (Schleiermacher 1973, 278). This picture of perfect soundness is from the perspective of an admittedly and necessarily corrupt memory. Alcibiades presents us with an equally compelling picture of himself and he begins with his own perspective, which sees Socrates as a bizarre satyr.

Alcibiades has already demonstrated his inconstancy, not only in his temporarily drunken state, but he has (somewhat playfully) demonstrated it in his behavior towards Socrates.

'I shall never forgive you! (δ οὐκ ἔστιν... ἐμοὶ καὶ σοὶ διαλλαγῇ)' Alcibiades cried. "I promise you, you'll pay for this! But, for the moment (νῦν),' he said turning to Agathon, 'give me some of these ribbons. I'd better make a wreath for him as well" (213d-e).

Liddell and Scott show that the primary sense of διαλλαγῇ is one of change, or interchange, specifically from "enmity to friendship" (1897, *ad loc*). Indeed, saying that one will never forgive someone is saying one's negative feelings towards someone will never change. Literally Alcibiades is saying that "it is not in me to change towards you" and yet Alcibiades' changes almost immediately. His vow to never forgive Socrates does

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<sup>211</sup> It is possible that Alcibiades' is proposing a narrative that is associative and prefiguring works like Lawrence Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*.

not last for any longer than it takes to read the sentence in which it is declared. With Alcibiades' speech, Plato shows that this claim was not just part of the comedic and drunken banter, but that it characterizes Alcibiades' constantly shifting feelings and perspective towards Socrates.

At the beginning of his speech, he compares Socrates to a statue of Silenus (215b). When we examine the speech, we find that Alcibiades is saying as much about himself as he is saying about Socrates. He is contrasting Socrates' appearance—both physical and 'ethical'—with his reality. Alcibiades says: "Nobody, Socrates, not even you can deny that you look like them. But the resemblance goes beyond appearance, as you're about to hear" (215b). In fact, we have just heard it as well. Alcibiades begins his comparison by describing the statues. "It's a Silenus sitting, his flute, or his pipes in his hands, and it's hollow. It's split right down the middle, and inside it's full of tiny statues of the gods" (215b). The point is the difference between the grotesque and vulgar satyr that appears and the beautiful gods inside it. But the appearance is hollow. Underlying the appearance is the true divine reality.

Socrates himself is not only this way, but his speech as well. Socrates' words aren't impressive, like those of Pericles or some other orator, but people "listen to you or even to a poor account of what you say—and we are all transported, completely possessed" (215d). Alcibiades mentions Socrates' speech here, but forgets it until he says, "Come to think of it I should have mentioned this much earlier (τοῦτο ἐν τοῖς πρώτοις παρέλιπον): even his ideas and arguments (οἱ λόγοι) are just like those hollow statues of Silenus" (221d-e). Alcibiades is remarking on his announced technique, saying that this point had not come to him before. Of course, it did at 215d, but in a

different way. His forgetfulness forgets even the forgetting, as all forgetfulness must. This is the principal way that Alcibiades is divided from himself and makes errors and unintentionally speaks falsely.

Alcibiades' speech shows not only that his own life is rent in two, but that Socrates' life is also split. Many lives are split between the appearance and the reality, but in most cases, people appear or want to appear to be better than they actually are. In the case of Alcibiades—and I believe that Plato portrays him as cognizant of this—there is nothing but that appearance, even in his military and athletic success; he is the Heraclitean man who finds no constancy in his soul. He appears (and therefore is) this way now when he is with Socrates, and another way later when he has left his side. Socrates, on the other hand, will always appear in the same way (vulgar like the satyr) while leading those around him towards the divine reality.

Socrates appears singly (as well as singular, cf. 221d) to those who observe him. It appears that “he’s crazy about beautiful boys; he constantly (ἀεί) follows them around in a perpetual daze (ἐκπέπληκται). Also he likes to say he is ignorant and knows nothing...And all of this is just on the surface (περιβέβληται ἔξωθεν), like the outside (γεγλυμμένος) of those statues of Silenus” (216d). Even his appearance is one of constancy, where he “constantly” follows beautiful boys in a “perpetual” daze. In the Greek, there is no word for “perpetual” but Nehemas and Woodruff’s translation highlights the sense of the passage. In fact, ἐκπέπληκται has more of a sense of immediate action along the lines of “he is always following them around getting knocked out [by them].” For, the erotic state Alcibiades is describing is one of constant agitation. But it only appears this way, on the outside. Socrates throws this appearance over the

outside περιβέβληται ἔξωθεν, and it is really, like all appearance, hollow. It is the very hollowness of the appearance that is compelling. The recognition of appearance as a appearance is the first promise of what is “underneath.”

As opposed to most people, who try to appear better than they are. Socrates appears to be vulgar but is truly divine and he recognizes that all appearances “images of virtue” are ugly and inconsequential. Others are vulgar because they are concerned with appearances. As Alcibiades says:

it couldn't matter less to him whether a boy is beautiful. You can't imagine how little cares whether a person is beautiful or rich, or famous or in any other way that most people admire. He considers all of these possessions beneath contempt” (216d-e).<sup>212</sup>

Appearances are worth nothing to Socrates and yet he knows that appearances are what people pay attention to and thus he consciously constructs one. Alcibiades says, “In public, I tell you, his whole life is one big game—a game of irony (εἰρωνευόμενος δὲ καὶ παίζων πάντα τὸν βίον πρὸς τοὺς ἀνθρώπους διατελεῖ)” (216e). It is not that his life is one big game, as Nehemas and Woodruff translate, but rather that he incessantly continues (διατελεῖ)<sup>213</sup> his life (τὸν βίον), in every way playing (παίζων πάντα) for people and being ironic (εἰρωνευόμενος). Thus, we can see that Alcibiades is again stressing the seamless nature of Socrates' appearance. He always lives ironically, or even from some perspectives dishonestly, with a distance between what appears and what is. It should be noted that it is not the irony, but the constancy that should be stressed. Socrates is not occasionally ironic and it is the completeness of his irony that makes him unique. He does not leave his behavior to whim or chance. Recognizing the

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<sup>212</sup> For the body as a possession see *Alcibiades I* 129c-e.

<sup>213</sup> See the previous chapter for a further discussion of this word.

uncertainty of human life, Socrates makes a very orderly and studied game of it. In fact only once Alcibiades claims to have seen Socrates

when he's actually serious. But I once caught him when he was open like Silenus' statues, and I had a glimpse of the figures he keeps hidden within (τὰ ἐντὸς ἀγάλματα): they were so godlike—so bright and beautiful, so utterly amazing—that I just (ἔμβραχυ) had to do (ποιητέον) what he told me” (216e-217a).<sup>214</sup>

The word ἔμβραχυ is important here. It means “shortly,” but it may mean either “shortly, I had to do what he told me” which is the general sense of Nehemas and Woodruff's translation. It may, however, also mean “I had to do what he told me, shortly” or “for a short time.”<sup>215</sup>

Alcibiades is well aware of the short-lived nature of his “obedience” to Socrates. He has just described the devastating effect Socrates has on his life and says “I know very well you could make me feel that way now (ἔτι γὰρ νῦν) if I gave you half a chance” (216a). This shows how Alcibiades is struggling to forget what Socrates has shown him. He opposes the past and the present with ἔτι and the νῦν and he shows that it is the νῦν that is important to him. He says, “I refuse to listen to him; I stop my ears and tear myself away from him” (216a-b). Alcibiades is referring to the *Odyssey*, but the situation is precisely the opposite of that described in the epic. For, there, Odysseus stops up his ears in order to remember the home to which he wants to return (XII. 36-45); Alcibiades stops up his ears in order to keep wandering haphazardly through life.

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<sup>214</sup> It is easy to see here a reference to the last lines of the *Alcibiades I*. Those who see the dialogue as spurious, believe that the *Alcibiades I* was written by an imitator in order to give this impression. For my discussion of this see the previous chapter.

<sup>215</sup> The word also has a sense of “in general” that is more common. But, Cf. *Hippias Minor* 365d, where Hippias, impatient to get on to other topics, asks Socrates to ask him briefly.

Alcibiades offers his description of Socrates' irony in direct contrast to his own split nature. He says that when he hears Socrates he is upset "so deeply that my very own soul started protesting that my life—my life!—was no better than the most miserable slaves" (215e). He goes on to say, "And yet that is exactly how this Marsyas here at my side makes me feel all the time (πολλάκις): he makes it seem that my life (βιωτόν) is not worth living" (215e-216a). Alcibiades focuses on his "soul," and his "life" which are at odds with one another. His comments make it clear that Socrates takes away his forgetfulness. Alcibiades is upset because Socrates makes him feel like his life is not worth living "all the time," or "often" (πολλάκις). Nehemas and Woodruff translate πολλάκις too strongly. The point is that Alcibiades can only see "many" moments, or "often" but not a whole life. He should welcome the feeling that he often sees his life clearly; it should cause him to try to make that "often" into "all the time." That shift from "often" to "always" would be precisely the thing that would change Alcibiades' life and make it seem worth living. It is the inconstancy of the unexamined life that makes it not worth living.

His account makes clear that his misery is a result of his inability to take his life into account. Socrates briefly shows Alcibiades his life, but Alcibiades forgets—or suppresses—it the moment he leaves Socrates. Instead of welcoming the chance to change his life, Alcibiades says he stops up his ears and "the moment (ἐπειδάν) I leave his side, I go back to my old ways" (216b). This shows how short-lived Alcibiades' obedience to Socrates was and it shows that he is not simply forgetful, but that he desires to forget, he is miserable when forced to recall himself and look at the way that his life truly is. This desire to forget, to stop up one's ears against the truth in favor the flattery of

the crowd (216b), defines Alcibiades' fragmented nature. Ironically, perhaps, Alcibiades tries to unify his entire life in the other direction, an effort which fails.

My whole life has become one constant effort to escape from him and keep away, but when I see him, I feel deeply ashamed, because I'm doing nothing about my way of life though I have already agreed with him that I should (δραπατεύω οὖν αὐτὸν καὶ φεύγω, καὶ ὅταν ἴδω, αἰσχύνομαι τὰ ὡμολογημένα)" (216b-c).

Again, the Greek does not have any equivalent of "My entire life has been one constant effort." The phrase is seemingly invented by Nehemas and Woodruff, but it nevertheless brings out the spirit of the text. This effort fails precisely because one cannot turn one's whole life into an effort to escape seeing the truth of one's whole life. Nor is there any Greek equivalent of "because I'm doing nothing about my way of life." Alcibiades' Greek is much more compact. He says, "I flee and escape him, and whenever I see him, I am ashamed about the things having been agreed upon." Though it is difficult to accept our translators' additions as translations, I can unreservedly endorse them as interpretations.

Alcibiades is expressing something about his inability to see his life as a whole and his desire not to see it in such a way. Socrates' life is divided into ironic game that corresponds with the hollow shell of the physical and the true virtue inside. By contrast, Alcibiades' life is temporally divided between the two poles of when he is with Socrates and when he is not with him, that is between now and not-now. Alcibiades finally expresses his divided soul saying "I can't live with him and I can't live without him" (216c).

The solidity of Socrates' life really becomes clear in the description of the battles at Potidaea and Delium. Alcibiades' speech almost makes Socrates seem supernatural.

He doesn't get drunk, can withstand both hunger and cold (219e-221c). The point, however, is not intended to show what a great soldier Socrates was, but rather how little he needed to change his ordinary life in order to be one. Alcibiades describes how cold it was in the winter and says that "Socrates went out in that weather wearing nothing but the same old light cloak, and even in bare feet he made better progress on the ice than the other soldiers did in their boots" (220c). This shows that Socrates is barefoot as he normally goes in the city and wearing the same kind of cloak.<sup>216</sup> It also shows to what an extent his body is truly a shell that is really ruled by his soul.

The extent to which he is ruled by his soul becomes clear in the next passage. One day, at dawn, he started thinking about some problem or other; he just stood outside, trying to figure it out. He couldn't resolve it, but he wouldn't give it up. He simply stood there, glued to the same spot... he stood on the very same spot until dawn. He only left next morning, when the sun came out, and he made his prayers to the new day (220c-d). To know that this is how Socrates behaved on a regular basis we need only to look back towards the beginning of the dialogue, before he and Aristodemus arrived at Agathon's. Apollodorus says that, "as they were walking Socrates began to think about something, lost himself in thought, and kept lagging behind. Whenever Aristodemus stopped to wait for him Socrates urged him to go ahead" (174d-e). When asked about Socrates' absence Aristodemus replies that it's "one of his habits: every now and then he just goes off like that and stands motionless, wherever he happens to be" (175b).<sup>217</sup>

Though he doesn't say so directly, it is seemingly this same quality that allows Socrates to save Alcibiades' life at Potidaea (220d-e). Alcibiades, being wounded and in need of saving, was not in a position to observe Socrates clearly and mainly discusses his

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<sup>216</sup> In addition, we can see how extraordinary this party is, to which Socrates is wearing "fancy sandals" at 174a.

<sup>217</sup> Rosen takes a totally perverse message from this. He thinks the fact that Socrates spends less time entranced means that he finds the dinner party more important than battle (1968, 313).

decoration after the battle. The generals “who seemed more concerned” with Alcibiades’ “social position” (220e) gave the decoration to him. Socrates shows no sign of jealousy, because he was acting as he always would, not abandoning his post (*Apology* 28d-29a).

At Delium, however, Alcibiades says: “That day I had a better chance to observe Socrates than I ever had at Potidaea, for, being on horseback, I wasn’t in very great danger” (221b). Alcibiades describes what he saw saying, “it was easy to see that he was remarkably more collected (ἔμφρων) than Laches” (221b). He continues, introducing a quotation from the *Clouds* and summarizing his entire account of Socrates “in the midst of battle he was making his way (διαπορεύεσθαι) exactly as he does around town (ἐνθάδε)” (221b). If any point summarizes Alcibiades’ encomium of Socrates, it is this. Alcibiades elaborates, enumerating the benefits of such a solid state of soul, of such ἔμφρων. He says: “he was observing (παρασκοπῶν) everything quite calmly (ἡρέμα), looking out for friendly troops and keeping an eye on the enemy” (221b).

As I pointed out above, Alcibiades makes the point that it is not only Socrates, but his words as well are uniformly plain in rhetoric, but god-like in meaning. He says:

If you were to listen to his arguments, at first (τὸ πρῶτον) they’d strike you as totally ridiculous (γελοῖοι); they’re clothed in words as coarse as the hides worn by the most vulgar (ὑβριστοῦ) satyrs. He’s always going on about pack asses, or blacksmiths, or cobblers, or tanners; he’s always making the same tired old points in the same tired old words (καὶ ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτὰ φαίνεται λέγειν)” (221e).

Though Nehemas and Woodruff do not translate the word “φαίνεται,” Alcibiades is pointing out that the appearance of the words is ordinary, “always going on about pack

asses”<sup>218</sup> and the like. But they also appear to always be the same. In this second regard, there is something true of the appearance. Its lack of pretension is designed to show its nature as appearance. Socrates’ discussions are ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτὰ in more ways than one. His discourses are very similar and use very similar words, but they are also, really, about ἀεὶ διὰ τῶν αὐτῶν τὰ αὐτὰ. Alcibiades says that, “if you go behind their surface you’ll realize that no other arguments make any sense. They’re truly worthy of a god (θειοτάτους), bursting with figures (ἀγάλματα) of virtue inside” (222a).

Alcibiades concludes his speech by saying: “He has deceived us all: he presents himself as your lover, and before you know it, you’re in love with him yourself!” (222b). This is the same claim that he has been making throughout. Socrates always presents this picture to the world, but he does so in order to get you to love virtue. Socrates’ life is singular and calculated for its long-term effect.

After this, Socrates gets the upper hand with Agathon and Alcibiades’ last words are “It’s the same old story: when Socrates is around nobody else can get close to a good-looking man (Σωκράτους παρόντας τῶν καλῶν μεταλαβεῖν ἀδύνατον ἄλλῳ). Look how smoothly and plausibly he found a reason for Agathon to lie down next to him” (223a-b). His words once again focus on Socrates’ repetition, but the proceedings are disrupted by a second large drunken group bursting in. Alcibiades is lost in this group, lost to Socrates forever.

In this chapter, I have shown the temporal and historical aspects of the *Symposium*. This analysis enabled me to make a detailed study of the dual portrait

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. Strauss 2001, 280.

presented by Alcibiades' speech. The portraits vividly and dramatically show the effect that Socrates' split life has on a scattered soul. These portraits also show the inconstancy of Alcibiades' soul in the flow of time is the cause of Alcibiades' failure and the failure of Socrates to reach him.

Though, it appears that Plato may have presented Socrates as having achieved a limited success with Alcibiades by dissuading him from giving advice to the city in the years between 432 and 416. Alcibiades' speech in the *Symposium* shows, however, that it is precisely because of time that such a limited success ultimately means very little. Alcibiades' forgetfulness allows him to address the city in 416 with no more success than had he done so in the 430s. Nevertheless, Socrates' attempts to win over Alcibiades show us a great deal about the nature of Socrates and of philosophy itself. The character of Alcibiades shows us to what extent philosophy is the struggle against forgetting and how difficult that struggle is. In the next two chapters, I will follow Plato's portrayal of the relationship between Critias and Socrates.

## Chapter 8

### Amazed by Remembering: *The Timaeus-Critias*

The Prologues of the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* present tales of memory and forgetting and they cast serious doubt on the project of historical investigation. These dialogues show the ways in which Critias fares poorly due to his relation to time and change. The identity of the Critias of the dialogue has been hotly contested within the scholarly commentary. In this chapter, I argue, first, that Plato intended the temporal inconsistencies and resulting confusion about the identity of the character. Then, I show the way that Plato uses this temporal confusion to characterize the soul of Critias and characterize his discourse in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* as an attempted coup of the city described by Socrates on the previous day.

Socrates recalls the assignment that he gave his three interlocutors on the previous day, and he does so in a temporal form (19b-c). He wants to see his city in motion, in time and war. The problem of time unites the cosmological discussions of the *Timaeus* with the political discussions of the prologue of the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. If we assume that Socrates in this dialogue is like the Socrates of the other dialogues (and there is no reason not to) then we can see that he has asked his question in order to assess the interlocutors' souls in terms of its relationship to time and becoming. We see that Critias sees true being as an image of becoming (20e, 25e, 26d),<sup>219</sup> whereas Timaeus famously

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<sup>219</sup> Though it might not be by Critias, the *Sisyphus* fragment often attributed to him since Sextus Empiricus, demonstrates this same idea.

sees time as “a moving image of eternity” (37d). This difference must have a profound effect on the souls of the interlocutors, or else philosophy would not be important.<sup>220</sup>

In this chapter I will take a particularly close look at what the dialogue says about the soul of Critias.

### **Ambiguous Generations: the Identity of Critias**

There has been a great deal of scholarly confusion surrounding the identity of the Critias in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. The difficulty arises as an issue of chronology and ultimately of generations. Ausland notices that “Critias is a recognizable Athenian (if of ambiguous generation” (2000, 189). The problem of generations is one of the problems presented in the text and it will resurface again and again.<sup>221</sup> Debra Nails notes:

Until 1949, it was difficult to take seriously Plato’s representation of historical persons in the dialogues when it could be pointed out that he did not, or could not, present his own ancestors accurately: there were too few known individuals to cover the amount of time Plato described between the days of Solon...and the days of Critias IV, who was at the time assumed to be the speaker in the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* (Nails 2002, 106).

The assumption in the passage above is that Plato wanted to portray his ancestors in an historically “accurate” manner and every major interpretation of the character of Critias or the date of the dialogue rests upon this assumption. Burnet, first argued, in 1914, that the speaker of the dialogue was Critias’ grandfather (338 and appendix).<sup>222</sup> The discovery of an ostrakon saying, “Critias, son of Leaidēs, was a candidate for ostracism

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<sup>220</sup> Welliver rightly remarks that a “remarkable aspect of the beginning of the work is the repeated and growing emphasis on Socrates’ high regard for Timaeus in contrast to his other two hosts” (1977, 8).

<sup>221</sup> Ausland is most interested in the question of why Diogenes “for some reason does not seem to think that Plato ‘dogmatizes through Critias’” (2000, 189). I will argue that Plato does in a sense “dogmatize” through Critias, but as a paradigm of negative manners of thinking and relating to the soul and the world.

<sup>222</sup> Taylor agreed in 1927 and Cornford in 1935 and most contemporary scholars have followed suite.

in the 480's" (Nails 2002, 107), bolstered his claim. Thus, many scholars conclude, that the speaker must be Critias III, the grandfather of the leader of the Thirty.<sup>223</sup>

While ultimately endorsing the identity of Critias III, Nails points out some of the difficulties with this interpretation. She remarks that Critias the grandfather would "be nearly ninety in 432, when the Peloponnesian war broke out. To make matters worse, Socrates was probably out of the city in August of 432 and certainly in August of 431 and 430, so the earliest possible dramatic date of the dialogue would be 429, when Critias III was ninety-one" (2002, 107).<sup>224</sup>

Lampert and Planeux follow Taylor in making the dialogue far later. These scholars set the dialogue in 421 (Taylor 1928, 16-17; Lampert and Planeux, 1998, 94). A.E. Taylor's argument is seriously flawed due to his attempt to place the *Timaeus* two days after the events described in the *Republic* (and one day after its narration).<sup>225</sup> Taylor also follows Burnet in dating the dialogue based on the fact that "both dialogues presuppose a state of peace" (1928, 160). Lampert and Planeux offer the most convincing account of that peace based on the history of Atheno-Locrian hostilities

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<sup>223</sup> Burnet also makes an argument based on a passage in the *Laws* about giving "due worship to the ancestors" (740b). He thus concludes that Plato would know the chronology of his own family (1914, 388). Assuming Plato knows the chronology of his family, does not mean that we can assume that he would not create a deliberate puzzle with it, in order to make a philosophical point. Voegelin claims on the one hand that "Critias is barely a name" (2000, 177) and on the other that we "meet again Plato in the person of Critias" (2000, 178). Both of these responses are absurd.

<sup>224</sup> Kalkavage agrees with Lampert and Planeux but acknowledges that "it is impossible to see so notorious a name and not think of the grandson who helped overthrow the democracy. The name suggests that behind the civil and ceremonious drama of the *Timaeus-Critias* there lurks the civil war and tyrant that that infected Athens when ambitious aristocrats tried to impose the rule of the best, when a presumed ideal was forced upon the humanly real. Perhaps the seeds of that future tyranny were somehow sown with the Critias we have here in the dialogue, with his political idealism and nostalgia for the 'good old days'" (2001, 6). Cf. chapter 11 below for an account of such generational decline.

<sup>225</sup> While there is a nice economy to this scheme, see Cornford 1935, 4-5 for numerous the numerous ways in which this is impossible. Cf. Ausland 2000, 197.

(1998, 94).<sup>226</sup> Their argument for the date is convincing, but they also want to argue that the speaker is the grandfather of Critias IV, who would be over one hundred years old at that date (1998). Much of their account of the identity of Critias is based on the fact that there were “too many years between Solon and Kritias the tyrant to be covered in four generations...however no chronological problems occur if we suppose that the Kritias of the *Timaeus-Critias* is the grandfather of Critias the tyrant” (1998, 96). None that is except for this extreme age at the time of the discussion. The age of one hundred calls for being remarked upon and that it is not does serious damage to this interpretation. As A.E. Taylor contends that “we have to suppose that this Critias is a remarkably old man” (127, 23). Since no interlocutor remarks upon it, this claim seems to ruin the identity of Critias.

Most scholars who hold that the Critias of our dialogues is Critias III, the grandfather of the tyrant, follow Taylor and back up their by claiming that “it is implied that he is extremely old when he says (*Tim.* 26b) that, though he recollects his childhood so vividly, he can hardly remember what he was told yesterday, and moralizes on the durability of ‘early impressions’” (1927, 23).<sup>227</sup> In fact, however, if we recall that Socrates gave some version of the *Republic* the day before, it is easy to see how someone of any age could find it difficult to remember “everything that was said yesterday,” especially when trying to remember another story while listening.

There are several other problems with this interpretation. Socrates makes no concession or mention of the age of this Critias— who shows a great deal of deference to Socrates in fact, who had given an “assignment” (ἐπίταξις) to the interlocutors the

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<sup>226</sup> Again, they follow Taylor (1927, 26) but offer more detail.

<sup>227</sup> Cf. Cornford 1935, 1; Nails 2002, 107;

previous day. Socrates mentions Cephalus' advanced age repeatedly in the *Republic* and it is strange that he should make no distinction in age between the ninety-one year old<sup>228</sup> Critias and the twenty-six or twenty-eight year old Hermocrates.<sup>229</sup> In the *Charmides* (which is set either in the same year as this dialogue, or a few years earlier, depending on one's chronology), Socrates remarks on the far lesser difference in age between Critias and Charmides (162e) and in the *Protagoras*, Plato has the great sophist remark upon his age (318c). But, in the *Timaeus*, Socrates describes all three interlocutors as people of the same sort, people who "take part in both philosophy and politics at once" (19e).

Timaeus gets the most detailed praise. He has "mastered the entire field of philosophy" (20a). Plato makes Socrates vague when giving the credentials of Critias, simply saying that "I'm sure all of us here in Athens know he's no mere layman (ἰδιώτην) in any of the areas we are talking about (ὅντα ᾧ λέγομεν)" (20a). At this point, the reader has no reason to think that the interlocutor would be any other than the tyrant Critias. It is not until 20e that the reader gets any of the evidence that scholars use to identify the speaker as Critias III. The knowledge that Critias is no private person, might have a wide range of signification to the "first reader" at this point. Since the dialogue was written many years after its dramatic date, a reader will immediately think of Critias' "experience" in politics. But, if we start to consider the statement

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<sup>228</sup> They would be one hundred and one and thirty-six respectively according to Lampert and Planeux's dating of 421. I generally follow Nails dating of 429, but there are advantages to Lampert and Planeux's dating. Since I argue that Plato is intentionally creating a temporal and generational ambiguity, I do not hold either year firmly.

<sup>229</sup> A.E. Taylor is one of the few commentators to offer an account of the age discrepancy. He says that "the youth of Hermocrates explains why he remains silent through the dialogue" (1928, 49). Cornford thought that Plato truly planned a dialogue with Hermocrates' name, but was for some reason unable to complete it (1935, 1-3). He presents a convincing parallel between the Atlantic invasion and Athens' own invasion of Syracuse (1935, 2). Voegelin argues that Hermocrates represents a threat to Athens (2000, 182). While, it was really Athens that was a threat to Athens, Critias' obsession with the past shows a lack of vision regarding the slow decline of the present. See also Lampert and Planeux 1998, 100-107).

dramatically, as Socrates (not Plato) must have meant it, we see another level of irony. Critias did remain virtually private (ιδιώτην) until after the war. Nails says that until “410 or later, i.e. until after he was about fifty, Critias IV did nothing that was known, unless he was at that time producing his literary works” (2002, 108). She continues, saying that since he was in his late twenties in the *Protagoras* and his early thirties in the *Charmides*, “[t]wenty years of obscurity thus need to be accounted for before his notoriety began” (2002, 109).<sup>230</sup> The double irony of the discussion of Critias’ experience in politics, further reinforces the sense that this is Critias the tyrant.

It is also unclear what Socrates means by “any of the areas we are talking about (ὄντα ὃ λέγομεν)” (20a). He has mentioned politics and philosophy, but he was also just talking about poets and sophists (19d-e).<sup>231</sup> Thus, whereas Socrates was clear that Timaeus was a statesman and a philosopher, he may be implying that Critias is experienced in poetry and sophistry, a trait shared by Critias of the Thirty and the “Critias” of the dialogue (21c, 26d).

Socrates is even more vague, perhaps because less familiar with Hermocrates. It is strange that Hermocrates (if he is the Hermocrates of Thucydides) should be staying either with the extremely elderly Critias III or Critias IV who was much closer to his age, though for different reasons.<sup>232</sup> Hermocrates commands Critias to tell his story, using the imperative λέγε (20d). It is unlikely that the twenty-six (or thirty six) year old guest of a ninety-one (or one hundred) year old man would presume to use the imperative to

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<sup>230</sup> For a man of Critias’ station to refrain from politics until he was fifty would have been remarked upon. Compare Plato’s statement in *Letter VII* that when “I was a young man I had the same ambition as many others: I thought of entering public life as soon as I came of age” (324b).

<sup>231</sup> Cf. Welliver 1977, 11, n. 7.

<sup>232</sup> Welliver argues that the two are “chummy” (1977, 10).

command the old man to speak. Whichever the Critias, we must wonder why these two Italians would be staying with him. Welliver remarks that “the strangest of all...is the dialogue’s cast of characters” (1977, 19). Whatever the (remotely plausible) dramatic date, there would be tension between the cities. Taylor’s date of 421 (followed by Lampert and Planeux) offers the most plausible explanation of the presence of Timaeus and Hermocrates in the city, a year after a treaty was signed between Athens and Locri (1998, 95). If this were the case, it is possible, but unlikely that the rather young foreign delegation would be staying with a hundred year old man, even if he were alive.<sup>233</sup> If it is Critias IV, we see an interesting tableau in the middle of temporarily submerged hostilities. When Socrates says he wants to see his city in motion, he is necessarily saying that he wants to see it in decline. Hermocrates represents the first great defeat of the democracy, while Critias IV represents its destruction.<sup>234</sup> The city ruled by Critias and the Thirty “showed in a short time that the previous constitution had been a precious thing” (*Letter VII*).

Whichever Critias we choose will create temporal problems that the other interpretation solves, bringing with it a whole new set of problems.<sup>235</sup> Thus, Plato may have intentionally created a temporal ambiguity. His Saitic priests, after all, are amused at

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<sup>233</sup> The older Protagoras stays with Callias, a man who could be his son. The *Republic* takes place at Polemarchus’, not Cephalus’.

<sup>234</sup> If we take the *Timaeus* not as an account of creation, but instead a description of the “continual” creation, or structure of the cosmos, then we could see each of the non-Socratic interlocutors, representing a temporal mode. Timaeus would be the present, Critias with his speech of ancient ages (and either a very old man or a conservative) representing the past and Hermocrates, who is to give his speeches in Thucydides, the future.

<sup>235</sup> Cf. Nails 2002, 107.

Solon's attempt "to compute their dates by calculating the number of years which had elapsed since the events of which he spoke" (22b).<sup>236</sup>

John Davies, who identifies the speaker as Critias IV considers "Plato's literary motivation for telescoping of two generations of his ancestors" (1972, 325). Davies argues that Plato intends the interlocutor to be Critias the tyrant, but that he condenses the number of generations so that Critias seems closer to Solon. Welliver is rightly dissatisfied with Davies' speculation about the motive of the "telescoping" or anachronism. Welliver, while he accepts Burnet's identification of Critias, shows how Plato has Critias misrepresent the chronology in order to show something about Critias' soul. Welliver claims that "Plato had him lie because he is a liar---that this anachronism stamps him as a liar from the beginning" (1977, 57). Welliver concludes saying: "The anachronism is his [Critias'], not Plato's" (1977, 57).

I follow both Davies and Welliver insofar as I believe that Plato is using anachronisms in order to make a philosophical point about anachronism and the use of the past.<sup>237</sup> Critias may be a liar, but Plato is up to something far more profound. Plato may have had Critias make an anachronistic lie in order to tell us something about his character, but Plato also uses the character precisely in order to observe the "telescoping" of time. My interpretation solves the problems of both Davies on the one hand, and Burnet, Taylor, et al on the other. In this chapter, I argue that the prologues of both the *Timaeus* and the *Critias* are intended to cast doubt upon the stories we tell about the past, while highlighting the character of Critias as an opportunistic conservative in thrall to it.

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<sup>236</sup> Welliver uses this same passage to argue that Plato "the man whose powers of inquiry have been the admiration of all posterity... did not accurately count the generations back to Solon" (1977, 55).

<sup>237</sup> Cf. Pownall 2004 for a discussion of the "use" of the past, especially among aristocrats, in the fourth century.

The speeches of Critias in both dialogues are about temporal uncertainty and forgetfulness and Plato created the dramatic frame of the dialogue so that we are uncertain of the speaker's identity or the date of the dialogue,<sup>238</sup> Our very desire to pin these down—to retrieve the past and date the dialogue—add a layer of meaning to the dialogue, as we grapple with our necessary and fundamental ignorance of the past in the same way that Solon and Critias both do in the course of the prologue, and like them, we often become so absorbed in our fantasies of the past that we miss much of the point along the way.

I suggest that Plato deliberately created a hermeneutic box that uses a principle of temporal uncertainty. The assumptions that it is necessary to make in order to pin down the identity of Critias change that identity's function in the dialogue and thus change the meaning of the dialogue and say something about our own interpretation of the past. In his influential study of the *Golden Ass*, John Winkler suggests that Apuleius' novel is a "hermeneutic entertainment" that is "about the process of interpretation" (1985, 11). I suggest that Plato uses a similar strategy in the prologues to the *Timaeus* and the *Critias*. The relevant sections are about the interpretation and use of the past, and Plato deliberately creates confusion about the time of the dialogue.

### **Memory and Forgetting in the Prologue of the *Timaeus***

One of the important points made by the prologue to the *Timaeus* is that, while Critias thinks he is telling a story of the past greatness of Athens, he is, in fact, saying more about its continual loss of knowledge. The prologue of the *Timaeus* is a story of

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<sup>238</sup> Plato, I suggest, is intentionally creating the kind of confusion created by William Faulkner in the *Sound and the Fury*, when two characters of different generations have the same name.

forgetting and remembering. The Athenians had forgotten their past due to disaster, but when it is recovered by Solon, it is again forgotten. It wasn't written as an epic by Solon because of political matters and, though it is told, it is forgotten for many years by Critias, who remembers it in pieces as a result of "yesterday's" discussion with Socrates. Critias has Solon speak on the level of cities and populations, but, if we are to pursue even the lowest level of analogy between the city and the soul, we can see how it mirrors precisely what I've been talking about. The population loses its knowledge and has to struggle in order to reclaim it. People do that precisely when they are able to recognize that they do not know and then they recollect the scattered knowledge of the past. The process shows how most learning is a product of the complex interplay of past, present and future. But we can also see how difficult memory is. If I am correct, our forgetfulness occurs like a disaster. It is a plague of water and fire leaving devastation. Or rather, in the myth disaster precedes forgetfulness, but in our individual lives forgetfulness also precedes disaster. We have seen, we most often think that we are pleasantly deluded, and will fight for our delusion, because we think that it is knowledge, and think that there is nothing to remember, nothing to look for. Again forgetfulness is most forgetful of itself. This forgetfulness uses memory itself to forget. Critias is full of memory, but these memories cause him to forget himself.

The *Timaeus* opens with counting,<sup>239</sup> but moves very quickly to memory. Ten lines into the dialogue, Socrates says "Do you remember (μέμνησθε) the subjects I assigned you to speak on?" (17b). Timaeus responds, saying "Some we do (τὰ μὲν μεμνήμεθα). And if there are any we don't—well you're here to remind us (σὺ παρῶν

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<sup>239</sup> Lampert and Planeux argue that the missing fourth person is Alcibiades (1998, 107-119). While such an interpretation would serve my purposes, the argument is, unfortunately, weak and overly speculative.

ὑπομνήσις)” (117b). Then he asks Socrates to refresh them and Socrates recounts a discussion very similar to parts of the *Republic*.<sup>240</sup> He is reminding them of what he said the previous day, but not of any historical fact (in the way that a historian or archivist reminds us).<sup>241</sup> He is reminding them of an ideal and is showing us something about the way that recollection should work. Recollection is not remembering events, but the whole.<sup>242</sup>

When Critias introduces his story, he says that Solon told it to his grandfather Critias “and the old man in his turn would tell it to us from memory” (20e). Critias is notably proud of his connection to Solon and his family history. Socrates mentions the connection twice in the *Charmides* (154d, 155a). This indicates a certain relation to the past that will continue to inform the character of Critias. Peter Kalkavage notices the importance of genealogy to Critias and Solon in the dialogue. He says that “Critias also displays the vanity that attends our interest in our own families and genealogies” (2001, 11). Critias has something to gain through his identification with Solon.<sup>243</sup> Kalkavage continues, saying “He is clearly proud of the fact that the story he has for Socrates is a family heirloom passed down from generation to generation and that the great Solon is a distant relative” (2001, 11).<sup>244</sup>

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<sup>240</sup> As the next chapters show, there is something sinister in this. Socrates is recounting to someone named Critias (the reader has not yet been given enough information to assume that it is anyone but the tyrant at this point) a discussion very similar to that he had with Polemarchus, one of the victims of the tyrant. That Socrates uses the term κεφάλαιον to begin his account is no accident.

<sup>241</sup> Socrates continues to use memory words to frame his brief speech. See εὐμνημόνευτον (18c) and μεμνήμεθα (18d).

<sup>242</sup> Cf. Harte 2002 for an excellent discussion on the relationship between parts and wholes.

<sup>243</sup> Cf. Welliver 1977, 57.

<sup>244</sup> Kalkavage is sensitive to the importance of this, especially in the present dialogue’s relation to the *Republic*. He says: “The rootedness in the love of our own—in our own families and family histories—is one of the reasons why it would be so difficult to actualize the city” (2001, 12). He goes on to point out that

Neither Critias nor Solon, however, gives an accurate account of the past,<sup>245</sup> but the politically expedient one.<sup>246</sup> Socrates has asked us to remember a discussion of the ideal city, and in response a Critias of whose identity we are suddenly no longer certain (wasn't there longer between Solon and Critias than that?) remembers his grandfather remembering the story of which the Egyptian priest reminded Solon.

Critias says that the “story is that our city had performed many great and marvelous deeds in ancient times, which, owing to the passage of time (ὕπὸ χρόνου) and to the destruction (φθορᾶς) of human life, have vanished” (20e). Critias is telling two means of forgetting, the passage of time and the destruction of people. The two are, ultimately, co-implicatory. Only so much time can pass before the destruction of people and people always die as a result of time (Cf. *Republic* 546a-c).

When Socrates asks about the story, Critias says: “It’s an ancient story I heard from a man who was no youngster himself (παλαιὸν ἀκοῶς λογον οὐ νέου ἀνδρός)” (21a).<sup>247</sup> In fact, at the time Critias was “pretty close to ninety years old already— so he

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“Critias is the very paradigm of this all-too-human rootedness in time, Becoming, and self-love” (2002, 12).

<sup>245</sup> Welliver mistakenly sees Critias’ claims of the story’s veracity as Plato’s. He says that “the authority of Egypt and Solon is a stern warning against assuming the story to be entirely false. In some sense it must be true; in some way it must fit history” (1977, 39). The story tells us a great deal about history, but Welliver is entirely wrong when he argues that Plato would use the authority of “Egypt and Solon” to warn us that this is in some ways a true historical account. To his credit, however, Welliver is careful to guard against over particularizing this history and rejecting claims as to the identity of Atlantis. Like others, he looks towards the Persian and Peloponnesian wars for the “truth” of the account. He is correct to say that “this one story accurately describes the moral and theological aspects of both great wars in Greek history, we can suppose it explains many others as well” (1977, 43).

<sup>246</sup> “Solon was appointed Chief Archon at Athens for the year 594/ 593 B.C. during a period of acute conflict between the noble ruling families and the impoverished peasants, many of whom had already been reduced to slavery. Fearing the possibility of a general uprising and the installation of a popular tyrant, the nobles appear to have been willing to make certain concessions. Although Solon was born into a noble family, he was not himself wealthy. He was perceived as a moderate, and yet, remarkably, each faction apparently expected him to protect its interest” (Anhalt 1993, 1).

<sup>247</sup> The Greek is much more elegant than Zeyl’s translation allows. More literally it says, “an old story heard from a not young man.”

said—and I was around ten” (21a-b). The theme of youth and age is everywhere present, and it is in this way that the dramatic frame of the dialogue continues with the concerns of the *Republic*.<sup>248</sup> Critias says that it was the time of the Apaturia. The Apaturia occurred in October-November and during three days the young men were presented to their phratres. This locates the story between temporal frames. The Apaturia was one of those occasions—like marriage—that marks the passage of one’s life, which is set to occur at a particular time of the year and marks that part of the year. This occurs, of course, within the context of some festival honoring Athena, perhaps the Panathenaic festival in July/August.<sup>249</sup> As was customary, Critias says, “our father’s started a recitation contest” (21b). This means that it is a specifically educational event whereby the children are initiated into the life of their phratres by means of sacrifices and stories.<sup>250</sup>

Critias says that “many of us children (παίδων) got to sing the songs of Solon, because they were new at the time (ἄτε δὲ νέα κατ’ ἐκεῖνον τὸν χρόνον)” (21b). The formulation here is a parallel of 21a above. There it was the old story of the not young man and here it is the new songs sung by the not old boys. This creates another temporal problem. As Nails bluntly puts it, “Solon’s verses were not ‘new at the time’ (*Ti*. 21b) in +510 although they may have seemed so to ten year olds singing them for the first time” (2002, 107). Nails correctly points out that the anachronism is greatly aggravated if

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<sup>248</sup> Again this seems designed to produce an ambiguous identity for Critias. For on the one hand, maybe they talk about youth and age so much because Critias is old and Hermocrates is young. On the other hand, one assumes that if Critias were older than his grandfather himself, he would mention it.

<sup>249</sup> Cornford says that the “Panathenaic festival would provide an obvious occasion for the strangers’ presence in Athens, as it does for Parmenides and Zeno in another of the late dialogues” (1935, 1). It does not explain why these particular strangers would be staying with Critias and conversing about politics with Socrates.

<sup>250</sup> For an excellent discussion of the cultural role of story-telling see Burnyeat 1997.

Critias IV is the interlocutor of the dialogue.<sup>251</sup> Arynander, a member of their phratres “said that he thought that Solon was not only the wisest of men in general but that his poetry in particular showed him to be the most civilized of the poets” (21b-c). Critias does not know whether the remark is made to flatter his grandfather, or not. Nevertheless, “the old man (γέρων)—how well I remember it (μύμνημαι)—was tickled” (21c).

The elder Critias (either Critias II or Critias III) says that “it’s too bad that Solon wrote poetry only as a diversion and didn’t seriously work at it like the other poets” (21c). Of course, Plato, also a descendent of Solon,<sup>252</sup> may think otherwise, as he has Socrates say in the *Phaedrus* (276c-d) and Plato himself expresses in *Letter VII* (344c).<sup>253</sup> In both of these cases, seriousness in writing was spurned. Critias thinks that it is “too bad that he never finished the story he brought back from Egypt. He was forced to abandon that story on account of the civil conflicts and all the other troubles he found there when he returned” (21c).<sup>254</sup> Welliver remarks that “the grandfather’s view is almost precisely the opposite of Socrates” (1977, 13) who would have wished that Solon had spent no time on poetry at all, but had rather attempted wholeheartedly to improve the city.

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<sup>251</sup> Nails’ solution does not seem plausible. If, as she argues, Critias III is ninety-one, would he still speak in the voice of his ten year old self? I think not. For instance, a ten year old of today, may hear the Beatles and think that they are new, but when that person is old, he or she is far more likely to say, “We sang the Beatles that November, because we thought they were new.”

<sup>252</sup> For an excellent discussion of the relation between Solon’s poetry, thought and politics, see Anhalt’s excellent study (1993).

<sup>253</sup> I do not, however, wish to go as far as Voegelin, who claims that Solon (and Critias!) are Plato (2000, 179).

<sup>254</sup> If our interlocutor is Critias III, these comments make more sense. At the time of the dialogue, he would not yet have conceived of his ambition (or if he had, there would be a great many years before he was able to fulfill it at all). Nails’ suggestion that this was the period in which Critias practiced his literary works makes sense.

The elder Critias believes that had he not abandoned the story “not even Hesiod or Homer, or any other poet at all, would ever have become more famous than he” (21d).<sup>255</sup> The elder Critias’ pride in his association with the great man is evident and he is in fact increasing his own and his city’s stature by repeating such a story. Critias says that this is the greatest deed the city had ever accomplished but “owing to the march of time (διὰ δὲ χρόνον) and the fact that the men who accomplished it have perished (φθορὰν τῶν ἐργασαμένων), the story has not survived (οὐ διήρκεσε) to the present” (21d). This seems an odd thing for him to say of a story that he is about to tell. In reality, however, it establishes Critias’ position as the next best thing to Solon who after all didn’t make up the story.<sup>256</sup> Solon is claiming the nine thousand year old authority of the priest, just as the younger Critias who is telling it to Socrates, Timaeus and Hermocrates is gaining the authority of his grandfather and ultimately of Solon and the priests all the way back to the Ancient Athenians. By means of this story, he increases his own authority and attempts to “take over” Socrates’ kallipolis<sup>257</sup> In doing so, Critias remembers the past and forgets himself.

At this point, the elder Critias merges with the younger Critias, as they tell the story with narrative simultaneity. That is to say, the younger Critias tells Socrates and his

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<sup>255</sup> This Panathenaic festival is one of the prime occasions for the recitation of poetry. Cf. Nagy 2003. Arieti points out that the Apaturia is a festival of Dionysus and that we are to take the entire story as “poetic invention” (1991, 20). Arieti differs from most commentators in seeing Timaeus as the parodic figure in the dialogue. Taylor made a similar suggestion when he said that: “No one, so far as I know, has yet seen that the *Timaeus* and the *Clouds* deal with the same period of Socrates’ life, but that fact is really undeniable. When we recognize it we are beginning to be in a position to appreciate the consummate art which Aristophanes himself expressly attributes to this particular comedy” (1927, 22).

<sup>256</sup> It also casts doubt on Thucydides’ claim that “though the events of remote antiquity, and even those that more immediately precede the war, could not from a lapse of time be clearly ascertained, yet the evidences which an inquiry carried back as far as was practicable lead me to trust, all point to the conclusion that there was nothing on a greater scale, either in war or other matters” (I.1)

<sup>257</sup> Cf. Welliver. “Obviously the city which Socrates describes could hardly be a historical city, but Critias, good Athenian that he is, takes possession of it by dubious means for his own purposes” (1977, 18).

friends the story in the form of his own hearing of it from his grandfather, the elder Critias. We have a situation where the younger Critias is quoting his grandfather, who is quoting Solon, who quotes the Saitic priest. Luc Brisson claims that Plato is commenting on the very structure of myth, whereby at religious festivals, the important stories of a culture are passed down by generation. For Brisson, it is a case where “genealogies constitute the framework of the story” (1998, 136). Brisson defines myth as a “discourse through which is communicated everything that a given community conserves in memory and transmits from generation to generation” (1998, 137). This is precisely what we see in the prologue of the *Timaeus* and *Critias*.

Marcel Detienne is suspicious of Brisson’s reading and remarks, more ominously that the “prologue of the *Timaeus* does not conceal the extent to which conjuring up memories of the origins of Athens is risky, perilous, in short, unreliable” (1989, 145).<sup>258</sup> Detienne offers as his first bit of evidence the fact that “the Egyptian story is now generally forgotten” (1987, 145) and even Critias had forgotten it. Brisson is correct, in so far as, I think, Plato is remarking on the way that such stories function socially and describing their layered—and thus unverifiable, unrepeatable<sup>259</sup> structure. I claim, however, that he is doing so in the form of critique. Such stories are a way to preserve cultural memory and yet they often encourage and manipulate forgetfulness, of which they are also a product. We are amiss if we look at the story of Critias as one of remembering and forget the forgetfulness that allows for it.

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<sup>258</sup> For Brisson’s response see the “Conclusion” to the second edition (1998, 136-139).

<sup>259</sup> A truly logical argument should be identical, no matter who is involved in the discussion. A story such as that presented here is much different if I hear it from Solon than if I hear it from Critias some generations later. Cf. Brisson for a distinction between myth and “falsifiable discourse” and argument (1998, 91-121).

## Solon in Egypt

Solon traveled to Egypt and went to the city of Sais where they “are very friendly to Athens and claim to be related to our people somehow or another” (21e). When Solon asked “those priests of theirs who were scholars of antiquity about ancient times, he discovered that just about every Greek, including himself, was all but completely ignorant of such matters” (22a). Here, again ignorance will be described in terms of forgetfulness, destruction and time. Solon was completely ignorant of his own city, without being aware of it. After Solon “tried to compute their [the ancient myths of Phoroneus and Niobe and Duecalion] dates by calculating the number of years (χρόνους ἀριθμεῖν) which had elapsed since the events of which he spoke” (22b), one of the priests, “a very old man, said ‘Ah, Solon, Solon, you Greeks are ever children (‘Ελληνες ἀεὶ παῖδες ἐστε)’” (22b). This is an interesting formulation, because the Athenians are always children precisely because they are not *always* anything. When Solon asks the priest what he means, the answer is a litany of temporal terms.

‘You are young,’ the old priest replied. ‘Young in soul (Νέοι ἐστέ), every one of you. Your souls are devoid of beliefs about antiquity handed down by ancient tradition (οὐδεμίαν γὰρ ἐν αὐταῖς ἔχετε δι’ ἀρχαίαν ἀκοὴν παλαιὰν δόξαν). Your souls lack any learning made hoary by time (οὐδε μάθημα χρόνῳ πολίον οὐδέν ). (22b-c).

There are several interesting points in the priest’s claim. We see that an individual soul, in this account, gains age by means of collective, traditional, knowledge. Not only the individual soul, but “learning” (μάθημα) is made venerable (πολίον) by time (χρόνῳ). It should be “truth” that makes learning “venerable,” not time. Time may, however, allow theories to have been extensively tested. The result is more often the opposite of this and

we see in this case that Solon does not test the priest's claims any more than Critias tests those of Timaeus.

The priest then tells Solon the reason for the youth of the Athenians: disaster. The disaster is a result of both the heavens and the earth. "There have been, and there will continue to be, numerous disasters that have destroyed human life in many kinds of ways" (22c). There are two major causes of disaster—fire and water—but "lesser ones have numerous other causes" (22c). When the world is destroyed by fire it is due to a "deviation in the heavenly bodies that travels around the earth, which causes huge fires that destroy what is on the earth across vast stretches of time" (22d). People on hills burn up more quickly and only those near water survive. To the contrary, when floods occur, "the herdsmen and the shepherds preserve their lives, while those who live in cities, in your region, are swept by the river into the sea" (22e). Because of the Nile, Egypt is subject to neither of these disasters. Thus the "antiquities preserved here are said to be the most ancient" (22e). Athens, to the contrary, is often destroyed.

The priest says that "the truth is that in all places where neither inordinate cold nor heat prevent it, the human race will continue to exist, sometimes in greater, sometimes in lesser numbers" (23a). The existence of the species is not in danger from these disasters, but, except for Egypt, the cultural memory of the species is at stake with each of these common disasters. The Egyptians keep scrupulous records in their temples, whereas "in your case, on the other hand...no sooner have you achieved literacy and all the other resources that city's require, than there, again, after the usual number of years, comes the heavenly flood" (23a). When the floods come they take the cultural knowledge

that allows cities to be (by preserving only those who live isolated in the hills).<sup>260</sup> When the flood comes “it sweeps upon you like a plague, and leaves only your illiterate and uncultured people behind. You become infants all over again, as it were, completely unfamiliar with anything there was in ancient times” (23a-b). This explains how collective wisdom adds “age” to the particular soul: the possibility of better education. When only the illiterate and “uncivilized” survive, humanity (or that region of humanity, who, to themselves, must seem like the totality of humanity that remains) finds itself in a state of ignorance that is not aware that it is ignorant.<sup>261</sup> A child of the scattered shepherds who survived a flood would have no experience of cities at all, but would know them, if at all, only as strange and incomprehensible stories.

This story of cultural forgetfulness also allows for progress, and constancy. It explains the development of society, without supposing shameful beginnings. The whole point of the priest’s story is that both Sais and Athens were “founded, nurtured and educated” by Athena (23d). The seed came from Earth and Hephaestus. They were created with divine laws in a suitable location to war and wisdom. And yet the Athenians were still able to improve their laws (24d). The Priest tells Solon that “the race from whom you yourself, your whole city, all that you and your countrymen have today, are sprung, thanks to the survival of a small portion of their [the ancient Athenians] stock” (23b-c). The priest is teaching Solon what he claims is part of his own being, his true

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<sup>260</sup> Cf. Gallant 1991 on the life of rural Greeks.

<sup>261</sup> “The rest of the tradition has been added later as a means of persuading the masses and as something useful for the laws and for matters of expediency; for they say that these gods are like men in form and like some of the other animals, but if one were to separate from the later additions to attend to this alone...he might realize that this was divinely spoken and that, while probably every art and every philosophy has often reached a stage of development as far as it could and then again has perished, these doctrines about the gods were saved like relics up to the present day” (*Metaphysics* 1074b5-15; Apostle’s trans.)

ancestry. He explains why, saying “this has escaped you, because, for many generations, the survivors passed on without leaving a written record” (23c).

The priest tells Solon that “all of the events reported to us, no matter where they’ve occurred—in your part or ours—if there are any that are noble or great or distinguished in some other way, they’ve all been inscribed” (23a). Just after this, he comments on the necessity of writing for cities and the loss of it by most of humanity every so many years due to flood. The priest says, “I’ll tell you the story for your own benefit as well as your city’s and especially in honor of our own patron goddess” (23d). And yet, Solon did not write and share it with the city, because he came back to Athens to find political turmoil (21c). This shows us that knowledge is lost other than by natural disaster, but is also subject to political disaster and simple forgetfulness.

After Critias finishes his sketch of the Egyptian story, he gives an equally interesting account of his own forgetting, which has a psychic effect analogous to the natural disasters. That there have been many disasters show that it is possible to relearn everything that has been forgotten, even without a “source” like Saitic priest. Athens had been destroyed nine thousand years prior and had developed the arts again, even without such contact. The element of reconstruction is forceful enough in Critias’ telling of the myth to make Cornford ask “what could Hermocrates do, if not describe the re-emergence of culture in the Greece of prehistoric and historic times” (1927, 7). Just as Critias’ story of ancient Athens and Egypt depicts historical and political destruction and reconstitution, Critias’ personal account of his relationship to the story presents a picture of psychic catastrophe and attempted reconstruction.

## The Forgetfulness of Critias

When Critias finishes his “concise version of old Critias’ story, as Solon originally reported it” (25e), he tells Socrates how he recalled it. “While you were speaking yesterday about politics and the men you were describing I was reminded (ἀναμιμνησκόμενος) of what I’ve just told you” (25e). This is a sort of perversion of any understanding of “Socratic” recollection. Critias’ memory is one in which the “ideal” reminds him of a particular set of events, rather than using the particulars to arrive the universal. Critias goes on to say that he’ll “translate the citizens of the city you described to us in mythical fashion yesterday to the realm of fact, and place it before us as though it is ancient Athens itself” (26d).

Critias makes his point even more explicit when he says “our song will be in tune if we say that your imaginary citizens are the ones who really existed at that time” (26d). Critias is making Socrates’ ideal city into the image of an actual historical city (or at least a mythological historical one), instead of seeing that historical city as a contingent copy of the true city.<sup>262</sup> Critias and Solon—had he written the poem—would be at third remove (if not much more, due to indirect discourse) from the truth. If Critias’ story were true, it would actually prove Socrates’ point. If his city was indeed the true city, then the goddess would have looked—though far more clearly—at the same model in order to make a moving image of it.<sup>263</sup> But Critias’ account misses its nature altogether, for he is remembering a story of a story of a story, told at a particular time in a particular place and forgotten and he takes that to be the “original.” In this way, by manipulating

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<sup>262</sup> Cf. Kalkavage: “Critias makes a bold claim: he will transfer the merely mythical city into ‘the truth’ (2001, 13).

<sup>263</sup> Socrates wants to see his city “in motion” (19b) and Timaeus describes time as a “moving image of eternity” (37d).

“history” Critias is able to “claim” the credit for the type of government, if not for himself, at least for his ancestors. Based on this “ancestral constitution” Critias tries to take over Socrates’ city.

We learn other things about Critias during this account. We see that he may not be listening to the account as closely as he should, since he is remembering the story of his youth, “amazed” (ἐθαύμαζον) by remembering (25e).<sup>264</sup> Critias continues and says “Because it had been so long ago, I didn’t remember Solon’s story very well (διὰ χρόνου γὰρ οὐχ ἰκανῶς ἐμνημήην). So I realized that I would first have to recover the whole story for myself well enough, then tell it that way” (26a). Here Critias admits the nature of his tale. He has just told us that he does not remember the story well and so he will have to tell it his way. What is Critias’ way to tell it? He says, “the most important task in situations like this is to propose a speech that rewards people’s expectations” (26a). He will tell a story that rewards the expectations of his guests. He may think he flatters Socrates for attempting to “translate the mythical citizens of the city you described to us in mythical fashion yesterday to the realm of fact” (26c-d).

Critias does not immediately tell us his story, but tells us of the process of remembering during the intervening night. He says, “the moment I left here yesterday, I began to repeat the story to him [Hermocrates] and to Timaeus as it came back to me. After I left them I concentrated on it all during the night and recovered just about the whole thing” (26b). After this comment, as if he has convinced himself, Critias’ attitude changes. He has just been talking about how he was trying to recall the story and how it

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<sup>264</sup> Critias’ relationship to memory and the past may be likened to that of Nestor in the *Iliad*. In the next section I will show that the types of details provided by Critias show how thoroughly he ignored Socrates’ discourse.

had been so long ago that he didn't remember well. Now he says, "I don't know if I'd be able to recall everything I heard yesterday, but I'd be extremely surprised if any part of this story has gotten away from me though it has been a very long time since I've heard it" (26b). This shows that he was not listening to Socrates' story, and that he was not telling the truth just a moment before when he discussed the difficulty of remembering the tale. In the *Critias*, we see precisely what sort of things he remembers and we see that he is not much interested in justice. He says that he remembers the story so well because "what I heard then gave me so much pleasure—the old man was eager to teach me because I kept on asking one question after another" (25b-c). Critias does not ask a single question of Timaeus, in his extremely long and difficult account, and most likely had no questions for Socrates on the previous day.

### **The *Critias***

The *Critias* begins with a prayer and ends in mid-sentence as Zeus is about to speak. It is a fragment about what we might call history and theology, or mythology and religion. As was the case with the Prologue of the *Timaeus*, it says as much about Critias as about ancient Athens.

Timaeus begins the dialogue with a prayer that the god who had

existed long before in reality, but who has now been created in my words...that he grant the preservation of all that has been spoken properly; but that he will impose the proper penalty (δίκην τὴν πρέπουσαν ἐπιτιθέναι) if we have, despite our best intentions, spoke any discordant note (106b).

The dialogue drops off with very similar words, in a far different context. Critias is describing the decline of the Atlantians, saying "they became disordered" (121b). Critias

goes further to say that “to those who were blind to true way of life oriented to happiness it was at this time that they gave the semblance of being supremely beautiful and blessed. Yet inwardly they were filled with an unjust lust for possessions and power” (121b). Critias then points out that “Zeus, god of gods, reigning as king according to law, could clearly see this state of affairs” (121b). When he “observed this noble race lying in this abject state and resolved to punish them (δίκην αὐτοῖς ἐπιθεῖναι) to make them more careful and harmonious as a result of the chastisement” (121b-c). This phrase of Critias, δίκην αὐτοῖς ἐπιθεῖναι, mirrors Timaeus’ δίκην τὴν πρέπουσαν ἐπιτιθέναι from the beginning of this dialogue. The similarities go further, with both accounts describing the point of the correction as bringing those who err into tune.

The similarities here may explain a certain number of difficulties with this fragment. I agree with Eric Voegelin, who argues that the dialogue is a “formal fragment, not an accidental one” (2000, 182).<sup>265</sup> Voegelin argues that this is so because it breaks off at a “formal incision in the dialogue” and therefore “its meaning is rounded in itself and does not depend on what might have followed” (2000, 182).<sup>266</sup> I think we need to push this point farther and say that if we compare the conclusion with the prayer at the beginning of the dialogue, we may surmise that what was previously unmeasured in deed

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<sup>265</sup> As a fragment the *Critias* interestingly—but certainly unintentionally—mirrors the state in which we find out much about “antiquity” at Oxyrhincus, for the very reasons listed by the Saitic priests. Welliver agrees, in so far as he sees the *Timaeus-Critias* as a whole (1977, 3); Cornford (1935, 7) expected a dialogue entitled the *Hermocrates*.

<sup>266</sup> Welliver similarly argues for the intentionally fragmentary nature of the *Critias*, citing “its frequent references to incompleteness” (1977, 34). More dubious are the speculations as to the dramatic cause of Critias’ sudden silence. He cites the illness of the missing “fourth” as a hint and says that one can “ascribe also Critias’ sudden silence to a sudden illness; and judging from Critias’ moral state at this point, the illness must have been serious, though perhaps not immediately fatal” (1977, 37). This speculation is ridiculous. We need not think of Critias falling dead, or even ill, in mid speech in order to see the dialogue as a formal fragment. That is, we need not account for its silence within the drama, but outside of it. The question then is not what happened to cause Critias to fall silent (if he had fallen ill, would they not remark on it?) but why Plato chose to represent his story in such a fragmentary way.

(Atlantis) is now unmeasured in speech and Zeus—as it were—refuses to speak for Critias. That is, Plato intentionally ended the dialogue at this point in order to allow the god to accept *Timaeus*' prayer.

There are a number of hints that the Critias of the dialogue may hold the atheistic views often attributed to him in the *Sisyphus* fragment. I am not making a claim that Critias authored the fragment, but rather that such ideas were certainly common among certain circles of Athenians. We have just seen that Zeus “could clearly see” inside of the Atlantians (121b-c). This is the purpose of inventing gods in the *Sisyphus* fragment. Further, at the beginning of the dialogue, after *Timaeus* had completed his prayer, Critias asks for a greater indulgence than that shown to *Timaeus*. He explains his request by saying:

It is easier, *Timaeus*, for someone to give the impression that he is a successful speaker when he speaks of the gods to an audience of mortals. The audience's lack of experience and sheer ignorance concerning a subject they can never know for certain provide the would-be speaker with great eloquence (107b).

Critias is showing how one may deceive people on the basis of that with which they have little familiarity, and in particular the gods. He ends up describing the art of the sophist, as he continues. He says, “everything we have all said is a kind of representation (μιμήσιν) and attempted likeness” (107b). He continues, using the same image that is often used by Plato to describe the sophist's art. He wants them to consider “the graphic art of the painter that has as its object the bodies of both gods and men and the relative ease and difficulty involved the painter's convincing his viewers that he has adequately represented the objects of his art” (107b). Then he says that “we are satisfied if an artist is able to represent—even to some small extent—the earth and mountains and rivers and

forests and all of heaven and the bodies that exist and move within it, and render their likeness” (107c). It seems as if Critias is attempting to discredit Timaeus’ account. This would explain the strange relation between the accounts of Critias and Timaeus, the first of whom spoke in the prologue of the *Timaeus* and gave an overview of his story, but returns to it later, after Timaeus speaks, for a detailed, but fragmentary and ultimately failed account. He spoke at the beginning of the *Timaeus*, with great pride—both in his family and his story—and he was sure that his account was to meet the expectation of the listeners (26a). After Timaeus’ account, he must now make his story look better. In Critias’ story, however, he spends far more time discussing precisely “the earth and mountains and rivers and forests” (107c) than the actions of human beings.

He continues, saying that

since we have no precise knowledge of such things, we do not examine (οὔτε ἐλέγχομεν) these paintings too closely or find fault with them, but we are content to accept an art of suggestion and illusion (σκιαγράφια) for such things as vague and deceptive (ἄσαφεῖ καὶ ἀπατηλῶ) as this (107c-d).

The language in this passage is quite similar to that in the *Sophist* (235e-236d). He is clearly describing that whereby deception about the “biggest things” occurs. He offers one last attack on Timaeus’ discourse, saying “we embrace what is said about the heavens and things divine with enthusiasm, even when what is said is quite implausible (σμιρκῶς εἰκότα λεγόμενα), but we are nice critics of what is said of mortals and human beings” (107d). Timaeus called his story a “likely account” and now Critias is saying that it is hardly likely (σμιρκῶς εἰκότα) at all. He points out again the difficulty of representing humans “if we are to satisfy people’s opinions” (107e-108a). Critias,

perhaps, notices that Socrates was impressed with Timaeus' speech, and thus reminds (ὑπομνήσαι) him of the difficulty of his own task (108a).

In effect Critias has attempted to discredit Timaeus' account in a way that is quite similar to his belittling of Socrates' account at the beginning of the *Timaeus*.<sup>267</sup> There (as he does again here) he makes Socrates' account into an image of his own, and here he is calling Timaeus' account a σκιαγράφια that is σμικρῶς εἰκότα.

Critias then begins with his own prayer to Mnemosyne. He says that "the success or failure of everything that is most important in our speech lies in the lap of this goddess" (108d). We must ask what is most important in Critias' speech. He explains the remark, saying, "if we can sufficiently recall (μνησθέντες) and relate what was said long ago by the priests and brought here to Athens by Solon, you the audience in our theater will find, I am confident, that we put on a worthy (μετρίως) performance" (108d). Thus, Critias begins as a poet, calling on the Goddess of memory. Or rather he claims to. He says that "I must...invoke the other gods and make a special prayer to Mnemosyne" (108d), but he does not actually make the prayer. Instead, after explaining why he should make it, he says "So much said. Now we must act. Let us delay no more" (108e).

We know that Critias IV was a poet and we have several fragments attributed to him. He begins more like a sophist than a poet, however. He relies on memory for his story, he says, but he relies on the wrong sort of memory. He is amazed by memory, lost in the fantasy of details of the geography and weather of the ancient cities, the details

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<sup>267</sup> "By this sleight of hand Critias attempts to rank mortal subject matter above immortal; and by misleadingly associating Timaeus's discourse with immortal subject matter only, he attempts to rank himself above Timaeus" (Welliver 1977, 25).

which are in many ways irrelevant to the assignment and which Critias has already mentioned are most difficult to judge or verify (107c).

As Kalkavage puts it, “through him [Critias] wisdom, in the dialogue comes to be identified not with recollection... of eternally unchanging Being but with the detailed memory of our own past” (2001, 12). It is important to note that Critias’ story is as much fantasy as it is memory. He mixes his own past (the Apaturia when he was ten, Socrates speaking the previous day) with a mythical past that he does not so much remember as imagine. Kalkavage continues, saying that Critias’ “nostalgia reminds us with great vividness and detail that human beings for the most part locate the meaning of their lives in the temporal flow of their lives” (2001, 11). What he does not recognize is the element of social or political expedience in the history claimed.<sup>268</sup> There is a sense in which Critias is “taking over” kallipolis.

In reality his speech shows us the decline and failure of a city. It is important to recall that in Socrates’ account of the ideal city at the beginning of the *Timaeus* does not include a discussion parallel to that in *Republic VIII*, where the decline of cities is discussed at length. In the *Critias*, we see two sorts of decline. The decline of the Atlantians and the sudden destruction of both the Atlantians and the Athenians.

Critias seemingly begins his discussion with prewar Athens (109a). In reality, however, he starts with a discussion of the allotment of the earth between the gods and their rearing of humanity (109b). He moves from there, however, not to Athens in its glory, but in its destruction. He says, “And they [Athena and Hephaestus] fashioned in it good men sprung from the land itself and gave them a conception of how to govern their

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<sup>268</sup> Cf. Pownall 2004 for an in depth study of the “manipulation” of the past. Pownall looks at the manipulation of the past for “moral” purposes, but it may just as well be used for immoral ones.

society” (109d). The very next sentence begins, not with a picture of that society, but with its dim memory. “The names of those first inhabitants have been preserved, but their deeds have perished on account of the catastrophes that befell those who succeeded them and the long passage of time intervening” (109d). All we have of these first Athenians are their names, because “those of their race who survived these successive destructions were...left as an illiterate mountain people” (109d). These people, according to Critias, named their children by the names of the old rulers “even though they were unaware of their ancestors virtues and institution—except for some dim legends” (109e).<sup>269</sup>

Critias describes the kind of post-apocalyptic life for the hill people. He says that “for many generations, these survivors and their children lived in distress for their survival and gave thought to their needs; they spoke only of supplying these needs, and have no interest in the events of the distant past” (109e-110a). Even had some educated people survived the catastrophe, they would not have been able to spend much time to educate their children in anything but survival. Critias explains saying that it “is in the train of Leisure (μετὰ σχολῆς) that Mythology (μυθολογία) and Inquiry into the Past (ἀναζήτησις) arrive in cities” (110a). This picture is a catastrophic inversion of the expulsion of people over ten in the *Republic* (though there is no mention of this in Socrates’ *Timaeus* speech). The old ways are destroyed, at once, but there is nothing better to replace them, only hardship.

It is unclear at this point whether mythology and the investigation into “the events of the distant past” (110a) are memory or invention. For, if one is not as fortunate as Solon and cannot travel to Egypt, where memory and been preserved, one may try some

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<sup>269</sup> It is interesting that the identity of the dialogue’s interlocutor is so uncertain as a result of sharing the name of an ancestor.

primitive archeology—finding a statue or some pottery here and there. Even if one is so fortunate as Solon there is really no means of verifying the story, by the very nature of the story. Critias says only that the “report of the Egyptian priests concerning our territory was plausible and true” (110d). He then goes into a long description of the geography of the ancient city, as “evidence” (110e, 111c).

When he moves to a discussion of the people of ancient Athens he does not get very far—except in time. He repeats the phrase “for generation after generation” (ἐκγόνων ἔκγονοι) three times. He describes the way that the warriors live communally on top of the Acropolis “as if they belonged to a single household” (112b). Nevertheless,

in pursuing a mean between ostentation and servility, they built for themselves tasteful houses and they grew old in them and in the company of their grandchildren; and for generation after generation (ἐκγόνων ἔκγονοι) they passed these dwellings down to descendents who were like themselves (112c).

This passage shows the ways in which Critias misunderstood—or rejected—Socrates’ proposals and is here slightly but significantly altering them. Critias most particularly rejects what Socrates calls their “unusual” proposal for the procreation of children (18c).

Critias maintains the private household and in doing so he calls Socrates’ guards “servile” (112c). Socrates clearly said that they had decided that

they should all have spouses and children in common and that schemes should be devised to prevent any one of them from recognizing his or her particular child. Everyone one of them would believe that they all make up a single family, and that all who fall within their own age bracket are brothers and sisters, that those who are older, who fall in an earlier bracket, are their parents or grandparents, while those who fall in a later one are their children or grandchildren (18d).

Because of his pride in his family—his essentially aristocratic tendency—Critias is unable to accept such a suggestion. He identifies too strongly with his family and its history to accept Socrates' abolition of it. This, of course, shows one of the main reasons that Socrates thinks that the family needs to be abolished.<sup>270</sup>

They also “kept the population stable as far as they could—both men and women—for generation after generation, maintaining the population of those who had reached military age or were still of military age at close to twenty thousand at the most” (112b). Thus, though generations pass, the size of the population is relatively stable. Finally, Critias summarizes, saying that “the character of these people was such and such was their life generation after generation” (112e). It is interesting that in all three instances it is the generations that are of great importance. He does not stress the education, or the tendency of each to identify with the whole, rather than with the household, as Socrates did, but rather stresses the role and continuity of tradition, as a fifth century aristocrat would be expected to do.

Critias moves on to the discussion of Atlantis with another appeal to memory, but one that has been supplemented by writing.<sup>271</sup> Of Atlantis he says “we will now openly reveal its history to you our friends, as the common property of friends, if we have not lost the memory (μνήμης) of what we heard when we were still boys” (112e). Then, in an excursus on names, Critias mentions written notes taken by Solon “when he was contemplating his own poetic version of the legend” writes down the meaning of each of the “Greek names frequently used for people who are not Greek” (113a). Critias says

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<sup>270</sup> See Chapter 11 below.

<sup>271</sup> I take this term from Jacques Derrida who takes it from Rousseau, for the relationship between writing and speech. See Derrida 1976, 269-315.

that these “manuscripts (τὰ γραμμάτια) were in the possession of my grandfather and they now remain in my possession” (113b). Though Critias explains some names (114b), it seems as if his true concern here is to mention that he has Solon’s notes in his possession. This lends credence to what he says, and authority to his voice.

It is with this that Critias launches into an elaborate description of the island of Atlantis, a description which has become part of the cultural mythology of the Western world.<sup>272</sup> Critias’ story ends up being far shorter than Timaeus’ and also far less interesting or philosophically germane. In fact, Plato shows the way that Critias himself, in the telling of the story, succumbs to the luxury of his description in the same way that the people in his description fall under the thrall of its luxury. For much of the time, they are free of this enthrallment. Critias says that “in their attitude to the disasters and chance events that constantly befall man and their relations with one another they exhibited a combination of mildness and prudence” (120e). In fact, throughout, it appears as if Critias has more sympathy with the means of government and the national character of the Atlantians than the ancient Athenians. It is for this reason that he shares their downfall, forgetting himself, hardly recognizing it. They did not, Critias tells us “become intoxicated with the luxury of the life their wealth made possible; they did not lose self-control and slip into decline” (121a). Eventually, however, the passage of time begins to dim the divine part of them and thus they became “disordered”(121a). This disorder brings Zeus, who can see the situation, to call the gods in order to chastise the Atlantians

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<sup>272</sup> See Welliver 1977, Appendix C for “Francis Bacon’s Understanding of the *Timaeus-Critias*” (61-63). In addition to philosophical works like Bacon’s Plato’s myth has helped produce cultural products that Plato never could have foreseen, such as a television drama “The Man from Atlantis” for only one instance of the vast legacy of this myth. In itself, this says something about our cultural memory, though we are still less than a third of the way to the nine thousand years separating the event and Solon’s discovery of the entire subterranean history of his city.

(121c). Then, whether intentionally, or by accident, the dialogue, like Atlantis, drops off the face of the earth.

Where the text breaks off and ends in the middle of a sentence we see the effects of forgetting, which forgets that it has forgotten, which is blank and illiterate, unaware that anything should be there, the Atlantic Ocean, beyond the pillars of Heracles.

In the next chapter, I show how many of these same concerns are played out in the *Charmides*.

## Chapter 9

### Knowing What We (Don't) Know: Knowledge and Politics in the *Charmides*

The *Charmides* makes as much use of historical detail and inference as any other dialogue. The dialogue is set just after the extended siege of Potidaea and the ambush of the Athenians that followed. Those events were the beginning of the extended war which no one in the late 430s or early 420s expected to rage on as it did. Of the characters present in the dialogue, only Socrates has experienced the nature of the world to come. The characters of Charmides, Critias and Chaerophon bring to mind the end of that war with the establishment of the Thirty, the exile of the democrats and their final return.<sup>273</sup> Attention to these details reveals a peculiar progression. As the dialogue opens, only Socrates knows the horrors that at least two generations of Athenians (and Greeks in general) would come to know so well. At the beginning of the dialogue there is a distinction between war and civic life. Plato presents Socrates as having the presence of mind to act in battle just as he acted in the city. Critias blurs the distinction between politics and war in a different way. When the Thirty take over and when Thrasybulus and the democrats return, this difference is erased, and there is no politics but war.

Plato shows this difference between Socrates and Critias in terms of their arguments and their respective understanding of their own accounts of *sophrosune*, or

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<sup>273</sup> Schmid says: “with a masterly brevity, the initial scene projects the reader forward to the entire tragic story of the Peloponnesian War, beyond that to the tyranny of the Thirty, and beyond that to Socrates’ own trial and execution” (1998, 3). On the relation between these cf. especially Brickhouse and Smith 1987.

temperance.<sup>274</sup> He does this most clearly in the prologue of the dialogue, before Charmides gives his first definition and in the last section, when Socrates and Critias investigate Socrates' dream of knowing ignorance and Critias' interpretation of this as knowing.

### **War and Peace**

The introduction to the *Charmides*, stresses time and absence (διὰ χρόνου ἀφιγμένος) (153a). The dialogue opens with Socrates' return from Potidaea in 429.<sup>275</sup> We have already discussed this battle in the previous chapters on Alcibiades, with whom Socrates served on this campaign between 432 and 429. Here we see Socrates after the terrible retreat following the defeat of the Athenians (II. 79), not, as commentators have suggested, after the initial battle. Athens attacked Potidaea (Thucydides I. 57, I. 61) and then held it under siege (II.70) until the citizens finally turned to cannibalism to stave off starvation. Potidaea finally surrendered in 430/429. The Athenians were on their way home when they were ambushed and badly beaten (II. 79).<sup>276</sup> It is after this final battle that we see Socrates.

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<sup>274</sup> Enough has been written on the Greek virtue of sophrosune in English to treat the transliteration as an English term. Temperance as self-control will also be used as translations, in accordance with the preferences of the scholars discussed in this chapter.

<sup>275</sup> I follow Planeux's chronology, which keeps Socrates and Alcibiades in Potidaea for three years (1999). Nails astutely comments that "Near unanimous past agreement that the Charmides place after the initial battle of 432...as if the soldiers had marched back home after the first action of the campaign, before the siege, before Potidaea surrendered, has always been untenable historically" (2002, 311). Kahn erroneously states that "Plato has forgotten or simply ignored the fact that the battle of Potidaea occurred at the beginning rather than the end of the long siege" (1996, 185, n. 3).

<sup>276</sup> The connection of this dialogue with the *Laches* also closely relates it to martial concerns. Cf. Kahn 1996, 184. Schmid points out that the plague may have stricken Athens for the first time during Socrates' absence (1998, 3, ).

In the dialogue's opening, he says that "since I was arriving after such a long absence sought out my accustomed haunts with pleasure" (153a).<sup>277</sup> Sprague's word "haunt" is not very accurate. Lamb's Loeb translation is better here where Socrates says that he sought out his "wonted conversations." Though Socrates proceeds to list the places he goes, it is the conversation and not the place that interest him. Indeed, the other senses of "διατριβάζ" carry temporal and not spatial connotations at all. The "focal" meaning uniting the definitions listed Liddell and Scott is a wearing away of time (1897, *ad loc*). Socrates has been away for a long time and now he is glad to be able to pass his time as he will, in conversation.

Socrates is looking for conversation, not necessarily for particular friends. He says: "I went immediately to the palaestra of Taureas... and there I found a good number of people, most of whom were familiar, though there were some too that I did not know" (153a). Plato has already invoked Socrates' long absence from the city, the long campaign at Potidaea and the hardships Socrates would have endured. He has also, in these very few lines, told us very specifically where Socrates goes to seek conversation. Finally, Plato brings Socrates in to a crowd of people and when "they saw me coming in unexpectedly, I was immediately hailed at a distance by people coming up from all directions" (153b).<sup>278</sup> Socrates presents this in way that both shows the contrast between the city and life on campaign, while also showing their similarities. There is the confusion of the crowd. This had been Socrates' customary life before his three year

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<sup>277</sup> In an unpublished article Polansky and Brouwer persuasively argue that this absence and homecoming signal an extended analogy with the *Odyssey*, so that Socrates, the returning Odysseus, argumentatively slay the suitors, Critias and Charmides. Their account is one of the few that stress the barely veiled hostility between the interlocutors.

<sup>278</sup> Hyland says that "Socrates is something of a celebrity" (1981, 29) and asks whether news of his heroics may have already reached the city (1981, 29).

absence. Now there is a difference in the sameness. Socrates must appreciate the same things differently.

The question of Socrates' experience of the crowded wrestling school in comparison with the campaign from which he had just returned is heightened when "Chaerophon, like the wild man he is, sprang up from the midst of a group of people and ran towards me" (153b). A "wild man" (μᾶνικός) springing up from the midst of a crowd and springing at one is more likely a description of a battle than a conversation, until, when Chaerophon seizes Socrates, he speaks instead of slays.<sup>279</sup> Indeed, the setting of the dialogue at the palaestra of Taureas, places in mind the sport of wrestling which was practiced there. Wrestling is a kind of simulated warfare, a fight in which nothing other than pride and reputation are stake. Critias' sophistic brand of discussion is like wrestling when compared with the true battle of Socratic dialectic.

But Critias and the others have not been introduced yet. Socrates has a kind of knowledge that the others lack and they eagerly question him. While they are both still standing, Chaerophon immediately asks Socrates "How did you come off in the battle?" (153b). Socrates responds "exactly as you see me" (153b). This is where we see the meaning of the martial description of the crowd at the wrestling school.

In the *Symposium* Alcibiades describes the difficulties of the battle in both Potidaea and in Delium. Alcibiades presents Socrates as a great soldier precisely because "in the midst of battle he was making his way exactly as he does around town" (221b). Socrates' answer here fits well with that. Chaerophon says "the way we heard it

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<sup>279</sup> Friedlander says that "Chaerophon represents the kind of spiritual turmoil that is not fit for philosophical discussion. It is a preliminary stage of the mania that, in its higher forms, appears over and over again from the *Ion* to the *Laws*" (1964, 69).

here...the fighting was very heavy and many of our friends were killed” (153b-c).

Socrates responds that the report is “pretty (ἐπιεικῶς) accurate” (153c). In fact, more than four hundred people and all of the generals were lost in the battle (Thucydides II. 79. 1-7). That, of course, was just the finale of the long campaign during which they were “cut off from our supplies, as often happens in the field” (*Symposium* 220a) and often endured difficult weather, such as the winter described in the *Symposium* (220b-c).

Alcibiades’ entire description of Socrates in battle is focused almost exclusively on his endurance and courage which seemed to stem from his ability to maintain the same calmness that he showed in the city in battle. Alcibiades describes him at Delium<sup>280</sup>:

He was observing everything quite calmly (ἡρέμα), looking out for friendly troops and keeping an eye on the enemy. Even from a great distance it was easy to see that this was a very brave man, who would put up a terrific fight if anyone approached him. That is what saved them both. For as a rule, you try to put as much distance as you can between yourself and such men in battle; you go after others, those who run helter skelter (*Symposium* 221c).

This shows us, first hand, the value of philosophy. Virtue is knowledge, because it is knowledge of oneself in the most difficult times. We fail when we escape our own notice and forget ourselves. I shall show how the *Charmides* works to make this point throughout the entire dialogue.

None of the other interlocutors has experienced the battle. Chaerophon wants a complete account of the events (153c) and brings Socrates over to the table where Critias has been sitting. This is strange in itself, since Chaerophon was later in exile with the

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<sup>280</sup> Though this battle is in the future of our dialogue, Alcibiades does not note any change in Socrates’ behavior in the two campaigns. Rather he stresses the constancy, remarking only on his different perspective (221a-b).

democrats during the reign of the Thirty and returned with them (*Apology* 21a).<sup>281</sup> It has been said that Plato includes Chaerophon in the dialogue as a counter-example to Critias and Charmides, to show that not all of Socrates' associates were either corrupt or oligarchs (though they may have been crazy). More than this, the juxtaposition of Critias and Chaerophon, as associates at the beginning of the war, shows the extent to which the series of historical events destroyed the unity of the city in ways that no one predicted. Both Chaerophon and Critias are inexperienced, as of yet, in the matters of war. They have not yet been tested by the events that become history.

We may think that Socrates would be happy to play the historian and relate the news of the battle and his own exploits.<sup>282</sup> While he does answer the questions of "Critias and the rest" (153d), he does not go on with his narrative any more than necessary. He says, "when they had had enough of these things, I in my turn began to question them with respect to affairs at home" (154d).<sup>283</sup> Socrates the narrator is not interested enough in this part of the story to recount in any detail what he told them about the battle, and neither is Plato, the author.<sup>284</sup> Plato the author is not a historian. He uses historical characters, but the *Charmides* and the *Timaeus-Critias*, will show his deep suspicion of

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<sup>281</sup> Kahn says that it "is significant that Socrates is led personally to Critias by Chaerophon...who was later found among the democratic exiles when Critias was in power...The dialogue takes place in a happier and more harmonious social world" (1996, 185 n. 4).

<sup>282</sup> Hyland asks "what kind of virtue is this which enables a man to return from a battle which would have been shattering to most men, and be apparently oblivious to its horror?" (1981, 28). I will suggest, however, that Socrates is less oblivious than he seems. Schmid points out that "Chaerophon's question, which he impulsively failed to consider might have been a cause of intense embarrassment to his friend (e.g., had Socrates saved himself by dropping his armor and running), might have tempted Socrates to embark on a tale of his own heroism" (1998, 4).

<sup>283</sup> Schmid says, "Almost immediately, Socrates' narrative serves to contrast his own attitude toward the war to that of the others present" (1998, 3). It is not only his attitude, but his experience of it, that contrasts sharply with the others.

<sup>284</sup> Friedlander marks this as a sign of temperance (1964, 70). Hyland points out that, because of the reluctance of Socrates the narrator to go into detail about this, we do not know what account of the battle Socrates may have given and nor the effect it may have had on the interlocutors (1981, 29).

the portrayal of events. He immediately let us know what affairs at home he was interested in, “the state of philosophy and about the young men” (153d).

Socrates has been away for three years. There is a sort of dance of memory between Socrates and his associates. He gives them news of the battle and they, in turn tell him about the state of philosophy and of the youths. Chaerophon and Critias are united in their opinion of Charmides’ beauty, a subject about which Socrates says, “I am a broken yardstick (λευκή στράθμη)” (154b). Here he broaches what will be one of the important topics of the dialogue: criteria for measurement or judgment. Socrates claims that he is a broken instrument that cannot make an adequate judgment about the matter. This enables Socrates to model the appropriate behavior in such an instance: he questions those who claim to know.<sup>285</sup> Thus, after they tell him about the body of Charmides, Socrates asks about his soul, and specifically whether or not it is well-formed (154d). Socrates couches this question in terms of lineage, something that we have seen, is quite important to Critias (154d, 155a).<sup>286</sup> Socrates insists on the propriety of a conversation

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<sup>285</sup> Hyland says that “even if Socrates cannot measure beauty, he might yet be able to measure wisdom through philosophy...In this very dialogue we are forced to think through what it means to measure according to a standard in such a way as to lead to something like the so-called ‘late theory of forms’” (1981, 31).

<sup>286</sup> Kahn remarks that this points to “Plato’s pride in his own family” (1996, 186). Nothing could, in fact, be farther from the truth. Kahn continues, commenting that “what we know from the text is that the choice of interlocutors permits Plato to elaborate on the fame and distinction of his own family and its connections by marriage” (1996, 187). Kahn does not make it clear which text tells us this, for it is certainly not the *Charmides*, in which both Critias and Charmides represent failure. Kahn goes on to cite the *Timaeus* as an attempt “once again to emphasize Plato’s ancestral connection with Solon” (1996, 187). The entire previous chapter is a rebuttal to this position. In the *Timaeus* and the *Charmides*, Plato shows the danger of a reliance upon, or overly keen interest in, ancestry and lineage. Finally, and farthest from the point, Kahn claims that “the presence of Critias and Charmides serves as a kind of personal signature, superimposed upon the anonymity of the Socratic dialogue form” (1996, 187). If Plato uses those figures as a “signature” it is to show the ways in which he himself may well have failed. Kahn’s reading directly and dramatically opposes Plato’s claim about his relation to these members of his family. It is precisely because they are related to him that Plato is more easily deceived by Critias and Charmides, in the same way we see happening to Charmides in the dialogue that shares his name. In *Letter VII*, Plato has been describing his youthful political ambition and the overthrow of the democratic constitution. Then he says, “Some of these men happened to be relatives and acquaintances of mine and they invited me to join them at once in what

since “you are both his guardian and his cousin” (155a). Immediately Critias consents, but he suggests that Socrates pretend to be a doctor who can cure the headaches that Charmides suffers in the mornings.<sup>287</sup>

When Charmides approaches before anything is said there is again a surge and confusion whose description is reminiscent of warfare (155c). This time, however, there is an erotic confusion so that “when everyone in the palaestra surged all around us in a circle... I saw inside his cloak and caught on fire and was quite beside myself (οὐκέτ’ ἐν ἐμαυτοῦ)” (155d). Socrates shows here one of the ways in which one becomes unaware of one’s self. He is enflamed and knocked outside of himself (οὐκέτ’ ἐν ἐμαυτοῦ).<sup>288</sup> Socrates will regain his control by asking questions of Charmides and Critias and indeed, by narrating the dialogue to us. Socrates’ erotic slip shows that self-knowledge—that is the knowledge of our own ignorance—is neither steady nor permanent, but that one can train oneself to forget less often, using dialogue as a kind of moral mnemonics.<sup>289</sup>

It is Critias who says that Charmides is temperate (157e-158a), thus preparing the way for him to enter the discussion under the assumption that he knows what *sophrosune* is.<sup>290</sup> After Charmides arrives and Socrates asks the young man about it, Charmides answers in a way that Socrates characterizes as “quite dignified” (158c). He tells

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seemed to be a proper undertaking. My attitude towards them was not surprising since I was young. I thought that they were going to lead the city out of the unjust life she had been living and establish a path of justice, so that I watched eagerly to see what they would do. But as I watched them they showed in a short time that the previous constitution had been a precious thing” (324c-d).

<sup>287</sup> Hyland suggests that the headaches are the result of immoderation in the consumption of wine and that is why the headaches are in the morning (1981, 41-42).

<sup>288</sup> Hyland stresses the relationship between *eros* and *sophrosune* (1981, 27)

<sup>289</sup> Kahn says that this ‘episode prefigures the topic of the dialogue by exhibiting Socrates’ subsequent success in regaining self-control whereas Critias is later shown to lose his self-restraint when his proposed definition is subjected to ridicule’ (1996, 188).

<sup>290</sup> Schmid cites Helen North’s still relevant 1966 study, saying that “*sophrosune* was a virtue characteristically (and propagandistically) identified with the conservative aristocratic tradition in Greek political thought, and with Sparta in particular... This tradition is represented in the *Charmides* by the title character and his guardian and uncle Critias” (1998, 4).

Socrates that “it was not easy for him in the present circumstances, either to agree or disagree with what he had been asked” (158c). The reason, he says, is because “if I should deny that I am temperate, it would not only seem an odd thing to say about oneself, but I would at the same time make Critias here a liar (ψευδῆ)...but on the other hand, if I were to agree and praise myself that would appear distasteful” (158d). Critias, of course, has already suggested that Socrates lie to Charmides and he himself has his slave lie to Charmides to get him there saying “call Charmides and tell him I want him to meet a doctor for the weakness (ἀσθενείας) he told me he was suffering (ἀσθενοῖ) from yesterday” (155b). It is only after this that he suggests to Socrates that he pretend to be the doctor.<sup>291</sup>

Charmides asks Socrates if he has the remedy for his headaches and Socrates answers that he does. The rest of the dialogue is an attempt to turn Critias’ lie into the truth and to actually present Charmides (and himself) with a cure. Socrates already hints at the use of force with which the dialogue will end, when he asks Charmides if he will copy the charm “with my permission...or without it?” (156a).

Thus, the historical setting of the dialogue and the combination of interlocutors come together to set the dialogue in motion. Chaerophon now disappears altogether and Critias will only return when he has been implicated by Charmides.

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<sup>291</sup> In his attempt to revise the images we have of Socrates (overwhelmingly positive) and his interlocutors (overwhelmingly negative), John Beversluis implies that it is Socrates who is trying to lure Charmides into the discussion “on false pretenses” (2000, 135). It is clear, however, that it is Critias who orchestrates the deception.

## Charmides: Speed and Slowness

The initial discussion with Charmides is often maligned as an example of unscrupulous and terribly fallacious arguments.<sup>292</sup> While this may be true, it is necessary to point out the way that Socrates uses Charmides' definition in order to turn the discussion to the issue of time and in order to highlight the virtues required in war and the unity of the virtues.

Socrates says that

it is clear that if temperance (σωφροσύνη) is present in you, you have some opinion about it...[I]f it really resides in you, it provides a sense of its presence, by means of which you would form an opinion not only that you have it, but of what sort it is" (159a).

These assumptions prefigure much of what is to come in Socrates' discussion of reflexivity with Critias. I will return to this point, but it is worth noting here that it is precisely this attempt to look "inside yourself" that may define *sophrosune* as a "knowing oneself" that amounts to "knowing what one knows and what one does not know" (167b).

When Charmides looks inside himself he says that "taking it altogether that what you ask about is a sort of quietness (ἡσυχιότης)" (159b). Socrates then gets Charmides to say that temperance is admirable and then lists a number of other fields when quickness is admirable. Beversluis points out that "the opposite of 'quickly' is not 'quietly' but 'slowly' and the opposite of 'quietly' is not 'quickly' but 'noisily'" (2000, 138). Beversluis is partly correct, but he assumes that ἡσυχιότης has precisely the same connotations as the English word "quietness." Rather, "calmness" may be the best

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<sup>292</sup> Hyland calls Socrates' move "sophistic equivocation" (1981, 59). Beversluis calls the arguments "faulty" saying that "both [arguments] depend on bizarre contrasts" as well as fallacious (2000, 138). He says that each set of arguments "concludes that temperance is not quietness (or a kind of quietness) on the ground that temperance is admirable and quick actions are more admirable than quiet ones" (200, 138).

English word for ἡσυχιότης. Nevertheless, there is something strange going on, something, I argue, that has to do with Socrates' experience in battle and the unity of virtue.

Socrates contrasts forms of ταχέως with ἡσυχῆ but he also pairs βραδέως with ἡσυχῆ. ταχέως and βραδέως—which mean swiftly and slowly, respectively—are more clearly opposed than ἡσυχῆ and ταχέως. It is not difficult to see someone doing something both quickly and calmly. In fact, this is a sign of competence. We must look more closely at Socrates' examples to see what he means.

First, however, it is worth recalling Charmides' examples. He said that temperance was “doing everything in an orderly and quiet way—things like walking in the streets and talking” (159b). These are both actions of small consequence and matters that are among the first things learned by infants—how to walk and to talk. In the chapter on the *Alcibiades I* (111a), we saw Alcibiades use the example of speech as an analogy for justice. He claimed that no one in particular taught him to speak, and so Socrates turns almost immediately to the example of writing, for which one did have a teacher. Socrates makes a similar move here. “Now when you are at the writing master's, is it more admirable to copy letters quickly or quietly?” (159c). Charmides answers that it is better to write quickly. He answers that it is also better to read quickly and to play the lyre and wrestle quickly and sharply (ὄξεως) than quietly and slowly (159c). The same is true of “boxing and pancration” and finally they agree that “with running and jumping and all the movements of the body, aren't the ones that are performed briskly and quickly the admirable ones, and those performed with difficulty (μόγῃς) and quietly, the ugly ones”

(159d). The addition of “μóγις” of “with difficulty” will be crucial here. Socrates will keep equating “calmly” as “with difficulty. ”

Before moving on to the matter of psychological speed, I will spend a moment on these physical examples. In each case, it simply performing it quickly that is admirable (when reading one does not care whether the letters were written quickly or not), but the ability to do it quickly. For in each case, if one can do it quickly, one can also do it slowly, whereas if one can do it slowly, it does not mean that one can do it quickly. When we ask, how is it that one does it quickly, we would answer by much practice and learning. That is, one has to have done it slowly many times in order to be able to do it quickly. Socrates’ motives become more clear as he moves the discussion towards the soul.

Here we find a different set of examples. All of the physical examples were things that were learned, while here we see the process of learning itself. He asks “is facility in learning more admirable or difficulty in learning?” (159e). Charmides answers that facility is better and Socrates equates facility with speed and difficulty with slowness. He then makes a similar case for teaching, remembering and being shrewd (159e-160a). Here, there is a quickness that seems more easily equitable with the good. But, it again depends on what I am thinking or remembering or teaching with speed. If I quickly teach people to lie quickly and with facility, can we really say that I am acting more admirably than if I slowly and ploddingly teach people to tell the truth slowly and ploddingly, by continually questioning themselves and others?

We also need to point out, that this quickness of thought or memory may lead to calm, ordered motion of the body. If we return to Charmides’ examples, we see that

these are things that take no special training to do and things which (most) anyone could do either quickly or slowly, calmly or boisterously. Socrates has already told us that we must “pay attention to the whole” (156e), but he separated the whole in his examples. In the physical examples, he spoke only of the quickness of the action, not what state of soul allowed such actions to be swift. In the examples of the soul, Socrates speaks only of means and not of the ends. This will be one of Critias’ largest failings over the course of the dialogue.

There is also another reason that Socrates uses the examples that he does. Socrates’ experience in battle helps explain this set of examples. If the virtues are virtues then they must be unified, and, as we saw in the *Protagoras*, courage and temperance must be mutually applicable (at least as “Pauline predications” in which the instance of the universal and not the universal itself, would be mutually predicable).<sup>293</sup> One of the remarkable things about Plato’s presentation of Socrates is his extreme constancy over the course of time. Nevertheless, Socrates’ experience in battle may partially account for some of the peculiarities of this dialogue.

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<sup>293</sup> Cf. Vlastos 1973, 252. Hyland correctly says that Socrates is trying to show Charmides “the courage, the sophrosyne needed to wrench oneself again and again out of the easy and comfortable acceptance of the cultural mores and values which appeal most immediately to one’s desires” (1981, 68). Hyland continues saying, “without claiming an utter identity of courage and sophrosyne, we can at least say that, far from holding that they are opposed, Plato is suggesting their essential interconnection, arguing that the investigation of the one necessarily involves the investigation and exhibition of the other” (1981, 69). Cf. *Statesman* 309e *ad finem*.

## The Return of Critias and the Criteria of Judgment

Charmides abandons his own definition and admits his failure, thus demonstrating a certain degree of temperance.<sup>294</sup> He says that he has “heard someone say that temperance is minding one’s own business” (161b). Socrates suggests that Charmides has heard the suggestion from Critias in very strong language, calling him a wretch, or polluted (μιαρέ). The definition here is similar to the definition of justice given in the *Republic*. Here, as in the *Republic*, Socrates finds it necessary to show the danger of this definition. The fate of Critias—and the 1,500 that he had executed—makes it clear that such a definition only makes sense if one knows what one’s business is.<sup>295</sup>

Critias takes up the claim from Charmides. Socrates says that “Critias had been agitated for some time and also that he was eager to impress Charmides and the rest who were there. He had held himself in with difficulty earlier (μόγισ δ’ ἐαυτὸν ἐν τῷ πρόσθεν), but now could do so no longer” (162c). This displays the character of Critias. It is difficult for him to restrain himself, or to keep himself in mind. Socrates continues and says that “Critias couldn’t put up with this but seemed to me angry with Charmides just the way the poet is when his verse is mangled by actors” (162c). Critias then says to Charmides “Do you suppose, Charmides, that just because you don’t understand what in the world the man meant who said temperance is ‘minding your own business,’ the man himself doesn’t understand either?” (162c).

The above statements show the great danger of education and imitation. One must ask, whose fault it is if the young ward does not understand his guardian’s definition of a

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<sup>294</sup> Friedlander says that “the older cousin lacks the other’s purity: when Kritias is helpless in the face of an argument, he will not admit his helplessness in the presence of others” (1964, 67).

<sup>295</sup> I address this in the next chapter.

virtue. This is particularly interesting when we recall that Critias told Socrates that Charmides was among the most *sophron* of his generation (158d). Socrates began by asking Charmides to look inside himself to see what *sophrosune* is (159a). He will not begin that way with the sophistic Critias, for Critias has already shown us that there is no connection between one's account of a virtue and his or her possession of it and yet his account turns out to be one that entails looking within oneself. He has declared Charmides to be *sophron* (157d), but now claims that he doesn't understand what it means. It will turn out, of course, that the "man himself does not understand" (162c). The irony of course could not be greater here, or more tragic. This definition is quite similar to that given by Polemarchus in *Republic* I.<sup>296</sup> Critias' response to Charmides highlights the question that plagues both: Who is to say what one's business is?<sup>297</sup> Charmides is not minding his business when he gives Critias' answer that he does not understand. But more importantly, Critias has not been minding his business if he has not properly educated Charmides.

The next definition of temperance as "the doing of good things" (163e) requires that one knows what is good and brings us closer to the crux of this problem. Critias, it seems thinks that "doing one's own" and "doing good things" are synonymous.<sup>298</sup> That is it seems to Critias that "doing one's own" or minding one's own business means

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<sup>296</sup> Socrates' seemingly flattering remark about Critias' age and experience" (162e). The dramatic date of the dialogue is some three decades earlier than the rule of the Thirty. Critias had very little experience that we know of up to this point. Socrates had just returned from a long battle, and so any claims to experience by Critias would have been, in comparison, quite limited.

<sup>297</sup> This is always part of what is at stake in politics. Slavoj Zizek puts it well in a discussion of Ernesto Laclau. He says, "The struggle for ideological-political hegemony is thus always the struggle for appropriation of the terms that are 'spontaneously' experienced as 'apolitical,' as transcending political boundaries" (1999, 177-178).

<sup>298</sup> Schmid says that "Critias' underlying thought is clear: the true meaning of *sophrosune* does not consist in making or even doing what is beautiful; it rather focuses on the idea of procuring benefit for oneself and avoiding harm as alien" (1998, 34).

something like “doing what is beneficial to oneself.”<sup>299</sup> And, indeed, this would again be a proper definition, if only one knew what were truly beneficial to oneself. Critias seems to think that he knows what is best for everyone. As Hyland puts it, “as a tyrant, he wants others to mind their own business—his version of being *sophron*—so he can rule” (1981, 72).

The problem of criteria does not disappear as the dialogue moves forward. Socrates brings up the necessity of knowledge, saying “the doctor doesn’t know himself whether he has acted beneficially or harmfully. Now if he acted beneficially, according to your argument, he acted temperately” (164c). Critias agrees and Socrates concludes that “on some occasions he acts beneficially and, in so doing, acts temperately and is temperate, but is ignorant of his temperance” (164c). This would mean that temperance would not be a kind of knowledge, because it could coincide with ignorance.<sup>300</sup> Critias, much to his credit among interlocutors, readily abandons his previous position.<sup>301</sup> He strongly says “I would rather withdraw some of my statements, and would not be ashamed to admit I had made a mistake, in preference to conceding that a man ignorant of himself could be temperate (*ἀγνοοῦντα αὐτὸν ἑαυτὸν ἄνθρωπον σωφρονεῖν*)” (164d). This is a remarkable admission from any Socratic interlocutor and particularly

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<sup>299</sup> Critias does not claim this directly, but it seems to motivate his claims of this section and his discussion of Hesiod in which he distinguishes between doing and making. Socrates’ next remarks make this clear. He says: “I understood the first part of your speech pretty well, when you said that you called things that were ‘one’s own’ and ‘of oneself’ good and called the doing of good things actions” (163d).

<sup>300</sup> Socrates begins the discussion assuming that if Charmides has *sophrosune* he will not be ignorant of it (159a).

<sup>301</sup> Beversluis points out that according to Kraut and Vlastos “Socrates’ interlocutors never renege on their previous admissions, i.e., they never retract propositions to which they previously assented. Perhaps not. But the possibility is envisaged here” (2000, 145 n. 22).

one with a reputation such as Critias.<sup>302</sup> With these words Critias begins a new section of the dialogue, which ends precisely when Socrates says of Critias that,

since his consistently high reputation made him feel ashamed in the eyes of the company and he did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question I had asked him, he said nothing clear but concealed his predicament (169c-d).

With these words, Plato shows the difference between Critias' claims and his actions with the subtle strokes of a literary master. It shows, further, that Critias does not know himself. He is not actually capable of admitting his errors, or of recognizing them. He, like Alcibiades, forgets himself in the eyes of others. Before moving on it is necessary to look carefully at his discussion of the Delphic inscription.

### **The Delphic Injunction**

After acknowledging his previous error, Critias says: "As a matter of fact, this is pretty much what I say temperance is, to know oneself, and I agree with the inscription to this effect set up at Delphi" (164d). Critias sees the inscription at the oracle as a "greeting from the god to those coming in in place of the usual 'Hail,' as though to say 'hail' were an incorrect greeting, but we should rather urge one another 'be temperate'" (164d). Critias understands the inscription as a simple greeting, claiming that people who made other inscriptions misinterpreted it as a "a piece of advice" (165a).

Critias does not wish to expend any effort in order to actually try to come to know himself. Indeed, it seems as if he gives this answer partly because he thinks that Socrates

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<sup>302</sup> This may partially explain Kahn's portrayal of Plato's family pride (1996, 197).

will accept it (165b).<sup>303</sup> But Socrates tries to show Critias the true meaning of the injunction. He says,

you are talking to me as though I profess to know the answers to my own questions and as though I could agree with you if I really wished. This is not the case—rather, because of my own ignorance, I am continually investigating in your company whatever is put forward (165c).

Socrates here sounds remarkably as he does in the *Apology*, though the trial is nearly three decades after the discussion at hand. By the time Socrates is tried, the rest of the interlocutors are dead, Chaerophon the only one among them who may have died of natural causes (Nails 2002, 86).

It is unclear when Chaerophon went to the oracle at Delphi, but if we take Socrates seriously in the *Apology*, we must assume that it was prior to this occasion. For, Socrates uses Chaerophon's trip to the oracle in order to explain his ignorance and continual questioning. At any rate, one can be nearly certain that Plato intends us to make the comparison between Critias' interpretation of the oracle and Socrates' in the *Apology*. The comparison is stark, for Critias takes the command to know himself as a simple greeting, whereas Socrates takes the answer to a question as a command or an injunction, to do precisely that which the inscription commands. When Chaerophon asked the oracle if anyone was wiser than Socrates and "the Pythian replied that no one was wiser" (21a). Socrates, eventually, interprets this in such a way that he can say "even now I continue this investigation, as the god bade me" (23b). The Pythian did not put the answer to Chaerophon's question in the form of a command, but Socrates interprets it as one, whereas the blatant command is interpreted by Critias as a greeting

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<sup>303</sup> Cf. "By citing it [the inscription], therefore, Critias both manifests his own imaginative intelligence and at the same time appeals to something dear to Socrates' heart which he knows the philosopher must in some sense or other accept" (Hyland 1981, 89).

that requires no effort.<sup>304</sup> When Critias grows angry and claims that “you are trying to refute me and ignoring the real question” (166c), Socrates offers an explanation that clearly recalls the *Apology*. He says of his refutation of Critias,

I would be doing it [refuting you] for any other reasons than the one I would give for a thorough investigation (ἐλέγχειν) of my own statements—the fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not (φοβούμενος μή ποτε λάθω οἰόμενος μὲν τι εἶδεναι, εἰδῶς δὲ μή)” (166c-d).

Here again, Socrates is afraid that he will escape his own notice (λάθω) in terms of what he knows and what he does not know.<sup>305</sup> He is making it clear that the very point of thinking that we know things that we do not know, is precisely that we think we have two kinds of knowledge that we do not. We think we have the knowledge and think we have the knowledge that we have it. I argue that this is the point of the rest of the dialogue and the discussion of the “knowledge of knowledge,” for the ignorance of ignorance always looks—to the ignorant one—like the knowledge of knowledge (Cf. *Apology* 21d-e).<sup>306</sup> Questioning is the way to remain vigilant against this constant tendency to slip into the pretense of wisdom.

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<sup>304</sup> Schmid argues that the “real meaning of Critias’ speech begins to be made clear when it compared to the actual religious tradition he invokes. In fact, the contrast between the Apollonian ideal of self-knowledge and what Plato has Critias represent could hardly be greater. The Apollonian ideal was the revelation of the god, of divinity, to human beings in their limitedness...The Apollonian ideal is no greeting equal to equal, and it cannot be separated from the moral injunctions with which it is associated” (1998, 37).

<sup>305</sup> Beversluis complains that “wrenched from context, as it usually is, this assurance that elenctic examination is always self-examination seems to underscore Socrates’ philosophical seriousness. In fact, it reveals his lack of seriousness” (2000, 149). He goes on to claim that this claim is “diversionary” and “patently insincere” (2000, 149). It is Beversluis’ argument that seems to be genuine. One must look only at the narrowest context to arrive at such a view. Socrates is modeling temperance as well as discussing it. The discussion with Charmides showed us that sophrosune can sometimes be harsh.

<sup>306</sup> Kahn says that this “avowal of ignorance serves delicately to prepare us for the argument to come, which will focus on the Socratic undertaking to know ‘what one knows and what one does not know’” (1996, 191).

Socrates tests Critias' definition and his soul at the same time when, after taking a moment to think over the definition of sophrosune as knowing oneself, he says "if knowing is what temperance is, then it clearly must be some sort of science and must be of something" (165c). Socrates is testing Critias' willingness to see what he means by his "self." Critias will ultimately display a sort of "will to power" in seeing his "self-knowledge" as the ability to know—and rule—the other knowledges. At this point, however, he repeats claims that the object of this science is "oneself" (165c). Socrates' next questions show how easy it is to forget oneself—even in the discussion of oneself. In the next part of the discussion Socrates plays between showing Critias how easy it is to forget and then calling him back to himself.

### **Reflexivity**

Critias has defined sophrosune, as Socrates summarizes it, in terms of a "science of self (ἐαυτοῦ ἐπιστήμη)" (165d). The self, or the soul, would seem to be a perfectly acceptable object of a science, but Socrates turns it into a productive science by asking what it produces by means of an analogy with house-building (165d-e). Critias correctly objects that this is saying that this science "does not have the same nature as any other" (165e). He tells Socrates that there is no product of other sciences, such as geometry (165e). Socrates responds by saying that the sciences of geometry and calculation have a subject that is other than the science itself (166a-b). At this point Critias is critically distracted and proceeds along a sophistic line of reasoning that is not at all interested in what the self is.

Critias could have said that *sophrosune* is that reflective action whereby the soul becomes aware of itself and then investigated this reflexivity with Socrates, much as Alcibiades does in the *Alcibiades I*.<sup>307</sup> Instead, Socrates and Critias end up discussing the possibility of reflexive knowledge,<sup>308</sup> but in terms of a “knowledge of knowledge itself” instead of a knowledge of the self (166b). Commentators often remark on the similarity between Critias’ definition here and Socratic conceptions of self-knowledge.<sup>309</sup> In fact, Socrates iterates such a position in the lines immediately following Critias’ introduction of *sophrosune* as “the only science which is both of other sciences and of itself” (166c), when he expresses, as we have already seen, his “fear of unconsciously thinking I know something when I do not” (166d). Indeed, when Socrates restates Critias’ position he turns it into his own, though Critias will neglect precisely those features that allow Socrates’ statement of the definition to be “Socratic.”

Socrates says that

only the temperate man will know himself and will be able to examine (ἐξετάσσει) what he knows and does not know, and in the same way he will be able to inspect (ἐπισκοπεῖν) other people to see when a man does in fact know what he knows and thinks he knows, and when again he does not know what he thinks he knows (167a).

This is, of course, precisely what Socrates is doing, as he just told us when he said he was “examining the argument for my own sake primarily, but also perhaps for the sake of my friends” (166d). The key point that will distinguish between Socrates and Critias for the

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<sup>307</sup> Friedlander makes a similar comparison to the *Alcibiades I* (1964, 79-80). Cf. also Schmid (1998, 47). For a full discussion see my chapter 6.

<sup>308</sup> Kahn claims that the “subtle analysis of the reflexive and irreflexive concepts marks it as one of the most technical of all the threshold dialogues” (1996, 184). Kahn is correct to note the import of the analysis of reflexive and irreflexive concepts, but he seems to miss their overall importance in his interest in the grouping of the dialogues. The point seems to be that Critias cannot conceive of a reflexive soul and must thereby resort to a reflexive concept.

<sup>309</sup> Cf. Kahn 1996, 193; Schmid 1998, 59

remainder of the dialogue, is the stress that Socrates places on “examination” and “inspection.” This is precisely what Critias’ account will neglect. Critias seems to see *sophrosune* as something that is established in those who are *sophron* so that they know what they know once and for all. Just as Alcibiades often forgot himself through inconstancy, Critias forgets himself by a hyper-constancy in which one already thinks that one knows everything one needs to know and forgets that one did not know. One forgets one’s ignorance and with it the willingness to investigate.

Socrates’ next set of examples make precisely the point that Critias ignores the investigatory process because he thinks that he knows. Socrates asks him to “consider, for instance, if you think there could be a kind of vision that is not the vision of the thing that other visions are of but is the vision of itself and other visions” (167c-d). If one thinks only of oneself—as an isolated individual—this is clearly an absurd position, because the eye cannot see itself. But, a brief comparison with the *Alcibiades I* makes Socrates’ position clear. The soul cannot simply see itself, but rather can only be reflected in conversation with another soul.<sup>310</sup>

In the *Alcibiades I*, it is also in discussion of the Delphic injunction that Socrates brings up the same analogy of an eye seeing itself in order to examine the reflexive nature of self-knowledge. But, in the *Alcibiades I*, instead of saying that it is “impossible” (168e), he explains precisely how the eye may see itself, saying “if an eye is to see itself, it must look at an eye, and that region of it in which the good activity of an eye actually occurs” (133b). This can only be done by looking into the pupil of another eye (133a). Socrates is even more explicit. He says “if the soul, Alcibiades, is going to know itself, it

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<sup>310</sup> Hyland says that the “self, then, which we examine is, like eros, never complete” (1981, 102).

must look at a soul, and especially at that region in which what makes a soul good, wisdom, occurs” (133b). Even more striking, is Socrates’ explicit claim that “knowing oneself (γινώσκειν αὐτόν) was the same as being self-controlled (σωφροσύνην)” (133c).

Even more than in the *Alcibiades I*, Socrates makes it clear that this is “absolutely impossible” (168e), if one does not continually engage and test oneself with others. This is exactly what Critias shows himself incapable of doing when Socrates says that

since his consistently high reputation made him feel ashamed in the eyes of the company and he did not wish to admit to me that he was incapable of dealing with the question I asked him, he said nothing clear, but concealed his predicament” (169c-d).

One should not expect to see oneself clearly if pride causes one to hide one’s own ignorance. Socrates tries to bring discussion around, while also providing a model of inquiry. He says: “I am in danger of being as confused as ever, because I still don’t understand how knowing what one knows and does not know is knowledge of the self” (170a).

Critias does not understand the problem and Socrates clarifies by asking whether a science of sciences is anything “more than the ability to divide things and say that one is a science and another is not” (170a). When Critias answers that “it amounts to this” he shows that he has not given much thought to himself, except insofar as he thinks himself capable of managing the sciences, or, of ruling. As Schmid points out, “in Critias’ case, this art has no content—it is the mere self-assertion of the would-be ruler, the would-be wise man” (1998, 57).

Socrates shows this lack of content when he pushes the idea of temperance as the “science of science” until he comes to the distinction between knowing what and knowing that (170c). This distinction will again bring him back to community and the criteria of judgment. If one only that one knows or does not know, “neither will he be able to distinguish the man who pretends to be a doctor, but is not, from the man who really is one” (170d).<sup>311</sup> According to Critias’ definition, there is no criteria for determining whether or not the doctor knows unless I know, which means that I can’t mind my own business, for I must know everything. The worst part of the definition, the absolutely fatal part, comes in what follows. Socrates asks “if the temperate man or anyone else whatsoever is going to tell the real doctor from the false one, how will he go about it?” (170e). The answer is devastating, because “he won’t, I suppose, engage him in conversation on the subject of medicine, because what the doctor knows, we say, is nothing but health and disease” (170e).

### **A World without Error**

Socrates tells us what the benefit of such knowledge would be and sketches a picture very similar to that we have already seen in the discussion of the art of measurement in the *Protagoras*. He says:

If the temperate man knew what he knew and what he did not know (and that he knows the former but not the latter) and were able to investigate another man who was in the same situation, then it would be of the greatest benefit to us to be temperate. Because those of us who had temperance would live lives free from error and so would all of those who were under our rule. Neither would we ourselves be attempting to do things we did not understand—rather we would find

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<sup>311</sup> Cf. Gorgias who says, “if an orator and a doctor came to a city anywhere you like and had to compete in speaking in the assembly or some other gathering over which of them should be appointed doctor, the doctor wouldn’t make any showing at all, but the one with the ability speak would be appointed” (*Gorgias* 456b-c).

those who did understand and turn the matter over to them—nor would we trust those over whom we ruled to do anything except what they would do correctly, and this would be that of which they possessed the science (171d-172a).

Socrates is telling us here precisely how we make mistakes as well as sketching a portrait of a world without error.<sup>312</sup> His answer here extends the analysis we have so far seen.

Again and again, in some form or another, we have seen Socrates make the point that we make mistakes because we think we know things that we do not know. Socrates is making that point again here. If I leave the things that I know I don't know to others, it seems as if I will not err. But Socrates makes it clear, that there is still room for error.

Socrates says that I must be able to investigate others who claim to know, or I may err in deciding to whom I should leave the things I don't know. The very fact that I don't know the subject means that I am unable to know whether or not someone knows. Thus, it should be the same knowledge that both knows that it does know and is able to evaluate the expert. There is of course the paradox that Socrates has been pointing to, if I don't know, how can that same knowledge also decide who should know. Thus, Socrates says,

If temperance (σωφροσύνη) really ruled (ἄρχοι) over us and were as we now define it, surely everything would be done according to science (κατὰ τὰς ἐπιστήμας): neither would anyone who says he is a pilot (but is not) nor would any doctor or general or anyone else pretending to know what he does not know escape our notice (λανθάνοι ἄν) (173b-c).

Thus, it turns out that sophrosune looks like it is defined as that whereby we do not escape our own notice. But, it is only possible not to escape our notice in this manner, if we ask questions and investigate the other people in order to “be able to inspect

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<sup>312</sup> Kahn correctly claims that the “primary concern of the *Charmides* is to interpret temperance as a beneficial form of knowledge, the kind of knowledge that can make us ‘do well’ (*eu prattein*) and lead a happy life (1996, 183).

(ἐπισκοπεῖν) other people to see when a man does in fact know what he knows and thinks he knows, and when again he does not know what he thinks he knows” (167a). Socrates is presenting a utopian picture that bridges the gap between the promise of the art of measurement in the *Protagoras* and the necessity of radical social change in the *Republic*.

More specifically, the argument again points towards the true danger, that of escaping our own notice, or having our forgetfulness exploited by others. The forgetfulness that is exploited is of a certain kind, a certain telling of stories to recreate a picture of the past that will have emotional resonance. Demagogues and unscrupulous politicians play precisely on our lack of knowledge, but our tendency to forget that we don't have knowledge. We want someone who will lead the country out of the quagmire that it is in and we don't know what to do. Someone, like Critias, tells us that he knows what to do, and forgetting that we have no way to evaluate his claims, give him the authority and take his claims as our own.

John Beversluis interprets this problem as one that is

intended to show that the second-order knowledge (or meta-knowledge) under examination—knowledge of knowledge—cannot enable its possessor to know what he and other people know and do not know unless he has some first order knowledge (2000, 153).

One certainly cannot have “first-order” knowledge of everything, or one ends up precisely with Critias’ extreme version of “do one’s own” (161d).<sup>313</sup> Ultimately, the

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<sup>313</sup> Schmid calls this dystopically self-sufficient political order “The egocratic city” and offers an excellent comparison between the implications of Critias’ definition at 161d and those of Socrates dream city at 171d (Schmid 1998, 127). Hyland suggests that “a radical one person-one job principle” is adopted ultimately to show the “positive alternative” that “sophrosyne as self-knowledge is a kind of knowledge, but it cannot be understood after the paradigm of an episteme” (1981). I think Hyland may be correct, though he takes episteme too technically.

danger of deception and the criteria for judgment is extremely important and, I think motivates many of the proposals of the *Republic*. The training necessitated by that dialogue is to ensure that there are those with the criteria (from generation to generation) who are able to distinguish between those who know and those who don't.<sup>314</sup>

Socrates makes an even more radical proposal. If we had some way to clearly evaluate what others know we would even know the future, because we could distinguish the true from the false seers (173c-d). In that case “the human race, if thus equipped, would act and live in a scientific way—because temperance, watching over it (φυλάττουσα)<sup>315</sup>, would not allow the absence of science (ἀνεπιστημοσύνην) to creep in (παρεμπίπτουσαν) and become our accomplice (συνεργόν)” (173d). The lack of knowledge creeps up, it slips in and we must constantly guard against it, as Socrates has already pointed out (66c-d). If, as Critias thinks, we were able to know everything, the past, the future and the present, we would still forget ourselves and would probably do so more readily.

It is for this reason that Socrates now doubts whether or not such knowledge truly makes us happy (173e). He says that “living by science” does not make us happy because shoemakers and smiths and weavers and carpenters are not happy (173e). Therefore it must be a certain kind of science. Critias agrees and Socrates asks him if the happy man is the “man who knows all future events” (174a).<sup>316</sup> Critias says that the man who knows the future and another kind of person is happy. Socrates answers for him and

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<sup>314</sup> Yet, there is a problem. In certain situations, Socrates does submit to those who seem to know, as he did in the battle from which he has just come. There he did not abandon his post (*Apology* 28e). The Athenian Generals at Potidaea must have thought they knew something they did not know

<sup>315</sup> Φύλαξ is the word for ‘guard’ in the *Republic*.

<sup>316</sup> Schmid makes a useful comparison with the discussion of soothsayers at *Laches* 195e-196a in the service of the same point.

says: “Isn’t it the sort of man who, in addition to the future knows everything that has been and is now and is ignorant of nothing” (174a). Socrates asks which of the many sciences possessed by this person makes him happy. Socrates is able to get Critias to acknowledge that even such a radical idea of knowledge, would not be sufficient for happiness. Rather, what is needed is a science of good and evil to be happy. Critias has claimed that sophrosune is a knowledge of knowledge and not a knowledge of good and evil which is necessary for happiness. Thus temperance would not be beneficial (174c). He says “this science, at any rate, is not temperance, as it seems, but that one of which the function is to benefit us. For it is not a science of science and absence of science, but of good and evil” (174d).

This is the same difficulty that we encountered in the *Protagoras*. Socrates has a knowledge of knowledge—a human wisdom whose what is precisely only a that— but he does not seem to have a true knowledge of good and evil. This is, however, the only knowledge that can make us happy.<sup>317</sup> Even knowing the future and the past would not necessarily make one happy for two reasons. First, the tendency to forget ourselves would not be eliminated by such knowledge, for we would still have to keep the knowledge in mind. Secondly, I argue that Plato is suggesting, as he does in the *Republic*, that the ability to predict the patterns of shadows will not make us happy (516c), but contemplation of the eternal. The knowledge of good and evil does not enable us to do any of the arts, but it does enable us to do them well (174d). Thus, the wisdom is again

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<sup>317</sup> Beversluis says that “for the philosopher who believes that virtue is knowledge to suggest that those whose lives are completely governed by knowledge would not necessarily be either virtuous or happy seems bizarre and utterly un-Socratic” (2002, 156). Beversluis acknowledges however that “it is not knowledge simpliciter that leads to happiness but knowledge of a certain kind, namely knowledge of good and evil” (2002, 156).

telling us something about how it is done, but to do something well requires that we know the good. Knowing the future is of little value, if we cannot evaluate what we see.

Socrates displays temperance again at the end of the dialogue, just before both Critias and Charmides display the roots of the intemperance that will lead to the establishment of the Thirty. The point is that one does not do wrong intentionally and that Critias and Charmides truly thought—as Plato, their younger relative also thought of them—that they were being virtuous in establishing the rule of the Thirty.

Socrates, however, is willing to question his own skill at investigation at the end of the dialogue. He says “the thing we have agreed to be the finest of all would have turned out to be of no benefit *if I had been any use in making a good search*” (175b; emphasis mine). He continues saying that he does not believe that you “should derive no benefit from temperance nor should it be of any use to you in the present life...rather I think that I am a worthless inquirer” (175e).

This all suggests that it is the knowledge of good and evil that will unify the virtues.<sup>318</sup> It may be, however, that such a knowledge is impossible for humans when taken as the “whole” of body and soul on the model of a Zalmoxian physician (156e). That is to say that a “human wisdom” of knowing what we know and what we do not know (170a), may be the best that we are able to do, to “become” virtuous through continual questioning. Even this, however, is extremely difficult, because the moment that we think we know something, we have lost this knowledge of knowledge. That is to say, the knowledge of what we know and do not know is a process of discovery, a life of constant questioning, the life that we see embodied by Socrates. It is Critias’ biggest

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<sup>318</sup> Cf. Penner 1992 and chapter 4 above.

mistake that he thinks that, like the public man in the *Apology*, “he thinks he knows something when he does not” (21d).<sup>319</sup>

Critias will institute a form of government under the Thirty that claims to know what is good for the city and to “establish her in the path of justice” (*Letter VII* 324d). In reality, the it is the government of the Thirty that brings the truth of the previous constitution to light (*Letter VII* 324d). Plato concludes the dialogue by pointing out another problem with this conception of the knowledge of what one knows and what others know: one must be a good inquirer and know how to ask questions (175b, 176a). More importantly, one must be willing to ask questions. Socrates offers advice to Charmides saying, “my advice to you would rather be to regard me as a babler, incapable of finding out anything whatsoever by means of argument” (176a). Charmides is confused and says that he is unsure of whether or not he is temperate, since neither Socrates nor Critias were able to discover it. Charmides had taken something from the discussion and wishes to engage in conversation with Socrates (176b). Critias says “if you do this, it will convince me of your temperance” (176b). This response shows Critias as clearly as anything else in the dialogue. He is not willing to engage in discussion with Socrates day after day and “let nothing great or small dissuade” him from it (176b). Critias has hidden the fact that he does not have knowledge and this leads, ominously, to a threat of force.

With this threat of force that concludes the dialogue, Plato brings us in a circle. We began the dialogue with an allusion to the campaign at Potidaea. I pointed out at the

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<sup>319</sup> I would like to make the suggestion that the presence of Chaerophon in the dialogue as well as the references to the Delphic oracle suggest that Critias is in fact the public man mentioned at *Apology* 21d and that Socrates does not mention his name, in part, because of the amnesty. See Brickhouse and Smith 1987 for a discussion of the amnesty.

beginning of this chapter, the ways in which Socrates' experience at that campaign may have influenced his conception of the virtue of sophrosune. Neither Socrates nor the other characters in the dialogue knew the future that was to follow Potidaea. Plato did, however, and I argue that he opened and closed the dialogue in the way that he did in order to show the different ways in which Socrates and Critias eliminate the difference between the battlefield and the city: Socrates acted with the same calmness and sophrosune in battle that he showed in the city, while Critias turns the city into a battle field, and acts everywhere with the same immoderation, showing, as Schmid puts it "the terrible forces of the human psyche with which Socratic philosophy is fated to contend—forces that themselves are the most irrational things, because they refuse to submit to reason" (1998, 151).

In the next chapter I will offer an intertextual reading of *Republic I* and Lysias' *Against Eratosthenes* in order to show the extent to which this is so. The analysis will show the extreme dangers of a definition such as that offered by Polemarchus—so similar to Critias' first definition of sophrosune—unless one has the knowledge of good and evil.

## Chapter 10

### The Ghost of Polemarchus and the Problem of Time in *Republic I*

It is not often noted that the passage of time is one of the central concerns of the *Republic*. In this chapter I will show that the *Republic* shares the same concerns as the other dialogues that we've read. It shows these concerns, however, on a larger, social canvass. Whereas, however, the *Protagoras*, the *Alcibiades* and *Charmides* are all concerned with the passage of time within an individual life and the problems that the future presents and the *Symposium* and *Timaeus-Critias* highlight the problems that are raised by our relationship to the past, the *Republic* shows the difficulties created for a society by the passage of time. When we consider the passage of time on a large scale, the existence of different generations becomes one of the most difficult problems. It is indeed the problem of the human experience of generations that unites the political and the educational concerns of the *Republic*.

Plato highlights these concerns early in the dialogue by the presence of Cephalus and his brief and often over-looked conversation with Socrates. In order to set the stage for the problems of the next chapter, this chapter presents an exploration of the intertextual elements that pass between the *Republic* and *Lysias XII Against Eratosthenes*. Polemarchus, the son of Cephalus and brother of Lysias, is the essential figure in the early parts of both works, and Critias looms large in the background. The dialogue that contains the "city in words" is contained within the house of

Polemarchus,<sup>320</sup> at the Piraeus. As the seat of generational difference, the household is one of the fundamental themes of the *Republic*.

The dialogue does not begin there, however, but in the Piraeus. The house is also in the Piraeus, but Plato's narrative strategy situates us in the street and will bring us, by invitation, persuasion, or force, into the enclosed space of the private residence. There is a spatial and political distance between the Piraeus and the town (ἄστυ) proper. Readers of the *Republic* are likely to think of saying "I went down to the Piraeus yesterday" (Κατέβην χθὲς εἰς Πειραιᾶ) as akin to "I went to the market yesterday." In reality, it is more like saying that one went to Long Island from Manhattan. The Piraeus was only four miles southwest of Athens, but it was a different political unit which was nevertheless essential to the identity of Athens, thanks to the walls built by Themistocles and destroyed by Themenes and Lysander.

When Lysias discusses the reign of the Thirty he gives much attention to the differences between the Piraeus party and that of the town (XII.53-60). This sense of separation of the town and the port continued through the reign of the Thirty. Yet it was heightened by those who followed, those "who were thought to be most opposed to Charicles and Critias and their club (ἑταιρεία): but as soon as they in their turn were raised to power, they set up a far sharper dissension and warfare (πολὺ μείζω στάσις καὶ πόλεμον) between the parties of the town and of the Piraeus" (XII. 55). The real

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<sup>320</sup> Cf. Nails "There were three houses in Cephalus II's family in 404 (Lys.12.18), with those of both Polemarchus and Lysias in the Piraeus. In *Republic*, Plato does not represent all the men as living together in the Piraeus...but as having gathered at Polemarchus' house (R. 328b). It is natural, but incorrect, to infer from the fact that Cephalus II is alive and still performing sacrifices that the conversation of the *Republic* takes place in the house of Cephalus II (Ferrari 2000, 350, Todd 2000,4; Howland 1993, 57, 63; Nussbaum 1986, 137). Neither place of residence nor the performing of sacrifices would affect Polemarchus' being the legal owner of the house, as the text describes him" (2002, 84).

connection between the town and the Piraeus were the walls, so important to the history and identity of Athens.

In his prosecution of Eratosthenes for arresting and killing Polemarchus, Lysias anticipates that Eratosthenes will claim that he was supporting Theremenes, rather than the more extreme Critias (by whom he was eventually killed) and so Lysias must also condemn Theremenes.

Why, I suppose, if he had been in the government with Themistocles he would have been loud in claiming that that he worked for the construction of the walls, when he claims he worked with Theremenes for their demolition! For I do not see that there is any parity of merit between them. The one constructed the walls against the wishes of the Lacedaemonians, whereas the other demolished them by beguilement of the citizens” (XII. 63-64).

These two events—the building and the demolition of the Long Walls connecting the Piraeus to the town—could be said to be two of the major events in Atheno-Spartan relations. In 479, in the aftermath of the Persian defeat, the Spartans “begged her [Athens] not only to abstain from building walls for herself, but also to join them in throwing down the remaining walls of the cities outside the Peloponnesus” (Thucydides, 1.90). Themistocles advised the Athenians to dismiss the Spartan embassy so that the matter might be discussed. He then told the Athenians to delay sending the embassy until

they had raised their wall to the height from which defense was possible. Meanwhile the whole population in the city was to labor at the wall, the Athenians, their wives, and their children, sparing no edifice, private or public, which might be of any use to the work, but throwing all down (1.90).

When the work had been completed Themistocles told the Spartans that “Athens was now fortified sufficiently to protect its inhabitants” (1.91). Themistocles also

persuaded them (the Athenians) to finish the walls of the Piraeus, which had been begun before, in his year as archon; being influenced alike by the fitness of a

locality that has three natural harbors, and by the great start which the Athenians would gain in the acquisition of power by becoming a naval people (1. 93).

Finally, in 457 Athens began construction on the “long walls to the sea, that toward Phalerum and that toward the Piraeus” (1. 107). This series of walls that allowed for the launch of the Athenian empire and which united the town and the Piraeus.

Xenophon reports the destruction of the wall and the downfall of the city in 405. Like Themistocles, Theremenes also asks to be sent ahead to negotiate with the Lacedaemonians. Lysias (who is clearly biased, but no less interesting for it) reports that “though other people keep secrets to baffle the enemy, he refused to mention amongst his own fellow-citizens what he was going to tell the enemy” (XII. 69).

It was out of desperation that the Athenians listened to Theremenes. As Xenophon describes it “Now the Athenians, being thus besieged by land and by sea, know not what to do since they had neither ships nor allies nor provisions; and they thought there was no way out” (2.10). Despite the desperate atmosphere “no one wanted to make any proposal involving the destruction of the walls” (2.14). Indeed, this was so distasteful to the Athenians that “when Archestratus said in the Senate (βουλή) that it was best to make peace with the Lacedaemonians on the terms they offered—and the terms were that they should tear down a portion...of the two long walls—he was thrown into prison and a decree was passed forbidding the making of a proposal of this sort” (2.15). Theremenes had negotiated with the Lacedaemonians, however, that the walls would come down and he convinced the Athenians to accept this. “After this Lysander sailed into Piraeus, the exiles returned, and the Peloponnesians with great enthusiasm began to tear down the walls to the music of flute-girls” (2.23).

The destruction of the walls occurred well after the dramatic date of the dialogue, but far prior to the compositional date or (more interestingly) the dates of its early reception. The *Republic* is filled with dramatic inconsistencies. Shorey safely situates the dialogue “June...between 431 and 411” (1930, viii).<sup>321</sup> Nearly every date between these extremes has been chosen by some scholar or another. It is not necessary for Plato to have had any particular year in mind. That is to say that it is not the historical ‘accuracy’ that matters, but the historical resonance. The mention of the Piraeus and of Polemarchus in the first page of the dialogue would have brought all of this to the mind of an early reader.

In fact, Plato does not just drop these important names but, in the opening lines of the dialogue, he offers what seems to be an almost perverse parody of Polemarchus’ arrest. Both texts are concerned with the relation between what we call the public and private spheres, and in both cases these intersect in streets and houses. In Lysias’ prosecution of Eratosthenes, the accused claimed that he was ‘just following orders’ (XII.24-33). He even claims to have spoken out against the measure proposing the arrest and execution of wealthy resident aliens in order to gain revenue (cf. XII.6-7). Lysias replies,

So then, most abandoned of mankind, you spoke in opposition to save us, but you helped in our arrest to put us to death. And when our salvation depended on the majority of your body, you assert that you spoke in opposition to those who sought our destruction; but when it rested with you alone to save Polemarchus or not, you arrested him and put him in prison (XII. 26).

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<sup>321</sup> Cited also in Nails (2002, 326). For a discussion of the difficulties in dating the dialogue see Nails (2002, 324-326). She sees the dialogue as difficult to date because of its “piecemeal” composition. She sees several different dialogues, a “On Justice, or Thrasymachus” and an “Ideal State” or “Protorepublic” each of which had a different dramatic date and a different set of characters whose ages may not be compatible with one another.

According to Lysias, Eratosthenes had a choice of whether or not to arrest Polemarchus. The houses were divided up between the oligarchs and most “entered your houses in search of either yourselves or some member of your household” (XII. 30). But Lysias admits that it would have been dangerous for them “not to go where they were sent, and to deny that they had found their victims there” (XII.31). Polemarchus was not among these who lived to judge those who entered their houses. “Besides, it was not in his house ( τῆ οἰκίᾳ), but in the street (τῆ ὁδοῦ), where he was free to leave him and the decrees of the thirty intact, that he (Eratosthenes) apprehended him (Polemarchus) and took him off to prison” (XII.30). Because he just happened to see Polemarchus in the street, Eratosthenes could have easily claimed that he never saw him at all and Polemarchus may have escaped, like his brother Lysias.

This passage in Lysias highlights the distinction between the Piraeus and the town, the public and the private, the street and the house. These same words are used to set up the discussion in the *Republic*. While Socrates and Glaucon were at the Piraeus for the festival of Bendis “Polemarchus saw us from a distance as we were setting off for home and told his slave to run and ask us to wait for him” (327a). The slave grabs a hold of Socrates from behind and Glaucon agrees to wait. When Polemarchus approaches he is with Adeimantus, Niceratus and others.

When Socrates says that he and Glaucon are on their way back to Athens, Polemarchus asks: “Do you see how many we are?”(327c). This is an implicit, if not serious, threat of force. He then tells Socrates that “you must either prove stronger than we are, or you will have to stay here” (327c). To which Socrates replies “Isn’t there another alternative, namely that we persuade you to let us go?” (327c). Polemarchus

replies in a way that is fitting of Eratosthenes “But could you persuade us, if we won’t listen?” (327c).

An acute awareness of the tragedy of future events keeps this from being a sort of cruel burlesque of Polemarchus’ arrest. It is through this exchange that Polemarchus induces Socrates and Glaucon to come to his house. Commentators have pointed out that due to this exchange we can see the discussion of the *Republic* as coerced.<sup>322</sup> While these final words particularly highlight one of the perennial problems of politics—that very often people refuse to be persuaded and necessitate the use of force—I would like to stress that here again Plato is using historical characters to open up a diachronic element in the dialogue. The futures of the interlocutors highlight the extreme importance of the conversation.

This becomes even more evident in the exchange with Cephalus which follows. Lysias tells us that Pericles induced Cephalus to come to Attica (Κέφαλος ἐπείσθη μὲν ὑπὸ Περικλέους). Cephalus appears in the *Republic* as a marker of time past; as Protagoras in the dialogue named for him, Cephalus stands for better times, the “Golden Age” of Pericles, whose democratic constitution the excesses of the Thirty would make seem precious in retrospect (*Letter VII* 324d-e). Yet, he came from Syracuse and this association should point us forward towards the Sicilian Expedition and ultimately, of

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<sup>322</sup> “Socrates wishes to return to Athens, but is compelled to remain by the insistence of young men who are not his close friends. Thus his subsequent speech, in which the just city is founded, takes place under the shadow of constraint...The beginning of the *Republic*, the dialogue devoted to justice, shows dramatically how the just city has its origins in injustice or constraint” (Rosen 1988, 106). There is something perverse in Rosen’s comments if we do not take who is constraining and in what way into account. The point seems rather to be that even if one were to attempt to found a just state it would be in a world where Critias’ and Eratosthenes have already reigned. Thus, it is impossible to start from scratch. The constraint is a necessary condition of history.

course, to the disastrous rule of the Thirty. The initial conversation between Cephalus and Socrates is a meditation on aging and the passage of time.

When Cephalus welcomes Socrates, his first words differ only slightly from those of Socrates at the beginning of the dialogue, reproaching him for not “coming down to the Piraeus” often enough. Cephalus immediately mentions his own inability to reciprocate by coming up to the town because of difficulties of old age. He says, “If it were still easy (εἰ μὲν γὰρ ἐγὼ ἔτι ἐν δυνάμει ἢ τοῦ ῥαδίως) for me to walk to town, you wouldn’t have to come here” (328c). Cephalus uses the word ἔτι or ‘still’ with capability, or δυνάμει, in a conditional clause. The complaints that his peers make regarding old age are complaints about the impingement of time on possibility. He relates his desire for conversation with his desire to see Socrates and so he stresses that Socrates needs to come more often (πυκνότερον δεῦρο) (328d). Cephalus explains that his desire for conversation is inversely proportionate with his desire for physical pleasures (328d). The first words point towards the same concern with temporality that this dissertation has examined. The statements of Socrates confirm this. He stresses his interest in examining his life as a whole. He says,

I enjoy talking with the very old (τοῖς σπόδρα πρεσβύταις), for we should ask them, as we might ask those who have traveled a road (ὁδόν) that we too will probably have to follow, what kind of road it is, whether rough and difficult or smooth and easy. And I’d gladly find out from you what you think about this, as you have reached the point the poet calls “the threshold of old age (328d-e).

Socrates brings together here everything that has already been said in the dialogue.

Socrates went down to the Piraeus and he and Glaucon are ‘arrested’ on the road home by Polemarchus and his friends. Then at Polemarchus’ house, Cephalus remarks that

Socrates needs to come down to the Piraeus often because his own age keeps Cephalus off the road. Socrates knows that he too will go down the road into old age and so asks Cephalus about it. He cannot, of course, know whom or what he will meet on the road, only its basic contours. If one is prepared for these then one may be better prepared to meet those occurrences that one cannot foresee. The remaining remarks of Cephalus testify to this.

Cephalus answers not only with his own opinions, but also reports of those who are in his age group, or generation. The word that Cephalus uses is ἡλικίαν which means a time of life, or as a substantive, ‘age group’ (Liddell and Scott 1897, *ad loc*). He says that those of the same age “often get together” (329a). Age groups do not only associate with one another. If this were true then, of course, there would be no such thing as the education or the corruption of the youth. Nevertheless, it is age-group which is here mentioned as a form of alliance of association, as opposed to national identity, clan, *deme*, or any other such affiliations. When the age group of Cephalus comes together,

the majority complain about the lost pleasures they remember from their youth, those of sex, drinking parties, feasts, and the other things that go along with them, and they get angry as if they had been deprived of important things and had lived well but are now hardly living at all (329a).

This group is unable to see their present situation in a clear fashion. In fact, he tells us that they all but define life, or its value, as the “lost pleasures remembered from their youth.”

Another faction of the elderly do not complain about the loss of the pleasures of youth, but “moan about the abuse heaped on old people by their relatives (οἰκεῶν), and because of this they repeat over and over that old age is the cause of many evils” (329a-

b). For these it is the social implications of old age that seem onerous. Cephalus thinks that both groups are mistaken “for if old age were really the cause, I should have suffered in the same way and so should everyone else of my age (ἡλικίας)” (329b).

In order to explain the true cause, Cephalus recites a story where someone asks Sophocles about sex and he replies “I am very glad to have escaped from all that, like a slave who has escaped from a savage and tyrannical master” (329c). Cephalus claims that we have many mad masters from which age helps to free us.

The real cause isn't old age (γῆρας), Socrates, but the way people live (τρόπος τῶν ἀνθρώπων). If they are moderate and contented (κόσμιοι καὶ εὐκόλοιοι), old age, too, is only moderately (μετρίως) onerous; if they aren't, both old age and youth are hard to bear (329d).

If we read this in light of what we have already seen, we could say that the miseries come from the tendency to define pleasure in terms of the moment rather than the life as a whole. When one is a youth one is obsessed with the momentary pleasures of youth. When one is old, one may still be obsessed with the momentary pleasures of youth, but now with their present absence.

Socrates asks Cephalus whether he is not happier than others in old age because he is wealthy. Cephalus and his sons were among the wealthiest families in Attica. They were Syracusean-born shield-manufacturers, or arms-dealers. Cephalus claims that wealth is somewhat accidental. It can keep one from suffering certain things, but it cannot make one happy. Cephalus first quotes Themistocles. “When someone from Seriphus insulted him by saying that his high reputation was due to his city and not to himself, he replied that, had he been a Seriphian, he wouldn't be famous, but neither would the other even if he had been Athenian” (329e-330a). This acknowledges the element of chance in our

fates but does not allow them to be counted either as a cause.<sup>323</sup> One cannot control the circumstances of one's life, but one can respond to them in a variety of ways. In his next statement Cephalus compares wealth with nationality. He says, "The same applies to those who aren't rich and find old age hard to bear. A good person wouldn't easily bear old age if he were poor, but a bad one wouldn't be at peace with himself even if he were wealthy" (330a).

The tragedy of temporality is that there was no way that he could have foreseen that his son and heir Polemarchus would be killed precisely because of his city of origin (at least negatively, i.e. that it was somewhere other than Athens) and his wealth.

Theognis and Peison pointed out to the other members of the Thirty that "among the resident aliens there were some who were embittered against the administration, and that therefore they had an excellent pretext for appearing to punish while in reality making money" (Lysias XII. 6-7). The Thirty were able to use foreign origin as a pretext to take money. "But our wealth impelled them to act as injuriously towards us as others might from anger aroused by grievous wrongs" (XII. 19).<sup>324</sup>

Socrates' question about inheritance brings the discussion again towards death. Cephalus describes the differences in fortune that the generations of his family have experienced (330b). Then Socrates asks him what is "the greatest good you've received from being wealthy?" (333d).

Cephalus is aware that his account of death may not persuade many people. They have been discussing wealth (πλούτος) and Cephalus turns the discussion towards the

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<sup>323</sup> Cf. *Protagoras* 345b-c.

<sup>324</sup> In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle says that "even if someone has lived in blessedness until old age, and has died appropriately, many fluctuations of his descendants' fortunes may still happen to him" (100a20-25).

underworld. He has shown how many of the aged are obsessed with the distant pleasures of their youth. Now he tells us that when one is “closer to what happens in Hades and has a clearer view of it, or whatever it is, he is filled with foreboding and fear, and he examines his life to see whether he has been unjust to anyone” (330e). This is, of course, not the time that one should begin examining one’s life, asking after the fact, whether or not they have been just. “If he finds many injustices in his life, he awakes from sleep in terror, as children do, and lives in anticipation of bad things” (330e). Not anticipating one’s life, or looking at it as a whole, forces one to contemplate it as such, when it is too late. This in turn forces one’s glance forward into the underworld and the many bad things to come. Money can help us avoid doing shameful things and thus eliminate a few injustices for which we may have to pay later. We see that eventually we will be forced to look at our lives as a whole and it is, therefore, better to do it sooner than later.

Many turn to philosophy at an old age, when, on the one hand, their desires subside, and on the other, death draws near. Polemarchus, who here inherits the argument and a promise of complete inheritance, turned to philosophy, we are told, before he died at a young age. The difference is that he did not see his death coming immediately. This is perhaps the point. We know that death will come and we do not know when and so one must live in such a way as those old men who think about the justice and injustice of their actions, as if death is always approaching. Yet, the *Republic* (book VIII particularly) will show us that a good man is not enough; the generational nature of our life makes politics necessary.

The account inherited by Polemarchus says that justice is “to give each what is owed to him” (331d).<sup>325</sup> Plato has the character of Polemarchus defend this claim, because his fate provides an ironic exemplum of how this definition can be disastrously unjust unless someone truly knows what is owed. One may claim with Lysias that

This was not the treatment we deserved (ἀξίους) at the city’s hands, when we had produced all our dramas for the festivals, and contributed many special levies; when we showed ourselves men of orderly (κοσμίους) life, and performed every duty laid on us (προσταττόμενον) (Lysias XII. 20).

Without any standard of truth, then it is a matter of the stronger enforcing what he believes is owed to him and rather than receiving what he was “owed” for his service to the city

Polemarchus received from the Thirty their accustomed order to drink hemlock, with no statement made as to the reason for his execution...And when he was being brought away dead from the prison, although we had three houses amongst us, they did not permit the funeral to be conducted from any of them, but they hired a small hut in which to lay him out (XII. 18).

The example of Polemarchus tragically shows that a seemingly reasonable definition such as that offered by Cephalus and inherited by Polemarchus, has no stability unless there is a standard by which to determine what is owed to each.<sup>326</sup> If each determines what is owed to him or her, then might truly makes right and justice is the “advantage of the stronger” (338c).<sup>327</sup> In that case, if the maniac, who demands his weapons back, is stronger than the one to whom he lent them, it is just for the maniac to take them (331e).

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<sup>325</sup> Cf. Critias’ definition of sophrosune at *Charmides* 161bff.

<sup>326</sup> Devin Stauffer points out that Polemarchus’ statement of the definition differs from his father’s in that it “leaves out part of telling the truth” (2001, 27).

<sup>327</sup> That Critias’ definition is so similar to Polemarchus’ shows the danger of disagreement about what is owed.

Plato sets the *Republic* at the house of Polemarchus to show just how serious this discussion is, and the human toll such man men may exact.

In this chapter I have shown how Plato uses the figures of Cephalus and Polemarchus in *Republic* I to set up the effects that the passage of time and relativism have on the effects of a particular conception of justice. The same conception of justice that paid off for Cephalus, was disastrous for Polemarchus. In order to show this Plato has relied upon his readers' independent information regarding these characters, most obviously Lysias' speech *Against Eratosthenes*. In the next chapter, I examine Socrates' explicit claims about the nature and dangers of generational decline as they occur in *Republic* VIII.

## Chapter 11

### On Generations and Corruption in *Republic VIII*

In *Republic VIII*, Plato presents his most specific and pessimistic view of human generations and the decline that often accompanies generations. This chapter shows that it is not only time within an individual's life that makes virtue so difficult, but intergenerational time, or history, compounds the problem and makes proper education essential. I show that book VIII uses this experience of time and the multiple influences within a city—beginning with individual households—to show that if one does not establish a just society and leaves justice to chance, then the generational nature of human life will compound this careless error until it reaches tyranny.<sup>328</sup>

#### Isomorphism and Decline

Since Aristotle, commentators on *Republic VIII* have been vexed by Plato's account of decline in Book VIII. Julia Annas complains that the account is “confusing and confused” (1986, 294). When we look at Aristotle's criticism of the *Republic* in *Politics I* and recall Socrates' reiteration of the importance of “the community of women and children” at the end of VII and the beginning of VIII, we see that the household (οἶκος) is the element missing from most accounts of the unjust regime. The account of decline will necessarily appear confused if one does not take the household into consideration. It is the household that begins and furthers each step of decline in both the city and the soul. In this chapter I highlight the effect of the household on the decline of

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<sup>328</sup> Perhaps Plato is pointing out the impossibility of such a project—or at least the radical difficulty of it—and explaining the inevitability of tyranny in human society.

the city and the soul in book VIII. In so doing, I will show that it is the reintroduction of the household that destroys the analogy between the city and the soul and allows for generational decline. I will show how the passage of time affects larger groups—households, clubs, factions and cities—and how these in turn affect the individual’s experience of this passage.

Jonathan Lear<sup>329</sup> argues that the point of VIII is precisely that what he calls the isomorphism between the city and the soul is no longer simple, because of the processes Lear calls externalization and internalization. Lear defines externalization as “the process, whatever it is, by which Plato thought a person fashions something in the external world according to a likeness in his psyche” (Lear 1992, 192) and internalization as “the process, whatever it is, that Plato thought grounded cultural influence” (Lear 1992, 190).

Lear argues that internalization and externalization account for the isomorphism—or the lack of it—existing between the city and the soul.<sup>330</sup> “The point of Plato’s argument is that there is only one relatively stable equilibrium position between inside and outside. Only the just polis and its citizens are so structured that the various internalizations and externalizations will maintain harmony in each” (Lear 1992, 207).

Of an unjust city or psyche Lear says,

So for any pathological structure  $F^*$ , one should not expect that an  $F^*$  polis is an immediate and simple externalization of  $F^*$  citizens. Nor should one think that  $F^*$  citizens are shaped by a simple internalization of the structure of the  $F^*$  polis. The

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<sup>329</sup> I am greatly indebted to Lear’s article and agree with it on many of its main points. I think, however, that Lear’s account leaves out an important element and thus fails to reach a comprehensive understanding of the issues he discusses. My purpose is to flesh out that account and answer several other questions by an analysis of the household’s role in internalization and externalization.

<sup>330</sup> Myles Burnyeat claims that “The city side of the analogy takes over” in Book VIII, but he is speaking primarily in a formal sense, “The soul is depicted in ever more vividly political terms” (1997, 226). It is my intention to show why this is the case.

whole point of F\* being pathological is that no such simple mirroring relationship can occur (1992, 207 n.112).

Lear's account is compelling. It seems clear that a lack of harmony between city and soul is the hallmark of pathology, or injustice. Lear is effectively saying that there is not proper analogy between the city and the soul precisely because they are pathological and they are pathological because there is not a proper relation between them. It seems as if Plato maintains a parallel between unjust cities and unjust souls, but the point is that each term in the isomorphism is itself skewed due to an improper relation with the other. The real beginning of this impropriety lies in the private household.

In the explanation that follows, Lear accounts for one of the elements that produces the disanalogous relation between the city and the soul. He says,

So, for example, the democratic polis is shaped not only by the degenerate son of the oligarchy, but also by the rebellious poor (556c-557a). However, the rebellious poor also had their psyches shaped via internalizations of previous externalizations of oligarchic rulers. And both they and the democratic man—the metaphorical and literal sons of the oligarchy—help to shape the democratic polis via externalization of the structures of their psyches (207 n. 122).

The relation as Lear states it is still exclusively between the psyche and the city, or the internal and external.<sup>331</sup> He complicates the account by showing that the 'other' psyches are also formed by the same process of internalization. He wants to portray Plato's account as "a dynamic account of the psychological transactions between the inside and the outside of a person's psyche, between a person's inner life and his cultural environment, between intrapsychic and interpsychic relations" (Lear 1992, 184). In attempting to see "what holds a person together" (Lear 1992, 185), Lear discusses the

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<sup>331</sup> At least in terms of the soul of the philosopher, which is the true parallel to kallipolis.

family, but he does not see it as the partition separating the ‘inner life’ from the ‘cultural environment.’ The household, in all but the just city, is the seat of both money and honor.<sup>332</sup> It is also the site within which opposing forces form and create a child, often for different reason. Thus the household is the seat of generational conflict. I will show that the household provides an intermediate level between what one considers internal and external and is the medium of the processes that Lear calls internalization and externalization.

### **Household and The Externalization of Injustice**

Aristotle says “we should all call the household more of a unit than the polis and, and the individual more of a unit than the household” (1261a20-21).<sup>333</sup> Aristotle claims that, because of these degrees of unity, Plato’s attempts at a more unified polis would produce “first a household instead of a polis, and then an individual instead of a household” (1261a18-21). For Aristotle, this means the destruction of the polis. Nevertheless, we can see in his criticism, part of the rationale behind Plato’s attempt to eliminate not the polis, but the household. For, based on Aristotle’s claim, wherever the household is present, any relation between city and soul will be mediated by the household. In the just city one identifies with the entire city as mine.<sup>334</sup> But in the unjust city one must identify first with the household and then identify the household with the

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<sup>332</sup> Even in kallipolis it would seem that the artisans have private houses and money, but the sphere of disturbance is limited by the strict segregation of classes.

<sup>333</sup> James Davidson puts it in a similar way when he says “Between the citizen and the state lay the oikos...In Athens it found itself in a rather precarious position, squeezed between the stronger claims of individual and polis. For the special relationship between city and citizen which is such a defining feature of classical Greece in general and of democratic Athens in particular could only be achieved by damping down other affiliations that might get in the way”(1998, 183).

<sup>334</sup> Cf. *Republic* 462c and *Politics* 1261a33-1262a30. It is worth noting that the ‘sense’ of family must not be eliminated, but rather it must be transferred to the city (463d).

city. One would most logically identify with the thing most like oneself and through it with something less like one's self. This is the essence of the argument given by Socrates at 415a, 423e-424a, 449d, 462c-464c.

The private household is the fundamental locus of both wealth (property) and honor and in it the two are inseparable. Household relations in Athens were more complicated than ours are. Since the pre-industrial household is the site of production as well as consumption, the Greeks meant by the household or οἶκος much of what we mean by the 'private sector.'<sup>335</sup>

One chose one's marriage partner (or one's father chose for one) very carefully. There were economic alliances, ancestral nobility and the simple dowry itself to consider. Indeed, when Glaucon is suggesting that the unjust man receive the benefits of justice, he says,

He rules his city because of his reputation for justice; he marries (γαμεῖν) into any family he wishes; he gives his children to anyone he wishes; he has contracts and partnerships with anyone he wants and in all these ways he profits . . . and he becomes wealthy, benefiting his friends and harming his enemies (τούς τε εὖ ποιεῖν καὶ τοὺς ἐχθροὺς βλάπτειν)" (362b2-c1).

Marriages, contracts, and partnership are sources of *philia* and are at least potential sources of profit, honor, or pleasure. So, it is the identification with the household as mine (instead of with the city as 'mine')<sup>336</sup> that I create negative conditions in society at large which inadvertently affect the children to whom I hoped to bequeath a better life. That is to say that the conditions of my achievement of the ends proscribed for me by my

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<sup>335</sup> The household was also a center of religion, but we must recall that the reforms of the *Republic* also contain extensive religious reforms.

<sup>336</sup> 462c1-2

overall conception of the good, will necessarily change the larger cultural situation and will affect my children in unexpected ways. Lear describes the situation as follows:

His son, having his appetites both encouraged and held down, becomes an interpsychic correlate of the appetites within the father. However, as a member of the outer world, the son is open to other polis influences. The oligarchic father encouraged prodigality outside the family, but Plato's point is that this prodigality cannot, finally, be kept outside (1992, 203).

The household was certainly not an insulated entity free from external influences. But the father always thinks that it is. The identification with the family and the attendant attempt to gain more money, honor, or pleasure for what is 'mine' causes a blindness to the conditions of society as a whole. One always wants one's family to be an "outstandingly happy group" (420b7).

The household was, in fact, the primary means of both the acquisition and the reinvestment of wealth.<sup>337</sup> Aristotle notes the acquisitive nature of the household. Even acquisition not directly concerned with the household arises ultimately out of it.<sup>338</sup>

Secrecy provided by households is one of first causes of strife in the city.

Such people will desire money just as those in oligarchies do, passionately adoring gold and silver in secret. They will possess private treasuries and storehouses, where they can keep it hidden, and have houses to enclose them, like private nests, where they can spend lavishly either on women or anything else they wish (Ἐπιθυμηταὶ δέ γε, ἦν δ' ἐγώ, χρημάτων οἱ τοιοῦτοι ἔσονται, ὥσπερ οἱ ἐν ταῖς ὀλιγαρχίαις, καὶ τιμῶντες ἀγρίως ὑπὸ σκότου χρυσόν τε καὶ ἄργυρον, ἅτε κεκτημένοι ταμιεῖα καὶ οἰκείους θησαυρίους, οἳ θέμενοι ἂν αὐτὰ κρύψειαν, καὶ αὖ περιβόλους οἰκήσεων, ἀτεχνῶς νεοττιὰς ἰδίας, ἐν αἷς ἀναλίσκοντες γυναιξὶ τε καὶ οἷς ἐθέλοιεν ἄλλοις πολλὰ ἂν δαπανῶντο) (5484-b).

The ability to acquire in secret creates both distrust and increases desire and lawlessness.

In this regard it is similar to the ring of Gyges. As the myth shows, when he had the ring,

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<sup>337</sup> When Socrates mentions the abolition of private houses, he does so in terms of 'livelihood' (464b9-c4).

<sup>338</sup> *Politics* I.ix

first of all “he seduced the king’s wife, attacked the king with her help, killed him and took over the kingdom” (360a7-b1).

One not only makes money *through* the house and stores it in its privacy, but one makes money *for* the house; one saves it for the sake of future generations. This is part of “ordering what nature provides”<sup>339</sup> This is made clear by the discussion with Cephalus in Book I. He says,

As a money-maker (χρηματιστής) I’m a sort of mean between my grandfather and my father. My grandfather and namesake inherited about the same amount of wealth (οὐσίαν) as I possess but multiplied it many times. My father, Lysanias, however, diminished that amount to even less than I have now. As for me, I’m satisfied to leave my son’s here not less but a little more than I inherited (330a8-b5).

It is important to notice that Cephalus wants to give more to his children than he had, but not much more. Others, like his grandfather wanted to give much more, while his father, as a result, was able to give much less.<sup>340</sup> In any case one identifies with one’s family as one’s own more than one does with the city for reasons that, as we have just shown, are at least partly economic. This is what we could call the material element of the household and it is one of the reasons Socrates wants to eliminate the family.<sup>341</sup> But, even on this ground floor of the household, we can see that its nature is primarily generational, or

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<sup>339</sup> Cf. *Politics* 1258a25-26. Jowett’s translation.

<sup>340</sup> “The experience of Cephalus’ family seems to have been quite typical in the classical period and fortunes went with an alarming rapidity. By tracing the family connections of those citizens who were on record as performing ‘liturgies’ . . . the historian John Davies was able to calculate approximately the rate of change among the upper echelons of Athenian society. He came up with only one family that was attested in the wealthiest class over five generations and three hundred and fifty-seven families that seemed to pass from ‘rags’ to riches and back to rags in the space of just one generation” (Davidson 1998, 184).

<sup>341</sup> In the remainder of this chapter, I will show other reasons for eliminating the household.

diachronic. One gets both one's wealth and one's character<sup>342</sup> from the previous generation and passes it on to the next; generations are demarcated along familial lines.

Though what we now term economics was an essential element of the household, there was a great deal more involved. The household and the patronymic associated with it, also provided the primary kind of what was called κλέος in the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*. One's honor, or reputation is passed along by family name. So, indeed is citizenship, often regardless of wealth.<sup>343</sup> Before the reforms of Cleisthenes, familial lineage was even more important.<sup>344</sup> Thus, as the seat of both riches and honor the household is an important source of *pleonexia*. Yet there was always a strong link between honor and property, either human (slaves) or material (goods, or what we would call capital, the ability to produce goods). Women, slaves and children increase the honor of the patriarch, but his actions and accomplishments also lend honor to the family.<sup>345</sup> The household is the primary source of honor. One gained honor from one's father (or mother, in the case of Achilles) and later for one's children.

The passage in *Iliad* XVI referred to by Socrates at 545d6-e1 may provide us with an example of the interconnection between privacy and honor. Achilles' honor was hurt because his property was taken from him.<sup>346</sup> The property has symbolic value in the realm of honor or glory. The line referenced by Socrates actually concerns the setting fire to the ships of the Achaeans, which is said to be it a direct result of the *stasis*, or quarrel between Achilles and Agamemnon. Achilles himself says,

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<sup>342</sup> The myth of the metals, beginning at 415a, presents a pervasive comparison between character and monetary value.

<sup>343</sup> Cf. *Politics*. III.ii

<sup>344</sup> Cf. Lintott (1982) 6,126.

<sup>345</sup> Cf 549c8. I will return to this below.

<sup>346</sup> This explains the easy transition from timocracy to oligarchy. It seems that it is often the same objects of wealth that have a double value as objects of honor (551a5).

The girl the sons of the Achaeans chose out for *my honor*,  
and I won her with my own spear, and stormed a strong-fenced city,  
is taken back out of my hands by powerful Agamemnon ,  
The *son of Atreus*, as if I were a *dishonored* vagabond (*Iliad* XVI 55-58).<sup>347</sup>

This passage highlights the connection between ancestral property, power, marriage, and honor. It is because “Agamemnon, son of Atreus...goes in greater authority” (XVI.53) that he takes the woman, who is a piece of property, an object of pleasure and a sign of honor, from Achilles. This struggle over marriage (in a loose sense), honor, and possession brought the flame of the Trojans upon the Achaean ships. Neither Agamemnon nor Achilles thought of themselves in terms of the whole Achaean army, rather both thought in terms of their own honor and possessions, their potentially permanent and presently temporary household. The household keeps persons from doing what their natural abilities prescribe for them. This is one of the main reasons the house must be eliminated. It is a nexus of *pleonexia*. I want more; and since I will die, I want more for my family. If I have a private house and family, we will all mean something different by ‘mine’. Of this Socrates says,

If different people apply the term to different things, one would drag into his own house whatever he could separate from the others, and another would drag into a different house to different wife and children and this would make for private pleasures and pains at private things ( ὀνομάζοντας μὴ τὸ αὐτὸ ἀλλ ἄλλον ἄλλο, τὸν μὲν εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ οἰκίαν ἔλκοντα ὅτι ἂν δύναται χωρὶς τῶν ἄλλων κτήσασθαι, τὸν δὲ εἰς τὴν ἑαυτοῦ ἑτέραν οὔσαν, καὶ γυναικὰ τε καὶ παῖδας ἑτέρους, ἡδονὰς τε καὶ ἀλγηδόνας ἐμοιοῦντας ἰδίῳ ὄντων ἰδίᾳς) (464c-d).

It is this identification with the family over the polis, as we saw above, that allows for the production of detrimental societal relations. One must identify with the entire polis as

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<sup>347</sup> The translation is Lattimore’s.

“kin” or there will be competing claims for loyalty. The identification with the family causes one to neglect the welfare, or happiness, of the rest of the city, wanting only to “benefit one’s friends and harm one’s enemies” (332d4).

Other forms of extra-familial association developed in the private sphere, but they were always an outgrowth of the privacy of the family. Anything secret will be held in suspicion. Once one moves beyond the individual, the private threatens the public. Symposia and drinking groups were one important form of association, which, like the family, threatened the separation, or what amounts to the unity, of the public and the private.<sup>348</sup> Instead of making the private public, as the just regime, such groups arouse fear that they will privatize what is public and publicize what is private, not for the good of the whole, but for the good of their group. Oswyn Murray notes that “the symposion remained largely a private affair and aristocratic preserve; but the social attitudes which it existed to promote required public display” (1990, 150). The couches Glaucon asks for at 372d-e are furnishings for a private house and even a private room within that house (the *ἀνδρόν*).<sup>349</sup> The drinking clubs, or sympotic groups, were held in suspicion during the democracy because of the secrecy of their meetings.<sup>350</sup> In reality, however, these associations were often based on the family and their activities could range from business, to sex and politics. Whether or not one has actual family members in one’s drinking group or political factions, it is the privacy of which the family is the primary instance that makes these other forms of private association possible.

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<sup>348</sup> Even Socrates and those with whom he conversed were clearly deemed dangerous by the city.

<sup>349</sup> For the privacy of the *andron*, see Davidson (1998) 44.

<sup>350</sup> Fears of conspiracy are always the result of secrecy. See the almost incessant series of theories concerning the Masons.

That is not to say, however, that these other forms may not eventually overtake the family, as happens in Thucydides' description of the "civil war" in Corcyra in 427, "Family relations were a weaker tie than party membership." (III. 82). We shall see that, for Plato, the forces within a household can destroy the household. Plato seems to have learned something important by events like those described by Thucydides: if the household can be destroyed by factions or other forms of civil strife, it may also be eliminated by justice.<sup>351</sup> The household is not just the casualty of civil war, for Plato, but one of its root causes. If the household is the cause of civil strife, Plato cannot consider the household 'natural,' for then justice is simply conventional, as Glaucon claimed (359a2). In the description of the 'primitive polis' (372b5-6) there is no mention of the family or the household. This does something to naturalize its absence in kallipolis. Myles Burnyeat remarks, "No details are given to clarify the sexual arrangements, but if, as seems clear, the children's mothers eat, drink and then have sex with all the men...It looks as though Socrates is sketching a primitive anticipations of the arrangements he will propose" (Burnyeat 1997, 230).<sup>352</sup> Indeed, he is doing more than that. In his description of the primitive polis, Socrates is denaturalizing the household as the fundamental mode of human organization.

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<sup>351</sup> The destruction of the household in stasis, or civil strife is not permanent. As *Republic VIII* makes clear, it resurfaces even after its elimination by regime.

<sup>352</sup> It is interesting that though Glaucon sees justice as conventional, his story of origins likewise neglects the household as the fundamental unit of society (358e2, 359b5). Cf. Malcolm Schofield, "This general approach to founding the city was taken up by Aristotle, but with the crucial difference that *Pol.* I.2 makes the basic form of self-sufficient community the household" (1999, 72).

## **Household and the Internalization of Injustice**

The identification with the household does not only introduce injustice into the city, but also into the soul. We have already seen the ways in which the identification with the family creates new social conditions, which in turn detrimentally affect the family and the individual psyche. It is this aspect of internalization which Lear and others focus on. Even within the family, however, there are many sources of psychic conflict. Since the household is less unified than the individual, but rears the individual, the family creates psychic discord from the very beginning. For Plato, all families are dysfunctional because of their plurality.

The household consists of the ‘master’ the wife, the children and the slaves and property (*Politics* 1253b,ff.). Each of these receives a different education, due either to status, or in the case of father and son, time. Even if one is not formally educated, one is always acculturated to hold something as good. Any group with a different education will necessarily hold something different to be good, perhaps without even being aware of it. Aristotle says that,

both classes (the ruled as well as the ruler) must share in goodness, but there must be different kinds of goodness( one for the ruler one for the ruled)—just as there are also different kinds of goodness among the classes of the ruled (1260a1-5).

While it may seem as if Aristotle comes close to quoting Plato here, the context makes Aristotle’s argument completely different. For Plato, the only difference between the young and the old within one class should be age and educational advancement. The young should respect the old. So, Plato maintains something like Aristotle’s paternal power within the class, but eliminates marital power and keeps the other, that between

ruled and ruler, outside of the class. The entire city is the family (415a-c), but each class will have its own good. Guards are not in constant contact with producers. Effectively one's class is one's immediate family—the principle locus of rearing—and within a class there cannot be different conceptions of the good. This is an important aspect in the elimination of the family. Inequality among those rearing the same infant is potentially disastrous to the character of the child. If only the guards educate the future guards, then there will be no such disparity, but if each member of the family educates the child, then the disparity will increase.

Socrates makes this clear when he argues for educational equality between the sexes, “it’s foolish to take seriously any standard of what is fine and beautiful other than the good” (453e1-2). The community of women and children is the “greatest good” (464) and makes the “whole difference” (449d), partly because it eliminates the intrafamilial strife which will be among the first things internalized by the child, because “it’s at that time that it is most malleable and takes on any pattern one wishes to impress on it” (377a10-b1). Before a child is ever exposed to the polis influences he or she is bombarded with the various desires of his or her mother, father, other relatives and slaves. The “other human beings” who first project images are family members and the wall of the cave is the privacy of the household.<sup>353</sup>

The first way in which the child is conditioned by the family pre-exists the child itself. It is beyond the scope of this chapter to offer a complete analysis of Plato’s program of eugenics. Nevertheless, to whatever extent he takes his analogy with

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<sup>353</sup> I am referring to Myles Burnyeat’s discussion of the cultural implications of the allegory of the cave (1997, 239).

Glaucon's hunting dogs (459a) seriously in what we would term a biological sense, the family breeds worse children.

Lear claims any character type will organize his family around the good, which organizes the rest of his life (1992, 202). If one marries for honor and one marries someone who was already raised according to honor then one is not thinking about the good of the child to be produced, but about honor. Likewise with money, or variety, so that the stock of future generations will already be predisposed towards these goods even before they are born. They are less carefully bred as a result of their parents' often conflicting notions of what is good and why one should marry.<sup>354</sup> It is clear, however, that the 'biological' damage is much less significant than the educational.

Women will be limited to certain goods by their own education and will marry for the highest good expected of them as women.<sup>355</sup> Socrates ironically claims that chance will seem to govern sexual unions in the ideal city (460b). This statement is ironic for in every other city the foundation of households involves little more than the chance combination of incompatible goods within a private space. Furthermore, these incompatible goods are set up in random orderings. Households like

buildings undertaken and completed by a single architect are usually more attractive and better ordered than those which many architects have tried to patch

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<sup>354</sup> It is worth noting that if each character-type procreates or marries on the basis of its overall conception of the good then the democratic man may indeed be like the city here and have any kind of hereditary constitution for a son, since he would seek sexual variety. Sexual variety tends to destroy the family by eliminating the legitimacy of offspring. Thus, the household may be destroyed by the variety that determines the democratic man. If, however, he raised the children, then they would be potential tyrants who, according to Plato, may end as patricides, again destroying the family. I return to this topic below.

<sup>355</sup> The household will be detrimental in terms of breeding not only because of the flawed ideas around which we construct our families, but also because of the enforced monogamy of women. If a good man and a woman produce bad offspring in a traditional family, they would try again with one another and not with other people. Men had a wide range of sexual options open to them, while women were often and for the most part cloistered away. See Davidson, 73-136 for an extensive account of Athenian sexual relations.

up by using old walls that had been built for different purposes (Descartes 1998, 7).<sup>356</sup>

Only in separated but interdependent class can a city have different goods. Everyone within what we might call a ‘rearing-unit’ will have the same job, either that of ruler or that of soldier and the only difference will be in terms of what Aristotle terms paternal power. The division of labor only works if the classes are raised separately from one another. Since that is impossible within the household, it must be eliminated.

For better or worse, when there is a traditional household present, each component (the objects of paternal, marital, and master relations) plays a role and each organizes its life around a different good. We saw that these together can nevertheless form a single power, a “small city” (*Politics* 1252a23-24), which fragments the city. The first argument for the elimination of the family thus had to do with the injustice it externalized into the polis due to competing senses of identification. Now we see that the household likewise introduces strife into the individual before he ever enters the polis, in terms of both “breeding and rearing.” One’s best intentions can do nothing to prevent the eventual decay in character as long as there is a household which is less unified than the individual and more unified than the city. Even if a man is just, when he has a child, if he does not have a just wife and a just polis, that child will most likely not be just.<sup>357</sup> One of the points that Plato is making is that, without a just city and proper education, it is impossible for the man to have a just wife. The internal strife introduced by the family is

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<sup>356</sup> Descartes’ analogy between ‘house’ and ‘consciousness’ permeates the second part of the *Discourse*. It is perhaps for this reason that he needs to stress that he doesn’t wish to bring the entire city down, as Plato wished. Descartes is, of course, speaking of houses as physical structures, rather than households, nevertheless, the point regarding the tendency of things designed by a single hand to be “usually more attractive and better ordered” is not affected by this difference.

<sup>357</sup> We shall see this in our examination of the timocratic man below.

one of the main arguments for the equality of women and the elimination of the family and the equal education of women.

A human being is generated by more than one human (454d-e) and this biological fact is one of the most potent sources of confusion and stasis in the human psyche.<sup>358</sup> If women help raise and educate children and are uneducated themselves they will instill a great number of detrimental opinions in the children, “and the opinions they absorb at that age are hard to erase and apt to become unalterable” (378d5-6). The mothers *believe* “such bad stories about the gods wandering at night in the shapes of strangers from foreign lands” and only thus do they “terrify their children with them” and “make them more cowardly” (381d7-e3). Because the mother herself believes the tales, she is possessed of a “true falsehood” (382a5) and will thus have no idea as to what to pass on to her children as true or to best enable them to see the truth.

Inequality in the education of women will be internalized by the child and will affect the overall character of the male and female children and thus women should receive the same education as the men. This is roughly the argument as Annas presents it (1986, 181-185) and her point is well taken that “Plato’s interest is neither in women’s rights or their preferences as they see them, but rather with the production of common good” (1986, 181).<sup>359</sup> This is certainly Plato’s intention, for the point of his analysis of the rearing is that if there is more than one common good among those who rear children

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<sup>358</sup> Eventually, even when managed as well as possible, the “nuptial number” will produce too many children possessing qualities that differ considerably from those of their parents. Divorce, in contemporary society makes this quite clear to the child itself. When the goods of the parents are recognized as incompatible and they split up on the grounds of ‘irreconcilable differences’ and establish two separate households, everyone involved sees the strife clearly. Plato wants to say that all households are at least potentially two. Thus, Plato may tell us that it is not divorce which effects the psyche of the child as much as the tensions of which the divorce was a manifestation.

<sup>359</sup> Justice is ultimately the common good and so to Annas’ account we must also add that, regardless of the quality of offspring, women must do what they can.

then the children will be disadvantaged by confusion. Aristotle, like Meno, thinks that women will do their best, if they stick to their own jobs (1260b18). While Plato thinks that it is just for each to do his or her part, he also realizes that if part of a woman's job is to raise the very young children, then women must be educated in the same way as men. Thus, the point is that Plato is not interested in the "rights" of any particular group and he attempts to eliminate all potential factions, limiting such differentiation to the three classes. So, while Plato is not particularly interested in "women's rights," he promotes what he sees as the well-being of all citizens by eliminating sources of confusion and faction.<sup>360</sup> Thus, women must receive the education of their class in order that the present and future state of the city may be one of health and justice. Though he is interested in the whole, Plato also seems to hold that what is good for the whole is best for all individual members of each group as well and Plato must have thought that such radical reform would also be both better and more pleasant for individual women.

The lack of education in women was a problem of pedagogy for Plato, but it was by no means the only problem. In most of the unjust regimes catalogued in *VIII*, the father also lacks education and is formed by a mistaken concept of the good. The father had a much greater ability to affect the son because he was the primary power in a household.<sup>361</sup>

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<sup>360</sup> Of course, any talk of "rights" in an ancient context is problematic, for Plato is concerned with classes of women, rather than individual women.

<sup>361</sup> The father will instill into a child the apparent good for which he should marry (363a1), but the son's interpretation of this good will be different from the father's.

## The Conflicting Goods Within the Family

The father of the timocrat is a good man who minds his own business in a bad city (549c). Though the text does not say explicitly why he married, it is likely that he married for justice. It is part of his job to marry and reproduce.

[H]e's not very concerned about money (ὀρώσης μὴ σφόδρα περὶ χρήματα σπουδάζοντα) and . . . he doesn't fight back when he's insulted, whether in private or in public in the courts, but is indifferent to everything of that sort. She also sees him concentrating his mind on his own thoughts, neither honoring nor dishonoring her too much (ἑαυτὴν δὲ μήτε πάνυ τιμῶντα μήτε ἀτιμάζοντα) (549c-d).

This makes it quite clear, on the other hand, that the wife married for money and honor, for she is “angered by this” and disparages her husband to their son “over and over again” (549d4-e1). She is apparently largely confined to the society of women and slaves and has not received an education. Honor deriving from her husband or son is the highest good available to her.<sup>362</sup> The slaves feel the same way and both contribute to the son's discontent. The son is raised in the household composed of these disparate elements and the household is likewise in a polis composed of disparate elements (it doesn't matter which other regime, simply in a badly governed one). He sees that “those in the city who do their own work are called fools and of little account, while those who meddle in other people's affairs are honored and praised” (550a).

This is the level of conflict recognized by Lear, that between the household influences and the polis influences. But, the conflicting influences within the household are earlier and more pervasive in the child's development. The mother was formed by the

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<sup>362</sup> The timocratic man's mother is “at a disadvantage among the other women as a result” of her husband's absence from the ranks of the rulers (549c6-7).

views of previous generations which were haphazardly composed of mixed goods gathered from both the family and the polis. The wife wants honor, and money and the husband wants justice. The husband is clearly more educated than the wife. He gives her neither too much nor too little honor, but what is too much or too little for him will be different than it is for her. In no other stage are the parents in open conflict with one another. Indeed, this is the only regime where the wife is said to disagree with her husband and even they are not said to quarrel or to be miserable; she just complains again and again to the son (449c-d). But, like the timocracy itself, the marriage was a compromise between two concepts of the good (547b6) and will produce a child who is psychically compromised in the same way.<sup>363</sup>

Even if the timocratic son were to choose reason over honor, the grounds of his choice would have already been determined by his mother's desire for honor and he would not be as reasonable or just as his father, except by chance. The very conditions of his birth make him fragmented and he will most likely pass this fragmentation on and compound it.<sup>364</sup> It is tempting to think that the child might "side" completely with its father and not compromise or reconcile any different positions. Unfortunately, Plato seems to hold a more pessimistic position. Since the child is educated before he or she has a chance to "choose" what we would call "unconscious" grounds for the child's decisions have already been made at the mimetic level (378d).

The oligarchic man is not concerned with education (554b4), but because of the private household, he is the one who educates his son. When the oligarchic man chooses

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<sup>363</sup> This is one answer to the question of why Pericles and others were unable to make their own children wise. Not only did most of the politicians not take sufficient care to educate their sons, they also married for the wrong reasons and created unforeseen consequences by means of their policies and actions. Cf. *Protagoras* 319e-320a and 324d-328a. Cf. also chapter 3 above.

<sup>364</sup> Cf. 461a-b

a “blind leader for his chorus” (554b5-6), he is also providing the steps for his son’s antistrophe and becomes a blind leader himself. Education has little to do with his acquisition and thus he ignores it. But he has force to back him up and to hold down the desires produced by acquisition. His son, however, does not have the force that his father does and succumbs to the desires and spends, rather than makes, the money.

The lack of equality in education and the marital system of classical Athens would have almost assured that a man would marry a woman worse than he. For instance, if one chooses a bride for money, like the oligarch, then one will already marry the daughter of someone who is already an oligarch who has neglected education for acquisition. Thus marrying according to one’s dominant good (if it is anything but justice) is in most cases to marry someone unlike oneself, because one makes a choice based on the qualities of the girl’s father rather than on those that she herself possesses. She is already a generation removed from the goods valued by her father. This is both a result and a cause of the decline that Plato outlines in Book VIII.

It is not the negative quality of any single parent that causes the deterioration that Plato describes, but the difference and multiplicity of influences on a young child’s psyche. If we return for a moment to the timocrat’s mother we can see the effect that even the slightest disagreement can have on the entire series of births. The father was just, only the mother desired money and honor among women (549c-e). This does not seem so bad and the timocrat is really not a bad man, but the effects of this rift do not stop with the timocrat. The wife’s good is not only the seed of honor in the youth, but also of wealth,

which will torture him until it comes to full fruition in his own son.<sup>365</sup> This effect multiplies with every generation so that the simple love of honor, in the less powerful parent, is enough, Socrates seems to be saying, to produce tyranny eventually. It is not only in Hades that “we pay the penalty of the crimes committed here, either ourselves or our children’s children” (366a5-6).

### **Miasma and Generation Gap**

We have seen that the family must be eliminated by the just city in order to be free of faction and division. It wants to be as static as possible. One of the most important forms of social movement is generational.

F. Scott Fitzgerald is one of the great observers of generational difference. In an early story he wrote:

Some generations are close to those that succeed them; between others the gulf is infinite and unbridgeable. Mrs. Buckner—a woman of character, a member of society in a large Middle Western city— carrying a pitcher of fruit lemonade through her own spacious back yard was progressing across a hundred years. Her own thoughts would have been comprehensible to her great-grandmother; what was happening in the room above the stable would have been entirely unintelligible to both. In what had once served as the coachman’s sleeping apartment, her son and a friend were not behaving in a normal manner, but were so to speak, experimenting in a void.<sup>366</sup>

This passage may help us to illuminate Plato’s ‘historicism.’ I would first like to argue that within each generation there may be “hundred year” stretches during which the generations are similar and mutually intelligible to one another and thus do not change

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<sup>365</sup> This is not to say that it will necessarily come to fruition in the same family, or in a single generation. One of the reasons that the decline occurs is that a variety of types exist within a single city and a single generation.

<sup>366</sup> Fitzgerald, F. Scott. “The Scandal Detectives.” Quoted in Cowley 1951, 7

the household, the constitution or the individual in a great way.<sup>367</sup> But, there will eventually come a point, where the maintenance of these very conditions creates a different social situation (The First World War, in Fitzgerald's case) that fosters the conflicts already present within the individuals of the younger generations.

The conflicting senses of good produce every generation, but, due to the presence of other types within a city—types like Socrates—it seems possible to ward off decline temporarily; but only temporarily, unless radical means, such as those described in the *Republic*, are adopted. Thus, Plato's "sociology" is not strictly "historicist."<sup>368</sup> He does not wish to "predict" what may happen next—this is what the people in the cave do—but to show that something will happen next and that something will be worse if education is left up to the family. Thus, he argues, we should attempt to eliminate the difference between generations and constitutions as much as possible.

Mrs. Buckner did not intentionally produce a son whose goods were unintelligible to her. If we look at Fitzgerald's description of the son we can see how it happens. The son and his friend are enclosed in the privacy of the house and they think they are "experimenting in a void." It is precisely the "void" of the private house that allows one to identify either with one's family, or with 'polis influences' outside the family and thus produce change. Plato's point is that we are never in a void and we cannot trust "the most important thing" to vague experimenting, for our experiments have consequences beyond what we ourselves can see. I have argued that in the *Protagoras*, Socrates maintains that one must look at one's life as a whole—that is rationally—in order to become virtuous.

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<sup>367</sup> I am not saying that Plato sees generations as a hundred years, but that a hundred years may pass without any great generational conflict.

<sup>368</sup> Cf. Popper (1950).

If I am right, the *Republic* suggests that one must look at the city's life as a whole, many generations ahead, when thinking about political actions, if one wants a just city.

The inheritance of mutated psychological states does not occur due to ritual pollution or miasma, but, as we have seen, through the pedagogical pollution of the psyche. A child is both educationally and biologically circumscribed by previous generations. Our cultural and biological possibilities exist as an outcome of the exteriorization of the older generation's psychic conflicts. The younger generation sees its parents from another point of view than they saw themselves and in many ways, the truth of the parent only becomes clear to the child.<sup>369</sup> The household begins in the compromise of marriage and creates a conflicted individual who brings further conflict into the household and through it back into the city. The elimination of the household and the communal raising of children by equally educated members of the same class is the solution Socrates proposes.

The good man, father of the timocrat, never comes to personal ruin, because he does not base his conception of the good either on the community at large or in the family. Thus, as far as his personal virtue is concerned, it does not matter what regime he lives in. Like Socrates, he is concerned with his personal virtue under whatever regime he happens to live. This is a strong part of the argument for the necessity of politics. Personal virtue is possible, but it is something of an anomaly and not easily transmitted to future generations. Though "the just man" may raise his son in a just way, if he raises his son at all it is in an unjust society. Because of the outside influences of this society and

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<sup>369</sup> Thus, Lear's mistake—leaving out the importance of the household in the unjust city—not only blurs his account of the city-soul analogy, but it also makes his account of internalization and externalization less intelligible. He claims that young mainly internalize and old externalize, but he does not recognize its overall importance to the argument.

the other influences within the family, the son will rebel against the father and replacing the true good with an apparent good. The danger is that he is formed so early on by a multiplicity of influences. This means that even if a child has a good model from which to learn, that model is only one among many. The child is forced to ‘adopt’ models when he or she does not yet have the capacity to do so.

Like the conflicted timocrat, part of every son wants to “be more of a man than his father” (550a1). He wants to be better than his father but because he is a product of conflicting notions of what is good, he will not be able to determine clearly what is ‘better’ and his attempts to improve his lot will be at best “experimenting in the void.” It seems that in Plato’s view the attempt of the child to be better than the parent will almost always make the younger generation unwittingly worse. Thus, generational rebellion is the worst form of domestic strife.<sup>370</sup>

The rebellious son is the result of the father’s “experiments” or mutations, as his own children will be. Since these ‘experiments’ are almost exclusively failures, it seems inevitable that the sons will come into contact with the ruinous consequences of the pursuit of these. So the son will first “emulate his father” (553a8. Cf also 550a9-b1) but will soon encounter the ineluctable results of the pursuit of honor or wealth. The timocrat is merely tempted to be “more of a man” than his father. The oligarch then sees his father “crashing against the city, spilling out all his possessions, even his life” (553a7-b1). The

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<sup>370</sup> There are of course counter-examples, the most formidable of which would be the generation that would take the radical measure to found kallipolis. Surely, they recognize the deficiencies of the older generations—all of whom they expel from the city—and attempt to become better than them. This is a peculiar case, for it is one that recognizes the its own actions as part of the problem and attempts to eliminate them, by removing the family. Cases such as contemporary Iran and the later stages of the Soviet Union are interesting. In both cases, positive change seems to occur because of the young people. In both cases, the officials see the change as both detrimental and as a result of influences from outside of the society itself.

father “was either put to death or exiled or was disenfranchised and had all of his property confiscated” (553b1-4) and the son “sees all this, suffers from it, loses his property, and, fearing for his life, immediately drives from his own soul the honor-loving and spirited part that ruled there. Humbled by poverty, he turns greedily to money making (χρηματισμόν)” (553b-c). The bankruptcy (πενία) of the first compromised values will necessarily lead to other compromises and conflicts. The son did not choose to love money, but was compelled to do so because of the poverty brought about by his father’s love of honor.

The democrat “who is reared in the miserly and uneducated manner we described, tastes the honey of the drones” (559c) who were created by his father’s usury (552b-e, 555c) begins to “indulge in every kind of insolence and to adopt their [“sophisticated men”] ways, because of his hatred of his father’s thrift” (572c-d). He is the first to rebel consciously and openly. He is not simply forced by different circumstances to adopt a different good than that of his father, but he despises his father’s miserliness and it is *because* of this hatred that he is insolent. He wants to “inflict every kind of punishment on an unjust father” (378b). It is characteristic of each son that he sees that his father is not just and wants to be a better man. The tragedy is, of course, that they are all right except for the just man’s son in whom a false idea of the good was instilled by his mother and slaves. Thus, from the oligarch down, the sons are accidentally correct in assuming that their fathers are not just, but they have no grounds for their assumption since they do not know what justice is. Since the son was educated by that father, the son will most likely not do better (or not much better), but will probably end up less of a man than his father, unless he meets with a haphazard polis influence like Socrates. The timocrat is the

first to be filled with “the greatest falsehood about the most important things” (377e). He is enacting the stories Hesiod was “telling us about how Uranus behaved, how Cronus punished him for it, and how he was in turn punished by his own son” (377e-378a).<sup>371</sup>

Finally the tyrant rebels against all restraint and thus the family itself. He “would sacrifice his long-loved and irreplaceable mother for a very recently acquired girlfriend” and “for the sake of a newfound and replaceable boyfriend in the bloom of youth, he’d strike his aged and irreplaceable father” (574b7-c3). He would enslave them and uses up all of their possessions (574c). If he needs something from someone he is “willing to fawn on them and make every gesture of friendship, as if he were dealing with his own family (πάντα σχήματα τολμῶντες ποιεῖν ὡς οἰκεῖοι)” (575e5-576a2). He uses violence against his father and is a parricide (569b). The savage part of the tyrant

doesn’t shrink from trying to have sex with a mother, as it supposes, or with anyone else at all, whether man, god, or beast. It will commit any foul murder and there is no food it refuses to eat (571d1-2).

In the myth of *X* we find out that a tyrant would even eat his own children (619b1), thus effectively ending the familial line. But even as the just city maintains those beneficial elements of the family (463d), the tyrant retains its negative elements within himself and ends up embodying the conflicted and secretive nature of the household so that we have “a household instead of a polis, and then an individual instead of a household” (*Politics* 1221a18-21). This tyrannical individual still contains the elements that began the conflict and thus Plato shows that if one does not educate women equally

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<sup>371</sup> Much of the literature excised by Socrates presents either generational rebellion or marital strife. These stories are the greatest falsehoods when they concern the gods, but they are true of the human community when it is dominated by the private household and must be censored in order to halt the perpetuation of such practices among humans.

with men, if one has a household, eventually, one will produce a tyrant who himself “lives like a woman, mostly confined to his own house (καταδεδυκῶς δὲ ἐν οἰκίᾳ τὰ πολλὰ ὡς γυνὴ ζῆ) and envying other citizens” (579b6-c1) in the same way that the just man’s wife did. Further he will be a “panderer to slaves” (579a2). He will have fully embodied and come to live the conflicts which first reared their heads several generations back.<sup>372</sup>

An unjust *person* may not become more unjust as time passes, but he or she will produce a less just person eventually. Timocracy, oligarchy and democracy are not so bad if we look at them statically. But the point is that they are not static. Plato is here similar to a contemporary evolutionary biologist, in so far as he looks at dynamic populations, rather than static constitutions. It is in fact, because of the dynamic nature of populations that there is only one possible static constitution, that which eliminates the generation gap as much as possible by eliminating the family. Even then the very nature of time and birth will eventually cause corruption (546a-e). Other regimes may be able to maintain the appearance of continuity for some period of time, but the haphazard nature of the constitution—built either on compromise or conflict—will inevitably deteriorate further and lead to tyranny.<sup>373</sup> We might say that all political roads do in fact lead to Rome, but the Rome of Caligula and Nero, because of the way education is conducted in all but the ideal regime.

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<sup>372</sup> Of course, these changes do not necessarily occur within a single family. Plato’s scheme requires that a given society contain instantiations of all of the types at any given time (except in kallipolis). In addition, as I have shown, there may be generations in which no decline or perceptible change will occur at all as in the case of Fitzgerald’s Mrs. Buckner and her parents and grandparents.

<sup>373</sup> Cf. “Nevertheless some particular ones (cities) among them are enduring and are not overturned. Yet many, from time to time, sink like ships and perish and have perished and will perish in the future due to the depravity of their steersman and sailor who have acquired the greatest ignorance of the greatest things” (*Statesman* 302a).

## **Generational Decline and Moral Argument**

Aristotle complains of Plato's succession of regimes. He says:

Again we may ask why the ideal state should turn into a state of the Spartan type. Constitutions change, as a rule more readily into an opposite than into a cognate form. The same argument applies to the other changes mentioned by Plato (*Politics* 1316a).

Popper claims that Plato presents us with a kind of historicist sociology in which "he (Plato) will try to understand the laws of historical development. If he succeeds in this, he will of course be able to predict future developments" (Popper 1950, 11). Julia Annas puts the same problem in slightly different words when she asks:

But why should there be precisely four kinds of breakdown that are exactly parallel in city and person? Plato is making a large unwarranted assumption in taking it that the parallel between the unified city and the unified person will be followed by precise parallels between four kinds of differently disunified cities and persons (Annas 1986, 295).

Annas is more explicit than Aristotle and Popper in linking the problems involved in the "historical progressions one from another" (1982, 295) to the failure of the city/soul analogy. If this position were correct it would threaten the moral argument of the *Republic*. If there is some other possible regime, or if the regimes do not have to move in this way, then perhaps the just life is not the best. Aristotle, Popper and Annas, are, however, all mistaken in their assessment of the argument.

An understanding of the role the household plays sheds considerable light on this problem of why there are "precisely four kinds of breakdown" (Annas 1986, 295) and why Plato presents them in the order he does. Plato, I take it, is not saying that a democracy will always and only develop out of an oligarchy. Rather, the point is that, if

humans are educated poorly, the next generation will most likely be educated in an even worse manner. That generation will probably educate its children in a worse manner than that in which it was educated. This structure makes these particular regimes less important than the nature of decline itself. Plato is not presenting us with history, but with an account of disruption and the decline of order. It is not any particular generation that is so bad, but the tyrant they may all become, over the course of time. Plato shows us this by taking a long view of procreation. Households and cities persist over a number of generations and this is quite important in the story of decline. Only the just regime, which starts ‘from scratch’ is fundamentally different from the others. This will save Socrates’ moral argument, but only at the cost of any normal, progressive idea of politics. Any regime that is not as perfectly static as possible is separated from tyranny only by the passage of time.<sup>374</sup>

In all but the just regime successive generations get progressively worse, and all other regimes are effectively discounted. Any regime in which there are private households will be plagued by love of money and love of honor. The love of money and the love of honor both originate largely in the structure of the household and are dependent upon hereditary relations. If there were a regime that was concerned with a different good—power for its own sake, for instance—this power would still involve the conditions of devolution, or conflict. There may be mixtures of these four different types, but the mixtures will shortly play out into one of the basic character types that Plato describes. He does not need to catalogue each mixture, because it is not the particular character type that is important for Plato, but their diachronic relations between them.

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<sup>374</sup> This suggests the futility of all but perfectionist politics. Both Socrates’ and Plato’s lives seem to illustrate this. See *Apology* (31a-e) and *Letter VII* (326a-b).

While a democratic man by himself is not so bad—he settles down and finds some kind of equanimity (561a-b)—he cannot be certain that the next generation, raised after his way of life will settle down in the same way. This is because the child will be raised within an entirely different context, the context produced in the polis by the actions of the father’s generation. This is why Adeimantus agrees that the democracy does seem pleasant, *while it lasts* (558a1). Even if decline is held off in some cases (this is how a democracy can have all types) eventually generations will get worse.<sup>375</sup> That means that anything but the just regime is unjust.<sup>376</sup> We speak of the tyrant as the completely unjust. All other regimes are unjust in some way and thus they are all degrees of tyranny. The passage of time necessitates justice, or eventually there will be tyranny.

Andrew Lintott explains that “Thucydides does not draw any distinction between degrees of democracy. Democracy on the Athenian model is his base-line and from this he calculates grades of oligarchy” (1982, 95). One could similarly say of Plato that he uses the just city as the base-line from which he characterizes degrees of tyranny.<sup>377</sup>

When they finally reach the extreme of the completely unjust man or tyrant, we see that the family has once again been abolished, though this time for the sake of pure injustice.

The tyrant is a parricide, would sleep with his mother and eat his children. All of the horrors of the extreme case and the generational and pleonexic nature of the household

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<sup>375</sup> Further, this explains why no progressive politics is possible for Plato. We may be able to salvage a democratic regime from tyranny temporarily, but as long as we don’t kick out the adults and start fresh with the children, we will always eventually devolve to tyranny.

<sup>376</sup> One may say that no perceptible triangle is precise, so why should we not eliminate all of them. The answer is that, though a perceptible triangle may change and become corrupted, its corruption is not successive. Triangles are imperfect, but they do not make mistakes. Geometry is a model because of its static axiomatic nature. Socrates is trying to make a city as much like a “perfect triangle” as possible. Mathematical “abstraction” is a kind of eliminating the imperfections of perceptible triangles.

<sup>377</sup> The Socrates of the *Republic* only seems interested in perfect justice as a viable regime. The argument of VIII suggests that this is indeed the only solution if one takes a long view. Perhaps *Statesman* 302b-303b where each regime is doubled is a rethinking of this radical position. Since the perfect regime may in fact be impossible, Socrates is quite interested in the pathology and decline of the imperfect character and city.

produce effectively eliminate the viability of all intermediate positions.<sup>378</sup> The engine of decline common to all regimes is the household. The familial arrangement of the tyrant, which is no more than flattery, eliminates the household in blood, while the familial arrangement of the just city would eliminate even the dreams that Socrates claims the best of us have about sleeping with our mothers, the dreams the tyrant makes real.<sup>379</sup>

We have seen that the household, as more unified than the city and less unified than the soul, opens the possibility of discord in both the city and in the soul and allows injustice to pass from one to the other most efficiently. The passage occurs in time and it functions through generations. The recognition of the generational nature of the household helps us understand the decline represented in VIII. The *Protagoras* shows that in an individual life, a person must look at that life as a whole in order to become virtuous and in the *Republic*, Plato shows that one must look at a city over the course of generations in order to provide justice. The generations will not necessarily always proceed in the manner described in Book VIII manner, but given enough time a pluralist society not based on reason will eventually deteriorate and end in tyranny. If a given society does not, it is only a matter of chance that it was destroyed or conquered before reaching such a state. Plato sets up four styles of organization where the generational transactions occur between conflicts internal and external to the household and show that there is no static relation between the city and the soul as long as there are private

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<sup>378</sup> We always find ourselves living in an intermediate position and this contributes to the haphazard nature of our education and ultimate decline.

<sup>379</sup> In a society where all women of a certain age were one's mother, incestuous dreams would not be as horrific as they are in the case of a nuclear family (thus as Lear suggests, appetites, even the worst of them are formed by internalization—without the extreme attachment to a single mother, such dreams would not be horrific. So, though Aristotle criticizes Plato for making each mother only a 1/1000<sup>th</sup> of a mother (*Pol.* II.3), we see that this serves for social unity. Actual incest, however, may turn out to be a statistical inevitability, even if a rare one, unless intergenerational sexual contact is entirely eliminated. This itself would be a radical claim for an Athenian.

households. Thus there is no stable analogy or isomorphism between the city and the soul as long as the household has not been abolished.

If there is any regime other than the just one described by Socrates, the individual will be distorted by intra-economic and extra-economic conflicts and will create a greater distortion in the family which will produce a great distortion in the city, which will contribute to the detriment of the next generation until it finally devolves in to tyranny. Thus any intermediate position which looks good in the present is discounted if it holds within it what will later appear to be the mildest form of conflict between husband and wife. Thus, once again, we see that an absorption in the present—or a failure to look at both one's life and the life of one's kind as a whole—leads to injustice, unhappiness and pain. Only by taking as large a temporal view as possible can we hope to see either a virtuous individual, household, or society.

## Chapter 12

### Conclusion

In this dissertation I have shown that the concern with the tendency to forget ourselves in the flow of time, as it appears in the *Protagoras*, motivates Plato's use of historical characters such as Alcibiades and Critias and that the same concerns extend throughout the dialogues in which these figures are represented. In the introduction, I combined the work of Andrea Nightingale, Ruby Blondell and Frances Pownall in order to establish a framework within which I was able to develop a theory of the intertextual paradigmatic character, by whose presence Plato is able to open up a diachronic dimension in the dialogue form in order to show the effects of time on virtue.

In the next four chapters, I laid out the philosophical framework for the rest of the dissertation by means of an extremely detailed reading of the *Protagoras*, which focused particularly on the effects of time on human virtue. In the remainder of the dissertation, I traced these same concerns through the *Alcibiades I*, the *Symposium*, the *Timaeus-Critias*, the *Charmides* and the *Republic*. In at least part of each of these dialogues, Plato is primarily concerned with the difficulties presented by time and forgetfulness. In each chapter, I argue, in some way or another, that the passage of time and our self-forgetfulness in the face of it, explains how it is that no one ever willingly does wrong, but people, like Alcibiades and Critias, go so tremendously wrong. This also explains why philosophy, and particularly a constant Socratic questioning, is so necessary: it is a mnemonic device intended to remind us of ourselves. The constantly changing nature of

human life in the world of becoming means that one does not come to realize that one knows nothing of great importance once and for all. Rather, Socrates' "human wisdom" is a process of continually reminding himself by means of the elenchus.

Thus, in this dissertation, I have substantially contributed to our understanding of (1) Plato's use of historical characters; (2) his understanding of the human experience of time; and (3) the nature of Socratic intellectualism and its relationship to error. My concern with these problems is not only an academic one. If one takes the conclusions of this dissertation seriously, one must take the Socratic claim that no one ever intentionally errs as a grave warning. Part of my project has been to show that Plato uses characters like Alcibiades and Critias—and shows them during their youth—in order to remind his reader that these figures did not intend to turn out in the ways that they did. In this conclusion, I intend to briefly discuss the more personal lessons I have taken out of this project.

I undertook this work out of a sense of great fear. I took Socrates seriously when he said that no one intentionally does wrong. Many scholars and commentators, I believe, have missed the point in their discussions of *akrasia* and the topics surrounding it. Socrates' point is the same as that which he made in the *Apology* and so many other places. He is pointing out that each one of us may, right now, be living in the midst of an error so deep that it does not recognize itself. In this dissertation I have shown how forcefully Socrates expresses that the true danger of forgetfulness is that it first and foremost forgets itself. That is to say, in forgetting ourselves we also forget that we have forgotten. The only way to remember ourselves is to ask questions constantly, both of ourselves and others. This is one of the reasons that Socratic philosophy is essentially,

and not only accidentally, gregarious. One cannot recall oneself to oneself sitting alone in a room, but rather one must continually test oneself with others.

The lessons from this dissertation shows that the moment we are certain of a course of action—when Alcibiades sets sail for Syracuse, or Critias kills Theremenes, for instance—is the moment when we have most thoroughly forgotten ourselves and think that we know things that we don't know. Plato's dialogues show us that we all need to be our own "gadflies" and try to wake ourselves up. Most often we forget our lives due to a temporal relativism which identifies with a particular temporal mode and makes decisions on the basis of that temporal mode. "Waking up" is trying to see one's life as a whole. The only way we can see our lives as a whole, the only way that we can escape temporal relativism, is through reason. Arguments enable us to take an entire life into account, because the objects of reason are atemporal.

Too often, we read a Platonic dialogue in such a way that we identify with Socrates. Thus, in a dialogue like the *Euthyphro*, one is tempted to ridicule Euthyphro for not wanting to go through the entire discussion again at the end of the dialogue. Nevertheless, most often, the reader does precisely the same thing when he or she closes the book and goes about his or her business. I began this dissertation out of the fear that I may in fact be closer to Alcibiades or Critias than to Socrates. Of course, these two figures were very talented and ambitious and most of us are more like other more minor interlocutors in the dialogues, Phaedrus or Eryximachus for instance. But the point is that if one does not continually examine ones life it is only by chance and a lack of talent that one is not a Critias. This is why Socrates says that the unexamined life is not worth

living. One may live a relatively contented life during which historical events do not push one to become vile or tyrannical, but it seems entirely foolish to bet one's life on it.

Of course, one must ask, how does philosophy really help us in this case. It is neither able nor does it want to predict the future so that we can plan ahead for a particular catastrophic day. Rather, Platonic philosophy, as presented in the dialogues I have studied here, is a way to deal with the radical contingency of human life in the world of becoming. When one "thinks one's life as a whole" one does not imagine every particular and contingent event that will occur. Philosophy treats universals rather than particulars and it is the thought of universals—particularly in the realm of excellent conduct—that help to counter the danger contained in the contingency of particular events, with which we, most often, solely identify while they are occurring. It is this identification with a single particular mode (usually the present) as the totality causes us to make most of our faulty decisions.

People undergo military training so that, when an unexpected situation arises in the field, they know how to handle it. Often, in the military, it is the physical ability to accomplish such acts in a time of stress and crisis that is practiced. At least a certain part of Platonic philosophy seems to be the ethical equivalent. If one constantly thinks and talks rationally about one's life as a whole, when the unexpected, critical moment arises—when as Crito says, "the time for counsel is past" (*Crito* 46a)—one will be able to assess the situation correctly. As in the case of military service, the fear of death most is one of the greatest dangers to self-recollection. But, the figures of Alcibiades and Critias show us that we may also be lost in our own ambition for the future. Whether we forget ourselves in memory of the past, ambition for the future or the presence of the

present, the dangers of self-forgetfulness are great. If we take Socrates seriously, it is this same self-forgetfulness that produced not only Alcibiades and Critias, but also Hitler and Stalin. By incorporating the figures of Alcibiades and Critias in his dialogues, however, and particularly showing them as bright young men, Plato presents a stern warning to us and assures that the unexamined life is truly not worth living.

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